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### Abstract

Gender, sexuality and identity in relation to individual freedom and equality go to the core of who we are, as well as shape our actions. By offering a glimpse into the identity work processes of two transgendered women, I hope to make visible some of the forces and mechanisms that influence all of us, regardless of our gender or status. The transgendered are a group of people who have long been excluded, diagnosed, defined and oppressed by our current gender system. By making my interviewees' stories heard, I hope to contribute to change in the prevailing hetero normative and dichotomic gender system.

This thesis is a narrative analysis on identity work and gender. In this thesis I aim at answering how the two transgendered women engage in identity work during our consecutive discussions. I also try to identify what the role of gender is during these discussions and in identity work.

I have conducted this thesis by interviewing both women in two consecutive in-depth interviews that took place a little over a year apart. After each interview I constructed a narrative that focused on the interviewee's working life experiences regarding her gender reassignment process and career. Later on, these narratives have worked as background against which I have reflected the identity work and the practice of narrating identity that took place during our meetings.

The concept of identity is based on multiple, always changing and socially constructed identities brought forward in popular queer theory literature. I have also used queer theory as a guide in identifying gender related identity work regarding my interviewees. I use the popular identity work literature and my data to name the dominant elements that are present during identity work. I also present a framework for identity work that shows how the previous identity work episode and the micro-level context have an effect on both: narrative identity practice and identity work. In addition I show how gender was present as a subject that was referred to and discussed about and a force that was always looming in the background when we were having our identity discussions.

This thesis adds to current identity work literature and queer theory. By making the gender related identity work visible, it helps us to grasp on and change current gendered practices and to undo gender. It also helps us to see and identify some of the forces that contribute to shaping our identities and action.

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**Keywords** Gender, Transgender, Identity Work, Queer Theory, Narrative Identity

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### Tiivistelmä

Sukupuoli, seksuaalisuus ja identiteetti suhteessa yksilön vapauteen ja tasa-arvoon määrittävät sekä tekojamme että sitä, keitä olemme. Tarjoamalla kurkistuksen kahden transtaustaisen naisen identiteettityön prosesseihin toivon voivani tehdä näkyväksi niitä voimia ja mekanismeja, jotka vaikuttavat meihin sukupuolesta ja yhteiskunnallisesta asemasta riippumatta. Transsukupuoliset ovat ihmisryhmä, joka on pitkään suljettu ulkopuolelle, diagnosoitu, määritelty ja alistettu nykyisen sukupuolijärjestelmämme toimesta. Toivon myös olevani mukana muuttamassa vallitsevaa heteronormatiivista ja kahtiajakautunutta sukupuolijärjestelmäämme tekemällä haastattelemieni ihmisten tarinat julkisiksi.

Tämä tutkielma on narratiivinen analyysi identiteettityöstä ja sukupuolesta. Pyrin tutkielmassani kertomaan, kuinka haastattelemani henkilöt tekevät identiteettityötä ja osallistuvat identiteettityöhön perättäisten keskustelujen aikana. Pyrin myös tunnistamaan mikä rooli sukupuolella on näissä haastatteluissa.

Olen syvähaastatellut molempia naisia kahdesti hieman yli vuoden välein. Jokaisen haastattelun jälkeen olen laatinut haastatellulleni narratiivin perustuen haastattelussa kerrottuihin tarinoihin. Haastattelujen aiheina ovat olleet ensin sukupuolenkorjausprosessi ja sitten ura. Laatimani narratiivit ovat toimineet taustana, jota vasten olen tutkinut identiteettityötä ja identiteettiin liittyvää narratiivisen identiteetin käytännettä.

Tässä tutkielmassa esiintyvä identiteetin käsite perustuu queer-tutkimukseen. Queer-tutkimuksen mukaan identiteetit ovat sosiaalisesti rakentuneita ja jatkuvassa muutoksen tilassa. Olen myös käyttänyt queer-tutkimusta tunnistaakseni sukupuoleen liittyvää identiteettityötä ja sen ilmiöitä. Käytän yleistä identiteettityökirjallisuutta ja tutkimusaineistoani nimetäkseni identiteettityön elementtejä. Esitän myös laatimani teoreettisen identiteettityön viitekehyksen, jonka avulla näytän, kuinka edellinen identiteettityöepisoodi ja mikrotason konteksti vaikuttavat sekä narratiivisen identiteetin käytänteeseen että identiteettityöhön. Lisäksi teen näkyväksi sen, kuinka sukupuoli oli identiteettikeskustelumme aikana jatkuvasti läsnä sekä keskustelunaiheena että taustalla häämöttävänä voimana.

Tämä tutkielma täydentää sekä nykyistä identiteettityökirjallisuutta että queer-tutkimusta. Sukupuolittuneen identiteettityön näkyväksi tekeminen helpottaa meitä tunnistamaan ja muuttamaan sukupuolittuneita käytäntöjä. Se myös auttaa meitä tunnistamaan joitakin niistä voimista, jotka vaikuttavat identiteettiimme ja toimintaamme.

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**Keywords** sukupuoli, transsukupuolinen, identiteettityö, narratiivinen identiteetti

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**Aalto University**  
**School of Business**

# Doing Identity Work with Transgendered Women

Master's Thesis  
Pekka Enroth  
xx.xx.20xx  
International Business

Approved by the head of the Department of Management Studies \_\_.\_\_.20\_\_ and  
awarded the grade \_\_\_\_\_

## Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1. Research Design</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Theoretical Framework</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>2.1. Gender as Something We Do</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>2.1.1. The Queer Commentary</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>2.1.2. My Interviewees and Trans-people in General</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>2.1.3. Gender as Something We Do</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>2.1.4. From Doing Gender to Redoing It and Then Doing Transgender</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>2.2. Identity and Identity Work</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>2.3. Narrating Identity</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>3. Methodology</b> .....	<b>32</b>
<b>3.1. Ontology and epistemology</b> .....	<b>35</b>
<b>3.2. Research Method</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>3.3. Data &amp; Analysis</b> .....	<b>41</b>
<b>3.4. Trustworthiness</b> .....	<b>43</b>
<b>3.5. Ethics</b> .....	<b>45</b>
<b>4. How I Became the Professional I am Today</b> .....	<b>46</b>
<b>4.1. The Story of J</b> .....	<b>47</b>
<b>4.2. The Story of H</b> .....	<b>59</b>
<b>4.2.1. The First Interview</b> .....	<b>60</b>
<b>4.2.2. The Second Interview</b> .....	<b>69</b>
<b>5. Conclusion</b> .....	<b>73</b>
<b>6. Epilogue</b> .....	<b>79</b>
<b>7. References</b> .....	<b>80</b>

## 1. Introduction

During the spring of 2015 I attended an Aalto University course named Gender and Diversity at Work. One of the assignments for the course was to conduct a group work that somehow dealt with gender or diversity issues. In our assignment (Enroth & al., 2015) we interviewed two transgendered women about their experiences at the workplace during their gender reassignment processes. I first planned on doing this thesis on the working life experiences related to gender reassignment processes of Finnish transgendered people. About six months after I attended the course I heard from the professor who was in charge of it that she had just supervised a thesis on the exact same subject (Laapas, 2015). I decided and was forced to rethink my angle. What really interested me was not perhaps the experiences per say, but how they contributed to the identities and later into action. This thesis is an attempt to understand what actually happened and how identities got made during the first interviews and second interviews that followed a year later. It's a story of us talking about working life and who we are.

To mask my interviewees' identities I have provided both women with pseudonyms. I have decided to call them only by initials J and H to dispel the gendered connotations attached to women's names. I am present with an initial P.

The first interview dealt with J's experiences at work during her gender reassignment process. At the time J had just been offered a severance package from an architectural magazine she used to work for. She was to continue her career as a freelance journalist but the work assignments that dealt with architectural issues were scarce at best, and she seemed to only get jobs that somehow dealt with LGBT issues. Later, I heard that she had started to study to become a nurse.

What I gathered, she had worked for a long time at a bimonthly magazine. At some point of her career she started the process for gender reassignment. As a hobby, she did serious art projects – some of which even ended up in television. Somehow this and some other things she did seemed to annoy her boss. I'm not sure, but I think that in a way, because of her openness at expressing something outside the "normal" behavior for a woman, she was stigmatized and sometimes seen only as a transgendered person. This was, in J's own view, seen as somehow troublesome by some people working in her magazine. What I mean is that she perhaps was first seen as "that transgendered guy" and only after that as something more.

At the time it was a common knowledge that the magazine industry was in turmoil. Editorial offices were downsizing and trying to cut costs wherever they could. As J was the official “queer” of the paper she did all the jobs that somehow involved the LGBT community. Naturally, this was not the core content of a magazine that normally did pieces on design and architecture. So, when the time came to downsize, who else should they fire than the “difficult transsexual” who concentrated on something else than modern buildings and advances on interior design. J was given a severance package, which she accepted. She worked as a freelance journalist for some time, but the freelance jobs concerning her know-how, the things she actually was interested in, were like finding hen’s teeth. She only got orders for articles concerned with sexuality and sexual minority groups. Somewhere in the line she gave up journalism and started to study to become a nurse – something she didn’t feel that strongly about, but thought that was a quite infallible way of bringing food to the table.

Our second interviewee H, a fifty something transwoman who had worked as a civil servant for more than 20 years and 18 for the same employer, told us a story, where she was working just to get payed. H had studied in the same school as me. Soon after graduating and doing her tour in the Finnish armed forces she had landed a job in the public sector. The year was 1985 and it was right after a strike of the federation of civil servants had ended. H had always known she wanted to be a civil servant. She was interested in working with new projects and some of her colleagues, whom I know, have told me that she always had good ideas and the drive to carry them out.

Two years after the birth of her child H suddenly realized she couldn’t go through pretending to be something she was not. She applied for a leave of absence so that she could look after their child and start her gender reassignment process.

In the first interview H stressed how she had no interest in her organization or moving up career wise, the same time telling stories about how she was mistreated by her employer and colleagues. What she was interested about was keeping her family together and being a mother to her then 12 years old daughter. How was it that a person who had done a long career, suddenly started to belittle it and saw herself in a totally different light?

The previous narratives are of my own making. They were gathered from events described by J and H in their first interview and later submitted for both J and H for evaluation and comments.

Although J herself denied being discriminated at work because of her gender, to me, it seemed clear, that a big part of the reasons why she eventually quit her job and changed her career resulted from the fact that she was a transgendered woman. In H’s case she ended up stressing her identity

as a mother. This was what I initially wanted to study. What had happened and what was the role of gender in a person's career?

During my talks with J and H I have come to understand that even partly blaming gender when it comes to issues of career is a sensitive subject. I think that this is mostly because only few of us want to be victimized by something that is as deeply connected to our identity as gender is.

J didn't directly blame gender on anything she saw as negative influence on her career. (In fact when asked about it, she said that her job made the transition process that much easier.) After discussing about gender issues, she admitted that gender played a part in some of the "happenings" at her workplace. These were little things. For example, an older man came to comment on her breasts in an office Christmas party. Still, for me, these little things started to show a pattern of small and bigger nudges that steered J's career. How was it that I came to see the same things in such a different light? As I decided to study the phenomena further, I knew I had to know more about gender, how it is done and what were its effects on people's careers. I also needed to understand what happened when J told me her story. Later on I realized that what actually was going on during our interview, was that we were in the process of making identity work.

Gender and professional identity is something that has been researched quite extensively. For example Ely (1995) has studied how women are presented in society and how this relates to how professional and gender identity is constructed. Gimlin (1996) has studied how female hairdressers construct their identities in relation to how they perceive their customer's identities. Dillabough (1999) has studied how gender influences in the perception professional identities among teachers. What has not been researched, is gender and professional identity and identity work from the perspective of transgendered people. Although there is quite a lot of academic research considering transgendered people and how they for example are confronted in their working communities (Pepper & Lorah, 2008 and Taranowski, 2008; Laapas, 2015), for example actual identity work among the transgendered is not a studied subject. Also as Pepper and Lorah (2008) state in their study there is little direct empirical research from the transgendered point of view and the actual voice of transgendered people is not often heard. (Pepper & Lorah, 2008)

West and Zimmerman (1987) state in their article that, "Gender is a routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction." The extent to which we have freedom to define who we are is in my view quite limited. I started to wonder, how the mere sex category could determine the extent of freedom an individual has to define his or her identity, and how this relates to every action we take. What interested me here, was how gender seemed to play a role in making career decisions

and how our interviewees reasoned their actions and emotions towards their former and current jobs and their career prospects and plans for the future. Later on I realized that even the interview process itself was so much laden with identity and gender related issues, it sometimes felt that we were in a maze we had to navigate through. This was a phenomena I wanted to study further.

While I identify myself as a heterosexual man, I also believe that similar gendered practices play a part when I myself try to make sense of who I am and what's my place in this world. If gender is done automatically and intuitively then I would have to incorporate a way for the emotion behind this intuitive behavior to make these processes of crafting identities visible. I decided to be as undetermined in this thesis as I could in order of not leaving out something that could later on prove to be valuable information.

We mostly live in a world built around an idea of two genders, men and women. As the whole system is built up to put people in different boxes so to speak, it seems to me that there is no possibility for true meritocracy or equal rights between people in different gender groups. At least not, if belonging to a certain gender makes a difference – and it certainly seems to do so. Almost every little thing we do, seems to somehow be related to which group, we ourselves or others, place us. This thesis aims at understanding how gender interplayed with identity work during the discussions with my interviewees and giving a clear voice for a minority that according to many researchers is seldom heard.

## **1.1. Research Design**

My original research question was “How transgendered people construct their professional identities before, during and after their gender reassignment process?” As this thesis has progressed I have changed the original research question to better fit the phenomena that captured my attention during the interviews. This is how the current research question is formulated:

**“How a transgendered person engages in identity work during collaborative and consecutive discussions?”**

Additional question could be,

**“How gender is done during these discussions and in identity work?”**

**“What identities are crafted during these discussions?”**



In a larger sense, **this thesis aims at making visible how a person, identifying herself as a transgendered woman, engages in identity work.** I have chosen to interview the same two people as we did in 2015 to get in-depth understanding on how my interviewees manage their identities.

To better illustrate the ongoing nature of identity work and the situational aspects, in other words the context in which identity work happens, I am doing two interviews with the same people, but so that the conversations are framed in a slightly different way. Basically this thesis is a narrative analysis of our interviews. I will further elaborate my method in the method part of this thesis. Boje (1991, p. 106) describes his research into organizations as storytelling entities as follows:

“stories were dynamic, varied by context, and were sometimes terse, requiring the hearer to fill in silently major chunks of story line, context, and implication. Stories were frequently challenged, reinter- preted, and revised by the hearers as they unfolded in conversation”

Though Boje talks of organizations, I found this portrayal to be true also during my conversations with J and H. I myself am always present in the conversations and this affects how they finally “play out”, hence the name for this thesis and the “Doing – with” part. As I see it, the name for this thesis could almost as easily have been “Doing Identity Work with a Cisgendered Man”. I am also quite aware that someone else would or might have had a totally different view and results after what was happening during our interviews. This is why I have decided to write myself as explicitly into this thesis as I can. I hope it adds to the relatability of this work, allows the reader to better evaluate my findings or make their own interpretation of what is happening.

While giving a voice to transgendered people in working life, this study will shed light and make visible some of the phenomena and practices that shape our actions and limit our agency when we engage in identity work. By making these practices, experiences and reflection visible, I hope to also advance individual freedom by unleashing some of the personal agency that gendered and other practices limit. Hopefully this can also lead in visible changes in some of the gendered practices that do not serve the people who are engaged in reproducing them. As I said before, the empirical research to the worlds of transgendered people is scarce (Pepper & Lorah, 2008) and while giving a voice to transgendered people it also contributes to empirical research demanded by other researchers.

To make things easier for myself and the reader, I have decided to concentrate in work related aspects of my interviewees' lives. I think work issues are generally more relatable, and taking this

viewpoint doesn't exclude things in other, more private spheres in my interviewees' lives, as they are interconnected. I will use the first interviews as a starting point. Then, my aim is to, together with my interviewees, craft professional narratives that describe their career development and career options and describe how they see themselves as professionals. We will also try to make sense of who they can and want to be professionally, and how their professional identity has developed over time during their gender reassignment processes. These narratives will act as a starting point for reflecting and analyzing how gender has influenced in career choices and their explicated identity and how identity work was done during the interviews.

Core concepts that are present in this thesis are gender and more importantly transgenderism, queer theory and identity, identity work and narrative identity and perspective. All these concepts will be thoroughly elaborated in the following literature review part of this thesis. After this, I will tell more about the methodology of this thesis, i.e. how I have gathered my data, what I have done to analyze it and why. After this I will present the empirical part of my work and findings. Lastly I will give my conclusions. Included in the conclusions are also some of my own suggestions for future research in the field.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

This is basically an inductive study on identity, gender and career. In other words, identity work, considering gender and career. At one point I had great difficulties in finding existing theories and research that somehow saw identity as I have, during the making of this thesis, started to see it. Luckily, and with the aid from my thesis supervisor, as I have studied the subject further I have found big themes that were present when J, H and I were having our identity discussions.

Firstly, as both of my interviewees are transwomen, this thesis is without a doubt a part of the queer commentary (the name for queer theory suggested by Bertland and Warner (1995)). This in mind, I'll start by answering what is the meaning of the term transgender, what is queer theory and what is its stance towards identity.

Secondly, gender can be viewed as something that we do – a practice of doing gender. In other words, almost everything we do can be viewed as a result of embedded social practices. As gender

is something that interests me, is a subject of queer theory, and always seems to loom and be present in this work, I have chosen to concentrate on it and what it means to do gender. Still, I see no objection to linking gender to other aspects of identity, they just might be more easily negotiated.

Lastly, there are the concepts of identity work and narrative identity. I will first introduce the concept of identity work and what it means in relation to this thesis. After this I then move on to the concept of narrative identity. Which, as I see it, is the situated action of narrating your identity, where the narrative itself serves as the end result. This thesis concentrates on identities and how they are crafted in interaction through identity work. Most of the identity work in the interviews is seemingly incoherent claims on identity, short stories, etc. They are used to make claims on identity and personality. During my work for this thesis I have started to call these statements of identity as temporal identities. As I see it, they work as a kind of storied artefacts for which the later identity work can build on. Later on during the editing of this thesis I found out that the term temporal identity and temporal self-identity already exist in for example biology and in philosophy (Ehman, 1974; Wiggins, 1967). In psychology for example Melges (1990) has studied how a person's conception of self and identity relates to time. Either way, in the context of this thesis temporal identity is just a name that signifies that a certain identity is a product of the specific moment it's narrated. Identities as evolving objects will be further elaborated in the chapter concerning identity work.

Later on, as I explicate the concept of identity work, you, as the reader, can judge for yourself how well the term temporal identity fits into the overall identity discourse. The concept of identity work is important, because it allows for all the themes to coexist. I started this section by saying that I struggled at times. This was mainly due to the fact that I saw situated action and almost automatically started to link it with what I saw as wider forces at play. Illustrative of this is the story in the beginning of this thesis, where I told about the severance package offered to J. I saw it partly linked to the trend of downsizing editorial staff in magazines in general – to zeitgeist. Although it makes, in my view, perfect sense to link these things together, I had, before introducing myself to identity work, found nothing that gave me the normative support to do so. What actually opened my eyes, was a subtle hint from my thesis supervisor and Tony Watson's (2008) article where he cites a famous sociologist Charles Wright Mills (1916–1962). According to Watson (Mills 1952, cited in article by Watson 2008, p. 138) Mills suggested in 1952 in his book the "Sociological Imagination" that researchers should shift through perspectives and actively try and see links between people's personal lives and what was happening in societies and the world in a broader sense. To put it plainly, this is just what identity work does. It allows me to bring together what is done in a micro

level, within personal interaction and how what is happening in the macro level, the world of work, nations, etc. influences this (grand narratives and discourse).

So, this thesis is about identity work and how it happens in subsequent different interviews that can be seen as praxis of a narrative practice. My interviewees are transwomen, and as much as this is a study about the process of identity work, this is a study about them engaged in doing it.

In the next chapters of this thesis, I will introduce West and Zimmerman's (1987) seminal article, *Doing Gender*, open up the topics of queer theory and queer identity which have arisen to oppose the dichotomic view on gender, and move on to introduce my interviewees and what means to do gender when you're transgender.

## **2.1. Gender as Something We Do**

In my view the everyday attitude towards gender is that it is something inherent to each person. Like a label of sorts that defines a part of who you are. Some two years ago I found out that there is another way of looking at gender. Here gender is seen as something that is done. This take on gender is based on the assumption that there are differences between genders that manifest themselves through human action. I.e. men and women do stuff differently, or they do different things. If we are men, we act accordingly and so on. Or that the action itself is gender. Though many articles have been written about doing gender in traditional feminist point of view, in my opinion, there are only a few good articles about doing gender that fall into the field of queer theory. In this chapter I'll introduce some of the seminal articles in queer theory and try to add to the subject by bringing into the discussion some research about doing gender that has been written from the feminist viewpoint.

I started my quest for the relevant literature for this thesis by revisiting the article *Doing Gender* by West and Zimmerman (1987). The main argument behind their work is that, as the title says, gender is something that we do. As I mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, West and Zimmerman (1987) claim that gender is routinely and mostly unconsciously done in almost every practice we take part in. This in my view relates also to the situations when we do career as a part of our identity as women, men or in this case transgendered individuals. Later on, as the title of this thesis suggests, I will explain how we together with my interviewees craft and discuss their career narratives and identities. Although the concepts of for example sexuality, gender, professional

identity, identity and career are separated and introduced separately in this thesis, they in reality are interrelated and can't be set apart from each other. But back to the issue of doing gender.

West and Zimmerman (1987) base some of their reasoning on the argument for doing gender on their analysis of original field notes done by Harold Garfinkel (1967). In his study he observed and interviewed Agnes, a transgendered woman, who in different situations acted in certain ways to socially pass as a woman. According to Agnes, some ways of doing certain (most) mundane things were considered to be more inherent to being a woman than others. To pass as a woman Agnes had to act accordingly. One of the examples of doing a woman in the right way, that West and Zimmerman (1987) mention, is when Agnes suntanned in front of her house. According to Agnes, if she wanted to pass as a woman, she couldn't suntan in front of their house as this would "put her on display to other men". Still for men this behavior was considered proper. So, doing gender is doing something differently in relation to other gender.

In my view these kind of gendered limits to the extent into how an individual can act and behave, are made easily visible when we observe different cultural contexts than our own. We are so submerged in our practices that looking outside in is sometimes the only way to question gendered practices. In my own life an example of this could be a situation, where we sometimes are fast to comment on for example women's place in a Muslim community, and seldom see problems in our own cultural settings.

It seems that most of the articles that somehow deal with the subject of doing gender, view it from the perspective of two genders. To most of us this seems to be given, and I subscribe to most of what West and Zimmerman (1987) say, but could there be more? This is actually something that "Doing Gender" is criticized about (Jurik & Siemsen, 2009; Connell, 2010). When doing gender revolves around the common understanding of two genders it shapes our conception about the transgendered person. This refers to how other people for example see and experience a trans-person who has undergone a visible gender reassignment operation. As I mentioned earlier, they might just see a person change from one gender to another. At first you could think that if you "changed sex" or as the politically correct term states reassigned your sex to fit your gender, you simply start doing the gender you feel that you belong to. Although in the case of transgendered people this is not so simple. Most of us have witnessed transgendered people doing drag, etc. How does this phenomena fit with our common understanding of a cisgendered world? Although few people dispute the view that gender and gender differences can be viewed as acting out specific gender, the theory of doing gender is still under construction (Jurik & Siemsen, 2009). For example, Connell (2010) who with several other researchers criticizes Garfinkel's (1967) original field notes

to which the famous “Doing Gender” is based on, asserts that in the case of transgendered individuals, who do not fit the current dichotomic and in a way linear categorization of sex, sex category and gender, have, at least in theory, the possibility to redo or undo gender. This means that transgendered people do not necessarily simply shift from doing their previous gender to doing their current gender. In other words, from doing man to doing woman or vice versa as suggested by the “test of practice”. They do something else. In these kind of cases the “test of practice” type practices could, in my opinion, show themselves in quite a sinister light. They uphold the gender system at the cost of individual freedom.

In her research, Connell (2010) interviewed 19 transgendered individuals and found out that depending the context and the interviewee they did gender in different ways. Sometimes doing gender fitted the traditional way that gender was done, but in addition the interviewees did gender in a way that it could be interpreted to be redoing or undoing gender. What Connell (2010) suggests, is that the phenomena should be called simply “doing transgender”. Many of the stories and examples Connell (2010) gives suggest that performing one’s gender can be such a unique accomplishment that it doesn’t fit to the traditional way of thinking, that gender is done only in a cisgendered world. As the praxis of gender is always situated action, it always takes different forms that are in relation to the context. This is also something that I observed when doing the interviews with H and J. Doing transgender is a subject I’m going to tell a bit more in the chapter aptly named as “From Doing Gender to Doing Transgender”.

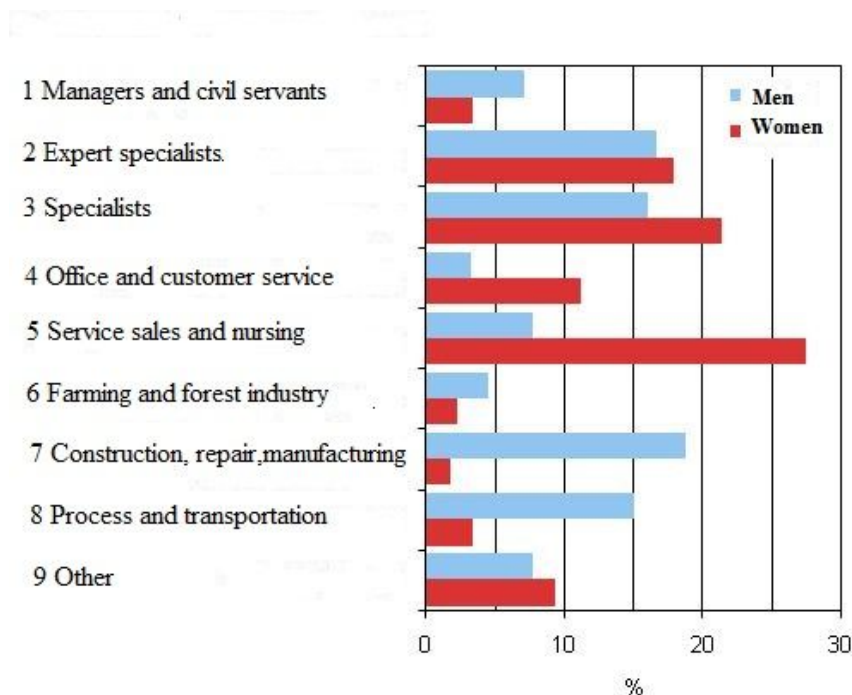
Nevertheless and regardless how many gender categories there might be, or how the context allows for the actors to act out their gender, these persons are still doing gender as long as some amount of gender categories exist. Our perceptions about sex categories and gender are not fixed. The same way we created sexual identities we can certainly create new gender objects and gender difference.

So, doing gender is certainly about applying makeup and having the hair or clothes that match the gender that we are trying to perform. But adding to this superficial take on doing gender, it is also something that is a part of the mundane but still important activities that define our lives. Gendered practices reach every aspect of our lives and define how we are able to speak and to act out our identities. In my opinion, gender is such a big part of the aspects of identity that it can be seen to manifest itself in people’s careers and in people narrating their career stories.

This brings us to doing gender, articulating our identity and doing career. Gender and career is a subject that has been studied quite a lot. For example Correll (2001) suggests that career choices are usually gender biased, due to cultural beliefs on how people should act according to their gender. In

this thesis the word culture can be seen as interrelated network of commonly agreed practices that can be “lumped together” as a specific culture. As this is a thesis about Finnish transgendered women, the culture can be seen as Finnish and very context and workplace specific. Later on I will also be adding another layer to the puzzle of identity work – the context of narrative identity. As it turned out the context where our interviewees narrated their identity had a big influence on what their identity narratives finally turned out to be. More on this is in the analysis and the conclusion part of this thesis.

One way to illustrate the previously mentioned gendered division between industries, is the statistical fact that some industries and occupations are dominated by one sex. This makes it quite evident that gender plays a role in planning and also doing career. The phenomena can be easily observed by for example looking into how Finnish workplaces are divided in regards of gender (Figure 1).



However, this thesis is not about comparing statistics. The former illustration is just to make the phenomena more tangible. Feminist researcher Martin (2003) states that women are poorly represented in the key decision-making jobs and this is due to gendered practices in workplaces and society that impairs women’s identities and confidence. Gender stereotypes work as mental schemas that help people to enact gender in work and when doing career (Ridgeway, 2001). In my view this kind of research further underlines how working life is built around the notion of gender dichotomy. For example, in my personal life I know gay men that work as nurses, hairdressers or as airline cabin crew. I have pondered if these are kind of “safer” professions for gay men to be and act

out who they feel they are. If career or career choice could be interpreted in some part to express gender and sexuality, can this phenomena be interpreted in a way, that these men are doing gay? This is also one of the subjects this thesis tries to cover.

As gender and sexuality are big parts of what make us who we are, they also set limits to who we can be. I base my arguments on the work by Mariam Fraser. In her article “Classing Queer, Politics in Competition” (1999) she argues that gender itself is not the issue. The idea behind this claim is that what matters are both gender (she speaks of identity) and how you are able to define and act out your gender (again identity). This means that a certain identity or gender can be understood to encompass different status in different contexts, and how much leeway you have in defining yourself between the different identities actually defines the political power you have. So, what I have gathered this far is that most of the feminist literature sees identities as fixed – you are either a man or a woman. Depending the circumstance these two genders have different political power, or as for example Ridgeway (2001) calls it – status. What if our identities were not fixed to just us being men or women? This is just what Frazer (1999) and Schilt and Westbrook are writing about. They say, and what queer theory in general is saying, is that our identities, as women and men or something else, are not fixed, but our ability to define identity is context specific. Thus, our ability to do and act out our gender varies from situation to situation.

Earlier in this chapter I mentioned that most of the “doing gender” articles are quite dichotomic in relation to gender. However my interviewees as transwomen do not always fit easily into the box of being women. Sometimes they are considered as women and sometimes something other. In the next chapter I will elaborate on the body of research of being something different than what is considered to be normal i.e. a field of critical studies that has become to be known as queer theory and which sees identities as ever changing and socially constructed.

### **2.1.1. The Queer Commentary**

One of the things that made me choose the subject for this thesis was the notion I got when we were having our first interviews on transgendered work experiences (Enroth & al. 2015). What dawned on me then, was that our identities were perhaps not as stable as I first had thought they were. This meant that identity, and perhaps more importantly in regards for this thesis, professional identity could not be something hidden deep within our subconscious minds just waiting to get out or to be



discovered. On the contrary, identities seemed to be fluid and dependent on how we ourselves crafted them in relation to others and the world around us. I started to ponder something which I had earlier taken for granted – gender. To be more specific, I was interested in how gender was a part of identity and how being either a man or a woman seemed to result in totally different type of behavior or justification for action in what seemed to be similar circumstance. During our initial interview with H, I noticed that she seemed to regard herself either as one of the guys or a woman, depending the situation or topic of discussion. This made me want to examine the relationship of gender, identity and career more profoundly.

Although I myself found the social constructivist view on identity just last year, in the academic literature the idea is not a new one. I started to do a little bit of digging on the subject. The first real effort to explain social constructivist view on reality that I found was by Berger and Luckmann (1966). The idea was not perhaps a new one, but they do a good job at summing up what it means that reality is a socially constructed body of knowledge. This view can also be applied to identity.

As explained in the earlier chapters, I at first tried to find out about gender and identity through feminist research but soon found out it dealt with the subject mostly from the perspective of women opposing men. In my frustration I asked help from my thesis supervisor, who suggested for me to look up the term “queer theory”.

Queer theory, according to Tamsin (1999), grew into what it is today during the 80’s and especially 90’s with a proliferation of scientific articles discussing LGBT identity and mentioning the word queer. According to Halperin (2003) the term queer theory first appeared as a provocative title of a conference held by Teresa de Laurentis in 1990. Queer theory itself was aimed to challenge heteronormativity and to theorize everything sexual. As a whole, queer theory drew influence on feminist studies (Watson, 2005; Fraser, 1999) at the same time discarding the essentialist view on identity. In a nutshell, essentialism means that things have some kind of basic “characteristic” that defines them. What also made queer theory different from feminist theories was that it tried to concentrate on politics and power by at the same time acknowledging how gender dichotomies and other bodies of knowledge shape our reality (Dilley, 1999).

Earlier feminist theories had the intention to bring equal rights between men and women but they seemed to view world as if it was inhabited only by women oppressed by men. This was the same notion that I had, when I first tried to approach the subject of gender identity through feminist literature. This narrow dichotomic view on gender was the backdrop and one of the driving forces behind queer theory.

As queer theory drew from feminist studies and philosophical ontologies such as social constructivism, some of the names that come up again and again when reading about queer theory are feminists, scholars and philosophers such as Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick, Michel Foucault, Erving Goffman, Pierre Bourdieu, etc.(Halperin, 2003; Watson 2005; Fraser, 1999; Tamsin, 1999; Glick, 2000; Stein & Plummer, 1994) Bertlant & Warner (1995) point out, that these big names that pop up in queer theory don't necessarily identify themselves as part of the queer movement. They also add that that most of the researchers that actually do identify themselves as queer theorists, are postgraduate students and quite unknown researchers. Halperin (2003) further notes that people who associate themselves with queer theory, in his opinion, often do it for benefitting of jumping to the queer bandwagon. In other words they appropriate the important issues just to be a part of something that is considered to be cool, while not actually helping to revolutionize the world. If this is true, then this thesis might be just what Halperin (2003) is criticizing. I have talked about this with both of my interviewees and I do not share this cynical view. Trends themselves change the world. When someone claims to be the first one to invent something that later on becomes a trend, he or she is only in competition with the other people involved in that thing. In my opinion queer theory still seems to be a relatively new field of study. As this is the case, it is perhaps necessary to discuss and mull out the ideas that influence it. Only after this "becoming" can the actual theory or theories show themselves as a collectively and jointly understood whole.

As discussed earlier, and pointed out by Katherine Watson (2005), queer theory is "not a clearly unified body of work, but one that continues to evolve, and is characterized by sets of 'theories' which utilize the term 'queer' for a variety of purposes." Berlant and Warner (1995), Halperin (2003) and Watson (2005) (and many others) criticize the idea of calling queer theory a theory. Instead Bertland and Warner (1995) suggest that it should be called queer commentary because of its multifaceted nature and lack of unified explicit theory. They also write, how difficult it is for "straight" audience to relate and understand what it is to be queer, at the same time stating that in their opinion queer is not a group of people that identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bi-, or transsexuals, but elaborate that queer as a label can be understood differently in different contexts. People who label themselves queer or not queer, do so in order to appropriate the meanings that the word or label queer in these different circumstances holds in itself.

One of Webster's online dictionary's (2016) definition for the word "queer" is that it is "differing in some odd way from what is usual or normal" attached to the word there are also connotation of queer being something disparaged. As I see it, queer theory and the word queer, today stand for something outside the realm of normal. As it usually goes, and is the case in this thesis, this normal

means the taken for granted, heterosexual dichotomic world of two genders, world of men and women. I also think this dichotomic approach is applicable to almost every situation where power is used to force the world into black and white and where there are no shades of gray. Also, one of the defining characteristic of queer theory is that it sees that almost everything is usually described and compared against to the elusive concept of normal or the other that is therefore labeled abnormal. In my view, this dichotomic view on the world, and the concept of normal is just what the queer theory was born to criticize.

According to Watson (2005), and what I see most relevant for this thesis, queer theory is a lot to do about identity and gender. One of the defining aspects of queer theory is that it sees identity as socially constructed. In this sense identity is “fragile constructs, constantly reliant on the successful performance of gender.” (Watson, 2005, p. 68). This view on identity is just the contrary to essentialism, mentioned earlier. Adding to this notion, Dilley (1999) explains how queer in this sense should not be seen as a quality, but an attribute referring to queer identity as a socially constructed body of knowledge. This view is in line with the previously proposed idea of being something outside the realm of normality and that queer is not just the LGBT community as it sometimes is understood (Berlant & Warner, 1995). In other words identity is a lot to do about gender. Gender is socially constructed and there are some that are normal in regards of gender, and some that are abnormal or queer.

So to summarize, queer theory studies and views a world where our identities are in a constant state of flux. Identities as objects and bodies of knowledge are constantly negotiated and created socially. At first I tried to exclude the subject of sexuality from this thesis. I think I was naïve in a way that I thought that sexuality and work related – or professional – identity are far apart and have almost nothing to do with each other. E.g. “What does it matter if you’re gay or not if it’s just your work? You are not having sex during your workday or at your workplace.” It turned out that I was wrong. It turned out that different aspects of identity and identities are an interrelated mix, in which all is related to everything. Doing gender was also doing heterosexual. And as stated earlier, it is the underlying assumption of heteronormativity that queer theory tries to criticize. Next on I will try to explain one way how sexuality is a part of identity and more importantly is intertwined with how we act out our gender. More on this subject will be in the analysis part of this thesis.

In the case of queer theory the term sexuality is often used in a way it can be seen almost synonymous with gender and identity. Watson (2005) refers to sexuality or sexual identity, and claims that it is not an object (sexuality) that exists waiting to be discovered, “The discourse speaks the object (i.e. sex/sexuality) into being as well as its subject (the homosexual).” Here words

become flesh and identity is born. But you are not absolutely free to define your identity. If the identity is conjured up in practice of narrating and through interaction with other people, it is evident that you are not free to define yourself in any way you want but any way you can. This part of queer theory narrows in the other concepts of this thesis – narrative identity and identity work.

According to Fraser (1999) the amount of this freedom is limited by what you say and what is “seen”. Fraser discusses mostly of the ideas developed by Judith Butler, one of the big names in queer theory who identified herself as a feminist, who uses the examples of race and sexuality. To me this is applicable also to gender and other signifiers. “Body is the site, or place, where the truth of an identity is revealed.” (Fraser, 1999, p. 109). In her book *Gender Trouble*, Butler (2011) argues how the mere existence of gender hierarchy or -system creates inequality between genders. To better illustrate this argument Schilt and Westbrook (2009) analyzed how the degree of sexuality within a certain context limits the degree of how people are able to do gender. This take on identity, gender, sexuality and how we are able to act out our identity is just in the crux of the matter of this thesis and has to be explained more in the next chapters.

In my search for relevant literature I found three articles that dealt with identity formation that concerned transgendered people and transgendered identity. They were either, in my view, written from an essentialist viewpoint or didn’t take into account the relation between identity construction and the context it happened in.

Gagne & al. (1997) research on how transgendered people “come out” and how this “coming out” relates to accepting their true identity. As Gagne & al. (1997) see identity as something that is “true” and is eventually found, this, in my view, is a quite an essentialist view on identity formation. Devor (2004) has comprised a fourteen step generic model on transgendered identity formation. In other words how transgendered people realize and come to terms with the fact that they are transgendered. So, the article views the subject of identity again from the essentialist point of view and doesn’t see identities as temporal objects the way I have come to see them during my thesis work. Again, here the identity formation is a process where the subject finally finds and accepts who he or she really is. This is not what this thesis is about. Finally Budge & al. (2010) write on workplace experiences and identity formation during reassignment processes of several transgendered people. Their article deals with working life related experiences of transgendered people in three stages of what is called a transition process. This is actually how this thesis got started. However and despite that these articles offer much insight to transgendered identity and life they don’t actually try to describe identity work as such but try to depict the process as steps or stages through which transgendered people find their “true” identity.

One way to grasp the concept of identity is to try and see how it is constructed through acts of subjectification and objectification introduced by Foucault (Foucault 1926 – 1984, cited by Alhanen, 2007, p. 61–70). Here the notion of objectification refers to the practices through which a person transforms into an object. According to Foucault (Foucault 1926 – 1984, cited by alhanenAlhanen, 2007, p. 61–70) subjectification in the other hand refers to how the person becomes a knowing subject that acts in relation to the subject. So, creating an object of identity also creates a relation to the subject and in a way forces the subject to somehow take a stance towards the object. This mechanism of objectification and subjectification is also one of the key ways how our subjective reality is constructed (Berger & Luckman, 1994). This mechanism however is not in the center of what this thesis is about. What limits this practice and what kind of gender identity you are able to act out is exactly what Fraser (1999) and especially Schilt and Westbrook (2009) are discussing about. This is also what I will discuss in the next chapters of this thesis.

In order of giving a comprehensive view on how gender, identity and career fit together I want to continue by properly defining the term gender. I am a native Finnish speaker and in Finnish language there is only one word that refers to both gender and sex. Therefore, at first I found it difficult to separate these two concepts “sex” and “gender” from each other. Only time I have felt social pressure related to my sexuality was when I was a teenager and my father suspected me of being gay, because I didn’t have girlfriends. After that, I have always felt at ease being a heterosexual man, and I think this easiness in finding my place in the world of things had led me to treating gender as a nonissue. As this can also be the case with other people, I feel the need to further elaborate the concept of gender and how it is viewed in queer theory.

West and Zimmerman (1987) offer a thorough definition for three intercepting concepts of “sex”, “sex category”, and “gender”. They define “sex” as something that is defined through using socially agreed criteria for dividing people into being either men or women. According to West and Zimmerman (1987) “sex category” is something that is attained when the classification process using the agreed criteria has been applied. In other words, when you match the criteria, you are put into a category. West and Zimmerman (1987) further claim that routinely the sex category is achieved if the person shows certain visible identificatory markers attached to being either a man or a woman. “Gender” on the other hand is done by acting according to the context and the attained sex category.

Although this seems like a reasonably simple and coherent presentation of sex and gender there’s more to come. What makes this presentation in my mind insufficient is the fact that it doesn’t stress enough the role of one important aspect, “sexuality”. As I mentioned before, I at first didn’t think

sexuality or sexual orientation was something I should really cover in this thesis as this is a thesis about gender and identity, discussed from work related viewpoint. In addition to the fact that I thought that sexuality was something that didn't matter, I also didn't want to be the person who makes remarks about people of a certain sexual orientation and take the social risk of being considered as... a not very likable person in my social sphere. I.e. I was afraid that making claims about sexuality would be as social risk for myself. However, as I have studied the subject further I have found sexuality being a crucial part of doing gender. Sexuality is also something that is frequently discussed in queer theory. Even more than gender.

During the first interview with J (Enroth & al., 2015), she told us how her breasts were commented by a drunken colleague during an office Christmas party. Also when I told a couple of friends about our interview they joked how I should keep in mind not to change camps. In other words, by interviewing a transgendered woman I was in risk of losing my heterosexual status and was liable to become gay. Of course this was just a joke, but to me the joke was sexual in nature and suggested that there was some sexual underpinning to the interview. I know that these kind of remarks would not have happened if I had told I would interview a person who had always been a woman.

J telling about the Christmas party episode, lead to us having a conversation about how transgendered people are often seen as overly sexualized. I think that if you are considered something other than a heterosexual man or a woman, you are in a risk, by simply being a part of that context, of somehow over sexualizing almost every situation you are in. I also told earlier that I didn't at first want to discuss the subject of sexuality. I felt that sexuality was almost like a taboo of sorts and it perhaps was too much of a personal risk to open that can of worms. In other words sexuality seemed to be an issue or a nonissue in everyday activities. Depending the context sexuality was or was not something that had to be considered. This meant it had to be made visible.

When you read articles that identify themselves as contributing to queer theory they are not usually discussing the issue of gender identity, but rather the words they use are sexuality and sexual identity. As I explained earlier I first found this emphasis on sexuality peculiar. How was sexuality or sexual identity relevant in regards of gender? You can for example be gay and still be a man, can't you? This link between sexuality, gender and heteronormativity is explained in detail by Schilt and Westbrook (2009) in their article "Doing gender, doing heteronormativity." They argue, that doing gender and passing as either man or woman significantly differs depending on the sexual nature of the social interaction. In their study, Schilt and Westbrook interviewed 54 transmen about their workplace experiences during their gender reassignment process. They also analyzed news stories about crimes that somehow dealt with transgendered people. What their study showed was

that doing gender has a lot to do with upholding the presumption of heteronormativity. In a normally non-sexualized work environment it was quite easy for transwomen to pass as women and transmen to pass as men, but in a sexually oriented situation this all changed. Heterosexual men who found out that they were “tricked” to having sex with a person with a trans-background were found to resort to violence, in other words, overly gendered masculine behavior to uphold their status as heterosexual men. Oversimplified the word heteronormativity means that the world of human beings consists of men and women. Men have sex with women and vice versa. The issue regarding heteronormativity is itself such a big concept that I will try to discuss it in another chapter of this thesis.

So, sexuality (and more importantly heterosexuality) plays a big part when discussing and theorizing gender. According to many philosophers and researchers and most importantly Michel Foucault (1978), individual sexual acts were not formerly seen as a representation of a person’s sexuality or sexual identity. The concepts of hetero-, bi-, gay-, lesbian, transsexual or other identities have developed during and after 19<sup>th</sup> century, when according to Foucault (1976) rapid increase in different discourses concerning gender and sexuality made them a thing that they are today. In other words, there used to be acts that people did and at some point in time those acts, for example sodomy, became representative to a group of people, in this case homosexuals. Suddenly everybody was talking about sexuality and you had to choose your camp. Now, as almost every act or thing in our lives can be framed as sexual in nature, sexuality and doing masculinity (being a man) and femininity (being a woman) in relation to heteronormativity, is something that often determines how we act. We are doing sexuality and gender at the same time.

In the next chapter of this thesis I will open up what it means if someone is considered to be transgendered. I will also explain how this label relates to the two transwomen I interviewed for this thesis.

### **2.1.2. My Interviewees and Trans-people in General**

My own relation to the term transgender has evolved over the years from accepting the fact that there might be such people as transsexuals or intersexuals, to me actively trying to abandon such categorization of sex or gender or at least trying not to class people by these categorizations. What I mean by this, is that I actively try to let people choose how they do gender and what gender

category they want to be associated with. As gender is done almost automatically, I have found this to be extremely difficult. If I had a say, for example, in leaving out the recognition of gender from passports, I would do so. So, usually when people tell me that they are women, men or transgendered, I first start to wonder why this person feels that it is relevant to stress the subject of gender. However, despite how I feel or react to the subject of gender, it is something ever present and something that this thesis is addressing.

What is relevant for this thesis, is that the term both interviewees wanted to use for themselves was either transwoman or a woman with a trans-background. I first found my interviewees by asking people I knew if they knew any transgendered or transsexual people willing to be interviewed for our work (Enroth & al. 2015) in 2015. Originally I had three possibilities for interviewees. One of the potential interviewees was a former woman, who was living with a gay man and identified himself as a gay transman. (The reason we didn't include him in our initial project was that his native tongue was English. We felt that we didn't have the necessary vocabulary to conduct the interview and we thought that two interviewees was quite enough.)

There is J, a former gay man who now is dating a man and whose sexual orientation has not been an issue that we actually have discussed during our interviews. Then there is H, a transwoman who used to be a heterosexual man and is married to a woman. Although H sometimes states that she is married to her wife and expresses anxiety towards social security codes etc. we haven't talked about sexuality. My point here is that the term transgender is quite loose and this is something I will next try to elaborate in more detail.

I started my inquiries on the subject of the transgender from the Finnish Transgender Support Center, Trasek. Trasek is an association run by Seta (a nongovernmental organization that advocates equal human rights for LGBTI in Finland). It offers its services to all trans- and intersex persons and to people close to them. What I found, was a quite comprehensive summary of the subject by Marita Karvinen (2016). In her article Karvinen cites multiple different anthropological studies, conducted around the world, that somehow question the western "gender system", the understanding that there are only two genders that exclude one another. Even this can be debatable, as at least I myself am starting to believe that using such broad terms as "western" etc. hide the fact that gender categories themselves are not fixed, but acted out differently even in the most minute of contexts. Anyway, one of the points that Karvinen (2016) makes is that the concept of gender can be viewed as socially constructed. (The term that she uses is culturally constructed, but I interpret that these things mean the same.) Karvinen (2016) further notes that the gender system is highly normative in nature. It does not only tell us what genders there are but also defines what is



considered normal and abnormal. Gender systems also define what is considered to be “the right” kind of abnormal.

The most commonly used definition for the term transgender is by American Psychological Association (2016, p.1). They define the term as:

*“an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity, gender expression or behavior does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth. Gender identity refers to a person’s internal sense of being male, female or something else; gender expression refers to the way a person communicates gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, hairstyles, voice or body characteristics. “Trans” is sometimes used as shorthand for “transgender”. While transgender is generally a good term to use, not everyone whose appearance or behavior is gender-nonconforming will identify as a transgender person. The ways that transgender people are talked about in popular culture, academia and science are constantly changing, particularly as individuals’ awareness, knowledge and openness about transgender people and their experiences grow.”*

According to Connell (2010, p. 3) who refers to Elkins and King who claim that the term transgender came into the public discourse in the middle of 1980’s. Before that the correct term was transsexual. (Elkins & King, 1996, cited in Connell 2010, p. 3). I’m not going to go further into the history of the word as I don’t see it relevant for this thesis. What is important to note, is that the categories seem to be changing and increasing and the same time the category of “normal” seems to be shifting. What I want to stress is, that the term transgender is used of various subcategories of gender identities that don’t match the traditional dichotomic division of people to either men or women. Terms for these identities could be such like drag queens, transsexuals, cross-dressers, gender benders, female impersonators, translesbians, genderqueers, etc. (Bilodeau, 2005) This thesis doesn’t try to paint a general overall picture of a “transgendered identity work” but rather to elaborate the situated identity work of two transgendered persons, and in this way add to the queer commentary covered earlier.

According to Bilodeau (2005) the term “Transgender” refers to individuals whose gender identity conflicts with their sex assigned at birth and/or societal norms for their gender expression. So, the term is kind of an umbrella for many subcategories of people. The Finnish Transgender Support Center (Trasek, 2016) describes the term transgender as a person whose gender is a unique blend of

woman and man. The transgendered person can experience herself or himself either a person with many or without any gender. Trasek (2016) adds that being a transgendered person may or may not involve body modification. In contrast to this Connell (2010, p 33) takes a more narrow view to the subject and defines transgendered people as persons who “desire surgical and medical procedures that will match their sex to their gender”.

While this is how transgendered people are classified by the “official” authorities like medical practitioners, academia and legislation, I myself have noticed that the term quite often also encompasses a sense of change – a transition from one gender to another. This transition was also something that H referred several times during our interviews. In the middle of transitioning there is a time period she referred as “molting”. Whether or not this sense of transition is shared by the transgendered person him- or herself, it is my own notion, that people who observe the transgendered individual usually experience a situation where a person changes or has changed his or her gender. I see this as a result of the dichotomic gender system discussed earlier. This is also a phenomenon that has direct impact on how the transgendered individual her- or himself is able to act out his or her gender identity. In other words, you hear comments like, “She used to be a man but now she is a (trans)woman.” This observation of a change might be interpreted to act as a cause for the person to somehow act or adjust his or her relation to the transgendered person. As most of the literature dealing with the transgendered concentrates in personal experiences of the transgendered person or classifying sex and gender, this experiencing of the transgendered is in my view usually something that is not usually discussed enough in academic articles dealing with the subject.

As the experiencing of gender is not only limited within the person who it concerns directly, the transgendered, it is important to understand how society in general acknowledges that someone is a transgendered person. This is illustrated by the fact that in Finland the highly personal experiencing of one’s gender is often classified by a medical professional, as a psychological illness, for which the cure is sexual reassignment surgery, or by academic writing such as this thesis. Usually the social authorities that name the problem and administrate the cure are doctors and medical practitioners. (Bilodeau, 2005); Karvinen, 2016). The reassignment process itself is governed by laws and regulations. In Finland the sexual reassignment process consists of eight stages, which can be started even if you are underage, although some of the stages of the process are possible to undergo only if the subject is of age. A big part of the sexual reassignment process stages are medical in nature. They consist of for example hormonal therapy and different types of surgical

procedures aimed at reshaping the body to better match the gender that the person tries to achieve. Other parts consist of such things as psychotherapy and legislative work like for example changing of the person's name. There is also a period called the "test of practice" that takes anything from 18 to 24 months. During this time the transgendered person receives hormonal and psychiatric therapy, tries to act according to the aspired gender and undergoes medical evaluation, after which a doctor approves or declines next steps of the gender reassignment process. (Nieminen & al, 1996; Karvinen, 2016).

Although there is quite a general consensus that gender experience is a result of genes and environment, the research on what causes people to experience conflict between their gender and sex is scarce and much debated. It, for example, encompasses controversial theories that compare transgender subcategories, homo- and heterosexual transgendered people. One of these debated works is by Michael Bailey (2003), whose research suggests that transwomen are either homosexuals who try to be more attractive towards men or heterosexuals who try to enact the object of their desire. The same division is made also by Smith & al. (2005) who suggest that the cause for gay-transgendered people who experience conflict between gender and sex is due to genes, and for heterosexual trans-people due to psychopathology. I myself would not jump into sweeping statements like these, but I can imagine them shaping our understanding and the discourse on what a transgendered person is or might be. This is something to consider when trying to understand how someone who identifies him- or herself as transgendered person, like my interviewees, experiences the world and its stance towards her or him.

I searched all types of scientific articles with the word transgender from Google Scholar and tried to get a general picture of what kind of research had been made from the subject. I concentrated my search only on the scientific articles and after reading several pages of search results found out that most of the articles could quite easily be divided into two categories. The first was written from the medical perspective. Out of the first 16 hits 12 fell into the previous category. They dealt with issues concerning sexually transmitted diseases (Clements-Nolle & al. 2001; Herbst & al. 2008; Garofalo & al. 2006). Boehmer (2002), who has studied LGBT issues present in Medline articles, states that, "61% of the articles were disease-specific, and 85% omitted reference to race/ethnicity." He also notes that the least amount of research dealt with transgendered people. Of course, as this is a quite new subject the focus has probably somewhat changed. Rest of the medical articles concerning the transgendered were more broadly outlined or concentrated in for example mental illness among the trans-community. The other big theme was transgendered people as victims of

oppression. Here, their experiences as being transgendered were that of exclusion and social injustice (For example, Lombardi & al. 2002; Fassinger & al. 2007).

What this tells about how we generally view transgendered people could be a subject for more research, but to me and some queer theorists it is quite evident that most of the research contributes to gender dichotomy by either seeing trans-people as somehow flawed and abnormal in a way that is considered to be negative, or in a middle of a change from one gender to another (Bilodeau, 2005; Karvinen, 2016).

#### **2.1.4. From Doing Gender to Redoing It and Then Doing Transgender**

When the concept of doing gender is based on the seminal article by West and Zimmerman (1987), I see doing transgender as an ongoing discussion of a topic that was first started by Butler (2004) in her book *Undoing Gender*, and then restarted by Francine Deutch (2007) with her article with the same name in which she tried answer to earlier calls to dismantle the gender system. In her article Deutch (2007) claims that majority of the articles that cite West and Zimmerman's (1987) original article concentrate on how difference between genders is constructed and preserved. In her article Deutch (2007) calls for shift in research on doing gender. The main idea is that though structural conditions could be seen to produce gender inequality, this gender difference could be undone through in personal interaction in a form of resistance. This is what Deutch (2007) calls undoing gender. Though Deutch doesn't mention transgendered in her article, it fueled a conversation on the subject that later included transgendered as a group of people who shared a unique position within and outside the gender binary (for example, Jaggi, 2011).

Later on this conversation was joined by Risman (2009) who built upon Deutch's idea of undoing gender. In her article Risman (2009, p. 84) claims that feminist scholars' goal should be to move to a "postgender society. Also, Risman (2009) stated that people's effort in undoing gender and breaking from the traditional ways of doing it should be acknowledged for and called what it is – undoing gender, rather than just doing new gender norms. Doing new gender norms is something that West and Zimmerman (2009) call redoing gender. In my opinion this sounds a lot like undoing though the emphasis on changing the way in which the gender dichotomy is reproduced. This is

evidently an ongoing debate in which some see the gender system so powerful it subdues everyone to it and some see that it can be changed through interaction.

Though Risman (2009) doesn't mention the transgendered or queer in her article, these kind of comments from known scholars, in my view, paved the way and validated the thinking that gender system was perhaps something not as static as it formerly had been thought to be. It also allowed for research to take a new kind of view on doing gender that was perhaps not so dichotomic. West and Zimmerman (2009) criticize Risman's (2009) idea of undoing gender and claim this is not possible as long gender categories exist. I tend to agree with West and Zimmerman (2009) who as myself see that gender like other categories are always used to underline essentialist differences within that group. In my opinion, whether it was called redoing (West & Zimmerman, 2009) or undoing gender (Risman, 2009), the research started to shift in a way it seemed the current gender system more susceptible to change.

Though transgendered are mentioned in research on doing gender made before 2010, for example by Vidal-Ortiz (2005; 2009), the honor of inventing the term of doing transgender fell on Connell (2010). In the earlier chapter about doing gender, I told that when Connell (2010) interviewed transgendered people, she noted that in addition to doing gender in traditional dichotomic sense, her interviewees did gender in ways which she considered to be undoing and redoing gender. This phenomena Connell (2010) simply called doing transgender. According to Connell (2010) doing transgender is a kind of blend of active, visible and intentional doing of both genders, or a specific gender behavior, that doesn't necessarily match the sex category assigned for the individual. This type of gender behavior is what actually defies the dichotomic view on gender.

Though there seems not to be a consensus over if undoing, redoing gender or doing transgender is even possible, there has been an increase in articles that somehow touch on the subject of the transgendered and doing gender that are published after 2010. For example, Pfeffer (2010) has researched how transgendered men who live with women share house work with their partners. According to Pfeffer (2010) this division is not egalitarian, and in my view, can be viewed as redoing gender.

In my opinion, one of the most interesting articles that deals with doing transgender is by Jenness and Fenstermaker (2014). In their article, Agnes goes to prison: gender authenticity, Transgender inmates in prisons for men, and pursuit of "The Real Deal", they give an account of how the gender system in prison conditions transgendered into doing the right kind of gender. The idea is not to pass as a woman, because everyone knows that a men's prison is reserved only for men, but to do

transgender that fits the prisons gender system. Finally, Thanem and Wallenberg (2016) do empirical research on the subject of doing transgender and claim that the participants in their research did both transgender and “underdid” gender in a way that finally made gender insignificant.

Though there are articles published about doing transgender they seem still to be few and far between. I hope that in the future I can read more empirical studies on the subject.

## **2.2. Identity and Identity Work**

Research on identity and especially on individual identity in relation to social constructs is a fashionable topic in organizational studies (Alvesson, 2010). Here the contemporary identity research usually positions itself between the essentialist and social constructivist views on identity (Alvesson, 2010). The latter means that identities are seen as socially constructed entities which are constantly managed and negotiated. The most commonly used term for this “process” is identity work. In this chapter, I will introduce the concept of identity work, how it has been studied and some research in field of identity work that I see relevant to this thesis.

”Identity work refers to people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness.” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165)

“Identity work involves the mutually constitutive processes whereby people strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity and struggle to come to terms with and, within limits, to influence the various social identities which pertain to them in the various milieu in which they live their lives.” (Watson, 2008, p. 129)

In other words, identity work refers to people forming, maintaining and managing their personal identities in different contexts of interrelated discourses. Identity work perceives identities as socially constructed and ever changing much in the same way as queer theory and narrative identity do (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003).

Some of the most common concepts used in identity work literature are social identity and personal self-identity (Watson, 2008). Identity work views personal self-identity as somewhat more stable identity than more generic social identities. I myself am not sure if I see these things as far apart from each other, as the mainstream identity work literature in my view does. Either way, identity

work offers a good framework or a set of tools with which to analyze what happens when people manage their identities.

One of the most cited articles on identity work is by researchers Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003), in which they depict the context, identity work and different managerial identities of a senior level female manager of a big international technology company. After the first interview with both of my interviewees I felt that there were many similarities in the case depicted by Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) and the way we conducted identity work with my interviewees. I somehow felt that there was a larger set of forces that ultimately played a big part on how identity work played out and how we were able to speak ourselves into existence. I was thrilled when I read Watson's (2008) article on identity work. He (Watson, 2008) points out that researchers should consider how circumstances in global, societal and organizational level influence identity formation, Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) depict how people in organizations do identity work and how discourses are used to draw meaning and influence on how we manage our identities. Current identity work research concentrates mostly on identities within or related to the organizations people work in. Here organizations are seen as the macro level, or the site where the myriad of micro level identity work episodes happen (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003).

As most of research identity work happens in organizations and is about managerial identity, Watson (2008) calls these identities corporate personas. They are crafted for a certain managerial role, where the organization serves as the context. According to Watson (2008) identities are crafted through a process that, to my understanding, progresses from crafting more "general" social identities for each role you are in, to a point where these social identities are then used as resources to craft more stable and private identities. He defines these identities by dividing them into two groups. According to Watson (2008), there are internal self-identities and more external discursive social identities which he sees as link between a person's "true" identity and the world of discourse.

Either way, the key element in respect to this thesis (as mentioned earlier) is how the wider context of discourses is used in identity formation. How for example doing gender translates into identity work and other way around. Watson (2008) gives an example where a broader concept of managerial identity works as a social identity and this is then used as a discursive resource when doing identity work and shaping and maintaining self-identity on a personal level. I myself do not fully share Watson's view on the nature of these social identities that work to bridge the gap between discourses and self-identities. What I have come to realize during the work for this thesis, is that narrated identities, although they are perhaps seen by Watson as self-identities, work as resources for later identity work as much as social identities and vice versa. I mean that, in a sense,

both are equally true, but perhaps the storied identities, that Watson (2008; 2009) calls self-identities, are just considered to be truer when people engage in identity work. This is something that I will elaborate more in the analysis and conclusion parts of this thesis.

McInnes and Corlett (2012) and Alvesson (2010) both state that majority of identity work literature concentrates on theorizing the amount of freedom an individual has to define his or her identity in relation to world of discourses, but only few actually try to describe the actual process of identity work. The initial object of this thesis was to make visible the linkage between gender, career and professional identity. After a couple of months of work, I have come to realize that what this thesis is about is exactly what McInnes and Corlett (2012) (who also stress that future research should be based more on analyzing talk that happens naturally, rather than interviews) and Alvesson (2010) are suggesting for the future research on identity work. Its final aim is to offer the reader an actual narrative on how identity work was done in consecutive situated interviews or discussions. The current identity work literature that I found relevant for this thesis aims at understanding and developing models for identity work that is done in a micro level in relation to macro level contexts – organizations. Next I will shortly introduce three studies that I myself see most relevant to this thesis.

Although identity work literature is almost exclusively limited to studies in organizational (companies that people work in) macro environment, they offer a good framework to understanding how identity narratives come about in relation to larger contexts. Alvesson (1998) has studied how gender is constructed in a Swedish advertising agency. He argues that the need for men to secure male identities at the workplace ladened with feminine values, etc. led to gendered division of work in the agency, and in a situation where men were seen to retain something masculine that made them a valuable resource and helped them to uphold their male identities. Although identity work has been studied from the perspective of gender (Alvesson, 1998) I have found no research on identity work among transgendered people. This doesn't mean that there aren't aspects that match with this thesis. For example, J, because of her trans-background, was seen, in her job in the magazine, to possess some inherent knowledge of the LGBT community that made her an expert of that field, and later on influenced in her leaving her job.

In my opinion, all of the interviews that I and my interviewees have had, could be viewed as a form of dialogue. Beech (2008) has examined how identity work is done through a process of dialogue. Beech's (2008) study is based on multiple identity narratives of a manager. He has comprised a model of the process through which meanings are given and attached to identities. In my mind the most interesting research in respect to this thesis is by Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010), who have



studied how identity narratives function as part of identity work in macro work transition situations. In other words, when one's work changes, one might need to do identity work, in order to negotiate attached new social identities to better fit one's personal identity. The focus of their (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010) work is to elaborate how people draw meanings from different discourses to craft identity narratives and thus identity. How this then relates to this thesis? As Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) suggest that "macro role transitions make authenticity and social validation motives especially salient." (Ibarra & Barbulescu. 2010), I suggest that a "change in one's sex makes gender more visible". In the chapter covering queer theory, I mention how the context has an effect on how we are able to do gender (Schilt & Westbrook, 2007). During the making of this thesis I have come to realize that the same way some discursive resources might not be admissible for identity work, depending on the context, or in particular, how the current discussion is framed.

During the analyzing of the identity work discussions I found that I started to focus more and more on the mechanism or process of our conversations. Identity work literature offers us several frameworks for understanding this process (McInnes and Corlett, 2012 and Beech, 2008).

During the thesis work it became clear that the practice of narrating, and the context it happened in, had a significant influence on how the narratives turned out. This observation and the further familiarization to concept of identity work led me eventually to craft a framework (see p. 60), which I will present in the final analysis of H's narrative, for identity work that happened during the consecutive episodes of our identity discussions.

McInnes & Corlett (2012) claim that while identity work happens within social structures like organizations, it can also be seen to happen within the world of discourse that influences human interaction. Here discourses for example of gender, sexuality and work function as resources that can be used by the individuals to establish claims of self-worth and approval from other persons involved. This is what they call an interpersonal level of identity work. At the same time discourses work as resources they frame the situation so that they can limit what can be said and how. (McInnes & Corlett, 2012).

In the next chapter I will briefly explain what the word narrative means and what is meant by narrating. Especially I'm going to elaborate what it means when narrative identity is seen as a practice (the circles in the framework depicting identity work) and how this view towards narratives and identity relates to this thesis.

One thing that sets these three theories apart from each other, and is most relevant to this thesis, is that when narrative identity concentrates in the practice of narrating, and queer theory in the wider discourses and power behind queer identity, identity work allows us to bring together the macro and micro levels of identity formation. When I see identity work first as a link between these macro and micro levels of socially constructed world, Alvesson (2012) describes this as linkage between agency and discourse. Either way, in my view identity work brings together both, the individuals here and now, and the world that surrounds them.

### **2.3. Narrating Identity**

As I have already covered the subject of identity work it would seem logical to end the literature section of this thesis here. However this is not the case. There is still something that I want to bring to the discussion. I use the word context quite often in this thesis. What I mean by the word context and what is largely missing from the identity work literature I encountered, is the reflection of the situated action identity work happens in. Already during the first set of interviews and later after the second set, I understood that the act of narrating and the context mattered a great deal in how identity work actually turned out. I'll give you an example of this. The next quotation is an utterance by H in the end of the second interview that finally woke me up:

*“... But, (H sighs) when you talk like that, I wonder what I was thinking then. I mean, if it's some evil spirit that has talked through me... I have a very, very boring background.”*

H refers to me referring in our previous interview. Earlier when we were talking about H's experiences during the gender reassignment process, she told E and me such awful stories of exclusion that made me almost physically sick. Now in the second interviews she was supposed to tell me about her career and was bewildered how her earlier stories were so dim and dark. This is the reference to an evil spirit. When the practice of narrating career sat in, she obviously wanted to tell me exciting career things which she didn't think she had. It might be that she also was in a better mood because of the situational factors that some researchers refer as micro level (Evetts, 1992) of the interview – the nice weather we had, etc. H and I have common friends who share different stance toward Finnish political parties. At some point I noticed H vaguely referring to these things. She for example, in our second interview H told me that she leaves politicking to people who are interested in such things. This kind of remark in itself seems quite innocent, but I also know that H is quite active in social media when it comes to politics. I interpreted this kind of remark to represent more of H's opinion of our common friends and me, than her true interest in

politics. It is a terse story that I catch up on. So, it's about the practice of narrating, the macro-level stuff like discourses, etc. the micro-level as for example the weather, but also the interpersonal level.

This is why I want to add still one last crucial part of theory to the mix – practice theory. As this thesis is not about practice of narrating identity I will try to keep it short and simple. There are two points about narrating identity that I want to make. The first one is that when we talk about career, we are engaged in a practice of narrative career. This is something that I will elaborate further in the methodology part of this thesis. The second point is that context matters and this is just what I try to explicate here.

I have taken career as an example through which I try and illustrate the significance of seeing narratives as a result of action. Julia Evetts (1992), who gives a thorough description on how career has been studied in the field of sociology, defines careers as both cognitive and normative. This means that careers can be “understood, experienced and used” and that at the same time they “limit choices of action”. Though careers are not static real objects (Evetts, 1992) each story and utterance can be seen as one. Stories and utterances are made in a certain context and that context has a part in shaping how they turn out.

In respect of this thesis, career and identity are socially constructed and interpreted “objects” that can be viewed to be both at the same time. They are narratives that are real and at the same time just representations of our view of reality. As stated in the earlier chapter, identity is not static but always dependent to when and where it is narrated. So, it's about the narrative, telling of the narrative i.e. narrating, and where, to whom and by whom the narrative is told. Evetts (1992) further makes a distinction between the macro and micro level structures that allow and limit how a narrated career actually turns out. I.e. the practice of narrating itself limits how identity work is done. It's about the big things such as gender etc. but also about the small things which contribute to the whole, weather, mood, blood sugar, etc.

LaPointe (2011, p. 28-35), who in her doctoral dissertation tells that although the traditional way of seeing career identity is to see it as a stable set of personal traits that are somehow linked to person's profession and the willingness to progress in his/her career (as also explained in the section about queer theory), identities are actually always shifting, and constructed through using language. Using language to craft utterances about identity that finally turn into narratives can be defined as a situated action of narrating. And here, the act of narrating can be seen as a practice. Narrating about

career, as I found out, is different than narrating about experiences of mistreatment. These both have an effect on how identities turn out.

A modern description of a practice is that it is a situated action that emerges from interaction between people and the cumulated context. Here the actors draw on different ways of acting and creating local meanings. While participating in these actions people use artefacts with which they shape and convey these generated meanings. (Jarzabkowski, 2005). While artefacts are usually considered to be physical in nature, I see that the temporal identities or identity narratives can in some ways be seen to work as artefacts. This, in my opinion, is a matter of academic hairsplitting and I leave it to the reader to decide if they want to use this term.

Three central concepts concerning practices are praxis, practitioner and practice. Here praxis is the realized situated action of practitioner emerged in a practice. E.g. if the practice is the prescription for acting, a praxis is the practice translated into a real action. (Oksman, 2013; Jarzabkowski, 2003; Whittington, 2002).

This in mind I have decided to use just the term identity as a general term referring to identity that emerges from career related and other discussions with H and J. As identity work is not in my view purely logical, but also intuitively reacting to the context, I will try to make sure that the context of each utterance concerning identity work and my own reflections are properly explicated when I see it as relevant.

In the next section of this thesis, I will further elaborate the methodology, data, etc. of my thesis work and, for example how I have taken into considerations the ethical considerations regarding it.

### **3. Methodology**

In the methodology section of this thesis I will first state my research philosophy and tradition. I will continue by explaining how I have come to choose my research method and why I decided to interview H and J. I will finish the methodology part by explaining how I have dealt with trustworthiness and ethics considering this thesis. In other words, I'll attempt to describe and support the actions I have taken in a way that my actions and logic behind them are transparent to the reader, and that the research is made in an ethical way.

At first I had a hard time defining the qualitative tradition of my research, finding it being neither a clear cut example of a narrative or a discourse analysis. Later on I learned that I had to do both in order of not losing some aspect to the data that I had. After listening to the recordings many times and acquainting myself to Kirsi LaPointe's doctoral thesis (2011), I have come to realize that in some of the things, that are said in interviews, can be clearly explained when they are observed through the lens of the practice theory. So, although this thesis concentrates on the narratives, antenarratives, terse stories and logic that lies behind them, there are also aspects that can be seen to clearly arise from the situated action of narrating and doing gender. By this I mean things that might seem illogical but are actually automatic and stem from undisputed ways of doing things (doing gender is an example of this). If and when this happens I will make a note of this and try to give my own reflections that I had during and after the interviews.

I started this thesis with the intention of doing a study that concentrates strictly on the narratives that I and my interviewees co-crafted. However during the thesis work it became clear that the practice of narrating, example telling short stories, referring to earlier incidents, etc. and the context it happened in had a significant influence on how the narratives turned out. As my interest shifted towards this new insight, I found myself doodling on a framework describing this identity work. The framework, which I will present at the end of the empiric part of this thesis, works as a tool at describing what I think was happening when we, me and my interviewee, were having our conversations.

As the word narrative appears often in my text, I feel that it is good to have the word properly defined at this stage of the thesis. Polkinghorne (1988, p. 13-21) states that our whole reality can be seen as comprised of narratives in which we put on center stage the things we consider important and leave out and downplay things that don't contribute to the meanings we try to convey. The same applies to this thesis. Although narratives are usually seen as stories passed from one person to another, they can also be seen to work in a way that the person telling them to someone else, is at the same time telling them to him- or herself (Watson, 2009). By narrating things and episodes we also construct them into objects we ourselves then can act upon. This take on the narrative refers to the practice of objectification shortly explained earlier in this thesis.

Kovalainen (2008, p. 213) gives three hallmarks for a narrative: First one is that narratives are set in time, "they have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Second, narratives are meaningful. One central way in which they convey meaning is by ordering events into a temporal sequence, which finally leads to a conclusion. This is why narratives have a causal dimension. Third, they are social, as they are produced for specific audiences." The last hallmark is especially important considering this

thesis. Narratives are always made for someone. The narrator has to take his or her audience into consideration but also the wider context matters. I.e. narratives are socially constructed. As I explained in the chapter considering identity work, the term identity work refers to different types of activities and practices individuals involve themselves in order to create, express and maintain their identities (Snow & Anderson, 1987). On the other hand identities and career narratives can be seen as co-created through a practice of narrating (LaPointe, 2010). In her doctoral thesis dealing with career transitions (2011, p 5–6) Kirsi LaPointe adds that narratives, as well as being usually co-crafted, are narrated to fit a purpose.

In this thesis I have chosen to focus on work related narratives. They are personal narratives. A personal narrative is a recollection of events and emotions as experienced by an individual in the course of his or her own life (Riessman, 1993). Bujold (2004) argues that identity is an important aspect of career theory. This takes us to consider a notion that I mentioned earlier, career can be viewed as a narrative (Bujold, 2004).

Although narratives have been researched in social studies as early as 1918 (Watson, 2009) they seem to have been almost absent from research done in the mid20th century. According to Watson (2009) identity narratives resurfaced in the 1970's and then in the 80's with the phenomenon called the narrative turn. At the time I am making my thesis, research on narratives seems to be a fashionable thing. This time though, I believe that the study of narratives and narrating will be with us for a long time. For example, identity narratives give us valuable insight on how people see themselves in relation to other aspects of their world. In her doctoral dissertation Kirsi LaPointe (2011) points out how work and career give us a significant context for achieving and validating identity. Grey (1994) on the other hand notes that career can be seen as a project of the self that spans most if not all life's domain. For example marriage and friendship can be seen as supportive or instrumental to doing career (Grey, 1994). This refers to the concept of narrative career that I mentioned in the previous chapter.

So, in a nutshell the gist of my method and this thesis is that this is a narrative research. After the first session with my interviewees I crafted a narrative that carried us to the next one. These narratives work as resources for studying identity, identity work and for example how practices like narrating career and gender are a part of identity work. As explained earlier, using different discourses as discursive resources is a part of identity work. This is why I have also included a brief overview of discourse analysis into this method section.

### **3.1. Ontology and epistemology**

In the final stages of my thesis work I got some critique about this thesis lacking focus and direction. Though I myself feel I know what, why and how I have done in this thesis, it was evident that I had not made these things clear to the potential reader. This chapter is put here so that I can tell you, the reader, who I am and where I'm coming from. It aims at giving you a clear picture of why this thesis or the analysis might seem obscure and to encourage you to make your own judgement of the stories and narratives I present.

As a scholar I find myself often viewing the world through phenomenalist and social constructivist glasses. I am a firm believer that we human beings are often times not rational, but intuitional decision makers. Our feelings both influence on how we interpret the world we experience and how we construct it. I.e. feelings matter. Hence, the only way to be as true and as objective as I can in this thesis is to explicate myself and my insight in the text. As I will explain in the next chapter, the method of this thesis combines both narrative analysis and analysis of narratives.

In the light of what I have just said, identity work, in this thesis, is something which is studied when the world is seen as socially constructed. The common ontological perspective in identity work literature (Watson, 2008) is that there is a world of things outside us and the way we interact through this world is by experiencing it and attaching different meanings to these experiences. The epistemology that stems from this ontology is that the only and most practical way to interpret this world is through understanding and making visible the attached meanings and experiences. As I said earlier, I myself like to take a pure social constructionist view on the world. In the context of this thesis, this means that things and our subjective realities are socially constructed. Resulting from this view is that the portrayed reality and the interpretation of this reality are my own and you, the reader may disagree with me. This view has been more thoroughly explained in each part of the literature review of this thesis.

As explained earlier the function of this thesis is basically to investigate how the transgendered people I interviewed construct their identities. My agenda here is that by making these narratives explicit, they can shed light on the way work, gender and social practices in general contribute in the (professional) identity work. Although I chose to interview transgendered people, I hope that my interviewees' experiences can make visible some of the same practices and mechanisms that influence other groups of people. In short, this work is still about transgendered persons and how

transgendered people who I interviewed use agency to “orienteer” amongst multiple discourses and practices that limit that agency. It’s about their stories, and how they do identity work when they tell their stories to me.

I believe that most of our actions are result of us participating in enacting in various social practices. One of these practices could be the situation where someone is interviewed for a master’s thesis. The same time these social practices influence our behavior, our behavior and how we reproduce the social practices shape our world. While these practices have, in my opinion, huge influence on how we behave, we seldom see how they influence us. To put in other words, social practices are like gravity and the air that we breathe. We usually don’t think about these things although they limit our action all the time. I have stressed the concept of practice as I see that the data I have gathered for this thesis is partly a result of this particular practice of interviewing and narrating. One of the other practices present might be doing gender.

While many of us might think that sex and gender are only physical attributes, and like gravity, their influence in our action is fixed, I believe that many aspects of gender are socially constructed. This socially constructed understanding of gender is utilized in gendered practices that limit our agency and our freedom to choose the way in which we construct our professional and private identities. As explained earlier, also narrating can be viewed as a form of practice (LaPointe, 2010).

This has been inductive interpretative study done from the constructivist perspective. E.g. I see the world as socially constructed and try and interpret how and what meaning is created during the interviews between me and my interviewees. Burr (2015) makes four assumptions that describe the social constructionist view. First, is that constructionist view criticizes the taken-for-granted assumptions we have about the world. Secondly, meaning is socially, culturally and historically constructed. Thirdly, knowledge is created and sustained through social practice. Fourthly, knowledge and social action go together. I.e. our action and knowledge form an interrelated whole.

As I have said earlier, this has been an inductive research on gender and identity. Inductive meaning here a study where I, the researcher, trying not to let my own presuppositions make me miss what was new to me, chose not to use predetermined structured methodologies when analyzing my data (Thomas, 2006. As this thesis progressed I found myself doing a narrative analysis and analyzing narratives with my interviewees. I also focused on the actual identity work that I and my interviewees did during the interviews.



As I described earlier in this thesis, I first planned on doing just a plain narrative analysis on career narratives I extracted through interviews. During the first interviews I had a feeling that I perhaps didn't do justice to the people I was interviewing. I wasn't a transgendered person. Who was I to say what they meant or how they experienced the world? I decided to do follow up interviews with the same people to get confirmation to what I had discovered in the first set of interviews, or at least give them a fair chance to correct me if they thought that I was doing them injustice.

At the same time that I did the second round of interviews, I had already been acquainted with the concept of identity work. When transliterating the second set of interviews I started to "doodle" a framework of what I thought depicted the situation. Us, my interviewees and me, having consecutive, differently framed interviews and quite often referring to something discussed earlier.

What I think accurately depicts my drivers for taking this long trip with my thesis is a quote by Thomas (2006, p. 2), "The primary purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies. In deductive analyses, such as those used in experimental and hypothesis testing research, key themes are often obscured, reframed, or left invisible because of the preconceptions in the data collection and data analysis procedures imposed by investigators."

To me this has been a long and ongoing trip to understanding identity work, practices and my own emotion. In the next chapters I will describe my method more closely, introduce my data and what I actually did to analyze it.

### **3.2. Research Method**

So, narratives are stories that have a sequential linear time related dimension to them (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). And they are social in a way that they are told by someone to someone (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). In this thesis the narratives are co-crafted in a way that either they are told to me as I state my questions or I myself craft them from information, terse stories, antenarratives and other utterances extracted during the interviews. It is clear that this type of narrating doesn't fit the clear cut definition for a narrative. Rather it is a jumble of small stories, utterances and referencing to other stories and narratives told in somewhere else. Two of these elements are so-called antenarratives and terse stories (Boje & al., 2004). Though Boje and al.

(2004) state that there is a wide disagreement over definitions of what can be called for example an antenarrative or a terse story, they give definition for both of these elements that might contribute to and later translate into narratives and narrating. According to Boje and al. (2004) an antenarrative is kind of a pre-story that contributes to the birth of a narrative. These small stories are often fragmented and nonlinear (Boje, 2001). A terse story is a short story where part of the elements of a story is left out and for the listener's imagination. During all the interviews this was what we did. My interviewees told me mostly antenarratives and terse stories which put together painted, for me and them, clear narratives of their working lives during their gender reassignment processes and the development of their careers and identity. The narratives that are used to introduce both interviewees were crafted by me and later presented for evaluation for both interviewee individually. They try to convey the reality as both I and my interviewees see it from a birds eye perspective. The analysis that follows after the narratives is my attempt to depict what happens in the moment and how the stories have come to be.

I have chosen to do a narrative analysis for several reasons. Firstly I share the common notion that narrative is most basic way through which we as people make sense of the world in and around us (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). What I mean is, that the narrative brings out what is considered important and meaningful. Secondly I think that the narratives that we co-construct and short episodes my interviewees narrate to me, include hints of the social and personal identities and identity work done by my interviewees.

According to Riessman (2005) narrative analysis refers to various types of analysis techniques that are used to analyze the narratives. Riessman (2005) mentions thematic analysis in which the researcher studies what is actually said in the interviews. Although narratives are perhaps crafted to represent subjective realities, I feel that they can be treated as descriptions of what actually happens, provided that someone else's interpretation of reality could be considerably different.

Riessman (1993) describes personal narrative as a person's own story that summarizes different events and shows how they have been experienced by the storyteller. This would also accurately describe the stories that my interviewees told me. According to my knowledge, the interviews I have conducted fall in to the category of collecting and constructing personal narratives by conducting conversational narrative interview. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) this is a method where both the interviewer and the interviewee together construct the narrative. In this kind of interview the interviewee tells his or her story from a personal point of view without a set of predetermined questions (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). Although there are no predetermined questions, I have tried to steer the conversation and sometimes supplied small

stories of my own so as to keep the narratives going. I feel that this is one of the tricky parts in this thesis. I know I influence the outcome of the interview. I am a part of the narrative practice. In the next chapter where I describe my data and analyzing it I try to write myself more explicitly into the text so that you, the reader, might have a better chance at seeing what forces are guiding the interview.

When I first started my work for this thesis I wanted the themes of the interviews to somehow touch upon work related subjects. At first I wasn't even sure why but later on I have come to realize that this is perhaps because I study in a business university and I feel that all things studied should have some organizational relevance to them. Also, gender was a subject that I was not that familiar with. I knew it was a huge subject for my interviewees. I was afraid of somehow hurting them if I started to ask into more private stories. I.e. career and work seemed safe and they in some ways were more public than for example asking narratives of relationships, etc.

So, when I started to do the interviews for this thesis I looked into what is called career construction theory or CCT. One of the big names of CCT is Mark Savickas (2005) who identifies career narratives as consisting of elements he calls "individual differences in traits, developmental tasks and coping strategies and psychodynamic motivation." Savickas (2005) calls these three domains career personality, career adaptability and life themes. In career narratives these three domains aim at addressing the questions of what, why and who (Savickas, 2005; Corso and Reh fuss, 2011). In other words, what the individual has done and what has happened, why he or she has taken the career choices in respect to challenges or possibilities in question, and what has been the inner motivation for the person in doing so. When these questions are answered the end result should be a holistic view on person's career. In other words a co-constructed career narrative. Although the framework in question is developed for career counselors, I felt that it gave me a useful tool for doing my narrative interviews. I have also tried to take in other good advice for conducting narrative interview. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) suggest that the interviewer move away from the factual interviewing that aims at collecting specific information, and uses open ended questioning and lets the interviewee tell their stories as freely as possible. They also suggest that interviewer uses either positive form of active listening or story sharing. These are both techniques I have tried to accommodate in all of the interview situations.

Sometimes I felt that the interviews with H and J resembled more conversations than interviews, but during the conversations I have always aimed at getting the three elements formerly mentioned present for each discussed subject. Sometimes it has felt forced to press some of the subjects. Whatever the micro-dynamic situation in each interview, I have tried to encourage and

let my interviewees tell things in their own words as freely as possible, but not in a way that the telling of stories has stopped all together. This has meant that I have actively participated in commenting a specific story, sometimes it has been enough to get the interviewee going that I have just muttered something.

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) cite Polkinghorne (1995) who makes a distinction between narrative analysis and analysis of narratives. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) Polkinghorne (1995) says that when analyzing narratives, the researcher focuses on narrative and sees it as a representation of a subjective reality. On the other hand, when conducting narrative analysis the researcher creates narratives from pieces of information that are then interpreted and discussed. If I had to choose the form for this thesis, it resembles more of the latter. Here narratives are co-crafted so that they could be discussed. The co-crafted narratives are not left to their own. What I mean is, that during our conversations I have sometimes referred to a narrative that I have crafted for the interviewee. We have then discussed about how she sees it represents reality. This refers to the distinction on thematic analysis in narrative research that concentrates in what is said and told and analyzing the meaning conveyed by the narratives (Riessman, 2005). I have done the previous for two reasons. In one hand for not misrepresenting my interviewees, and on the other hand getting better understanding of the identity work and the creation and management of meanings it encompasses. As said earlier, I am quite aware that this type of method means that I myself am a big part of how the research has turned out. This does not, in my view, anyway undermine the trustworthiness of this thesis if it is recognized. A concern which I answer to in the chapter 3.3.

In chapters 2.2 and 2.3 concerning identity work and narrative identity, it is quite clearly explicated that identity work during this research is an interactive process. This process of interaction is situated into the circles of narrative identity in the identity work framework presented later in the empiric section of this thesis. This is why I see I also have to include elements of interactional narrative analysis (Riessman, 2005) into this thesis. In the analysis of this interaction, I have used my own field notes, audio and my own reflection on what has happened.

Although this thesis is mostly about narrative analysis and analyzing narratives, included in identity work is the world of discourse.

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) mention a version of discourse analysis that studies how identities are constructed in socially interrelated contexts. The writers give an example how a researcher

could study situations where different people use “conflicting discourses to understand the world around them, or to achieve goals.” (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 232). Because identity work is largely about how the subjects explicate their identities in relation to larger discourses, discourse analysis is a part of this thesis and I have used it to identify all the elements in present in our identity work. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) this kind of approach to discourse analysis originates from psychology and social psychology. Although this is not a psychological research, I rely on Wetherell and Potter (1988), who state that there are no simple rules for making this kind of research but the researcher has to develop a method of analyzing the data according to the research question and situation. I have used the discourses as scaffolds that are later discarded and are something I don’t concentrate on in this thesis.

### **3.3. Data & Analysis**

Due to a human error, the audio recording and transliteration of the first interview in 2015 with J was lost. This is an issue I have discussed with my thesis supervisor. I had two choices. Either I leave out all material by J from this thesis or I try and use the narrative and the interviews as well as I can. I have chosen the latter. I think that bringing J’s story into this interview adds to the trustworthiness by giving an alternative perspective to the world of identity work and gender. The missing recording from the year 2015 has lead me to treat J’s part in this thesis a bit differently than H’s. I have used the crafted narrative as an example, as the narrative is made earlier and is based on the original audio material I myself know it to be a valid interpretation of J’s story but can’t expect my reader other than take my word for this. As I don’t have the tape or the transliterated data, I have not made further claims on the basis of the first interview with J. I hope that you, the reader, take this into consideration when reading this thesis.

As explained earlier, the data for this research has been gathered by interviewing two transgendered persons in two consecutive interviews. All the interviews were conducted in Finnish. The first interviews were conducted in 2015 and concentrated in the workplace experiences concerning gender reassignment processes of both interviewees. The second set of interviews were conducted in the summer of 2016 and framed around the careers and professional ambitions of both interviewees. Both, the first and the second interviews lasted each a bit over an hour each. After conducting the interviews I have transcribed them verbatim. I also have recordings from all the interviews, excluded the first one conducted with J in 2015, and some field notes regarding the interviews.

I have used thematic coding to find patterns and common phenomena in the transcribed interviews and in the audio recordings. I have also used field notes of my own reflections, etc. that I have gathered during the interviews to recollect my own reactions during the interviews. Strauss and Corbin (1990) argue that coding provides a researcher a tool that helps the researcher in developing a theory and it also provides a way to handle a large amount of data that at the same time is systematic but allows creativity. Coding also helps in finding relations between identified themes and concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Coding in respect to this thesis means that I have printed out all the transcribed interviews and for each interview tried to identify utterances, terse stories, antenarratives, etc. themes that are somehow related to each other. After this I have named the themes that these utterances or for example phenomena such as laughter, high pitch voice, using many filler words, etc. fall into. Sometimes I have simply had a feeling that I for example can't say something. To me these can be phenomena that are representative of a discursive practice. For example, I have felt somehow out of line if I say something. This type of phenomenological approach and the fact that narratives were co-crafted using terse stories antenarratives, etc. is covered in the in the previous chapter of this thesis.

J has been interviewed for a popular Finnish magazine. In the article she openly tells her life story from early childhood to current day. I have read the article as J has mentioned it several times during the interviews. Although the interview is present in the conversations, and works as a narrative resource, I have not analyzed it further. During the interviews it became evident that J participated in a great deal of art projects. I have tried to look up all the material on the internet from these projects, so that I know what she is referring to. These materials include music videos, photos, YouTube videos and interviews. There are no such materials about H that I know of. This thesis is not analysis of the material other than gathered during the interviews. Still, I know that for example J's artwork has influenced in my behavior in the interviews and in their analysis. This is why I have mentioned them in this thesis.

Analyzing the transcribed interviews has been an iterative process. After the initial interview I have tried to compose a narrative of my own, based on both individual interviews. This narrative has worked as a kind of a summary that has guided me to do my next interview. I have done this because I realized I did it anyway intuitively. To leave the completed narratives out, would in my view leave out a part of the thesis that helps each reader to identify with my perspective, a kind of filter for the later analysis. This has been further explained in the earlier chapter of this thesis.

Bem's Sex Role Trait Inventory (BSRI) (Bem, 1977) is something that I briefly looked into while analyzing the interviews. BSRTI is a brief list of traits and how they measure with each other in

respects of average femininity and masculinity attached to those traits. A more current list of traits and how they have developed during time in American society is offered by Auster and Ohm (2000). There is also much critique about BSRI. A good summary of the critique is for example by Pedhazur and Tetenbaum (1997).

BSRI is something I didn't want to go deeply into. BSRI would perhaps have provided a framework for analysis, but also made this thesis something that I feel it's not. For example, though it might be interpreted as being feminine, I don't think J is actively doing gender when she claims to be sensitive person. Still, these are questions I have tried to raise when they come up. Femininity and masculinity are words that on occasion come up during the analysis. They are based on my own interpretation on the connotations of each subject and only loosely based on BSRI.

There are numerous citations in this thesis. The citations are translated into English, in a way that the message in each of the utterance comes across as clearly as possible. I have also left some of the filler words out of the citations to make them more understandable.

### **3.4. Trustworthiness**

In this section I will shortly go through the steps I have taken to ensure the trustworthiness of this thesis. I have tried to write myself into the text to make the text more reader friendly in a way it resembles a personal story, but also so that it is easier for the reader to assess the academic value and trustworthiness of this thesis. I have also tried to be as open for new insight as I can and not reveal or describe my motives for this research to my interviewees in advance, any more than is necessary so as not to risk them telling me what they think might be the right answers. In this way I hope this thesis resembles an inductive research. I.e. it's quite hard to cheat, to get the right results when you don't know what results your study is aiming to prove. Even if I try to be as objective as I can, the choices for relevant literature, discussions and interviews I have conducted, and the interpretation of data are made by me and are highly subjective.

For qualitative analysis as this, where the research relies on relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology, Eriksson and Kovalainen, (2008) advice the researcher to abandon the principles of validity, reliability and generalizability that are developed for the appraisal of positivist research.

Alternatively they suggest that the writer either adopts criteria for qualitative analysis suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), or that the researcher comes up with own criteria that is made especially to fit for the assessment of the current research and research method. As this is a master's thesis and I'm only a graduate student, I lack the confidence to craft my own criteria. This is why I have chosen to follow the criteria suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). These are dependability, transferability, credibility and conformability. Shenton (2004) offers several strategies to meet the criteria.

To meet the criteria of dependability, I will always try to explicate my reasoning and give citations of the interview data when I have used it to make a point or justify an action. I will also reflect on my own reasoning so that the reader doesn't have to guess my motives. As suggested by Shenton (2004), I have used well tested methods for both gathering data and analyzing it. Shenton (2004) suggests that the researcher familiarizes with the subject he or she is studying. I have done this by both studying the subject of my research and getting acquainted with my interviewees, so as not to misinterpret them.

To meet the criteria of transferability I have, for example, crafted the framework for identity work and will also show the linkage with existing and current research that touch upon the phenomena and themes that I try to analyze in this thesis. Shenton (2004) proposes for the researcher also to reveal the important contextual information, such as who I interview, restrictions to what the interviewees might reveal, who I am, the methods of collecting my data and for example how long the interviews took, how many interviews we conducted and the time period the data was collected in. These are all things that I have done, though because of the ethics involved, I will not be revealing any information about my interviewees that makes it easy for someone to identify them.

As for credibility, I try and offer logical and explicit reasoning to back my claims. As Shenton (2004) suggests, I have also explained the design and implementation of my research, how I have gathered the data and will give my own reflections and appraisal on how the research has developed and turned out. I have also conducted the interviews with H and J to the point that they, in my opinion, reach saturation when we discuss about identity. For example, I first planned on doing three interviews with both women. After analyzing the second set of interviews I have come to understand that there is no reason for doing the third set of interviews.



To meet the criteria of conformability, as stated many times before in this thesis, I explicate my reasoning and results in a way that I show the linkage between my data, what other researchers write about the subject, and what I claim on the basis of these two. This is also what Shenton (2004) suggests for as an effective way to ensure the conformability of a qualitative research.

### **3.5. Ethics**

The questions regarding identity, gender and sexual orientation can be, and usually are, in the core of what make us who we are. As this is the case, I have taken in to consideration that my research is conducted in an ethical way. Miller and Bell (2012) argue that giving an informed consent to participating in a research is an ongoing process. As the studies are usually subject to change it is important that H and J who participate in the study were aware of how their initial consent related to the changes in the study. I have also contacted them both if and when changes in my research, relevant to the consent that they have given, happened.

Also Miller and Bell (2012) stress that it is important to recognize the way that gatekeepers can apply pressure for people to participate in a study. As I told earlier I have originally used my personal contacts and acquaintances to find suitable people to participate in my study. I had made it clear for these gatekeepers that they shouldn't be too eager to talk people into participating. When potential interviewees were interested in participating to this thesis, I explained my intentions and the general idea behind my research. I have tried to do this in a manner of minimizing the risk to the dependability of this thesis.

Before each interview, I have always asked how much private information H or J want to reveal about themselves. Though for example H didn't see the need to change her name and J was very open about describing her art projects in a way that she could easily be identified, I have tried to mask both of their identities. As a rule I provide pseudonyms for both of them, even if they themselves don't see the need for this. In the final version of this thesis the detailed work history and some of the demographic factors such as ages and dates are changed so that the identification through association could be prevented. Although some information is changed I have always made sure with thesis supervisor that this has not lowered the scientific worth of this thesis.

After the first draft of my work I have tried to get comments from both of my interviewees, so as not to misrepresent them in the study. I have emailed a copy of the narrative and the individual analysis to both of the interviewees prior to the publishing of this thesis so that they can comment what I say about them or our conversations. The comments are briefly summarized in the Epilogue chapter in the end of this thesis. Lastly, I have send both J and H a copy of the finalized thesis.

#### **4. How I Became the Professional I am Today**

These are the stories of two Finnish women with a trans-background. My analysis centers on the identity work done during the interviews, but as interesting topics or phenomena emerge I will try and also bring these up to the discussion. When I did my analysis, I first constructed a short narrative of both persons' careers. The career narratives have been crafted by using the interview data and represent my view of both J's and H's careers. They have been later checked and approved by both interviewees. The coding process for career narratives included for example gathering dates for specific incidents and listing them in chronological order. Later this list of dates was compared with big themes that rose out from the data. An example of this would be J studying to become a nurse, or H going through her gender reassignment process, etc.

During the analysis I have named the dominant themes that our discussions revolve around. The section here is not the full accounting of the process of my analysis. Rather it is the result. The citations are here to explicate my reasoning. They also provide a voice for my interviewees.

I will start with the story of J and tell about our conversation and its analysis. Then I will introduce H, a civil servant and the conversations we had. Lastly I will introduce a framework for identity work that is based on both the literature section and the interviews covered in this thesis. The framework for identity work started out as a mind map and finally evolved to a framework. It has worked as a tool for bringing together all the elements of identity work that I found present during our identity discussions.

The results of the analysis are the explicated identities for both of my interviewees. The process of identity work and the doing gender are explicated as I account how I see the identities are crafted.

#### 4.1. The Story of J

In this section I will first recap the story of J. It is based on the interviews with J and other material that has come up during my thesis work. I will then explicate my analysis of J's second interview.

J has always been sure that she wants to be an artist. She starts vocational studies in an art school at the age of 17 and graduates as an artist from an art academy in middle 90's. After some time, she gets a job in a magazine based in Helsinki. J's career in the magazine lasts for 15 years.

In year 2000 J is diagnosed with burnout. The next year she starts the process for gender reassignment, although officially the process starts as soon as the new law considering the transgendered sets in in the year 2003.

Meanwhile working in the magazine, J does various art projects. Although she has from early on been really into being a journalist, she gradually grows tired of magazine work. At the time this happens the industry in general is in turmoil. There are cutbacks and editorials are using more and more free labor.

In 2012 J participates in a popular song contest and does five appearances in a TV talk show. She also does a cameo role in a movie. In the end of the year the relationship with her then editor culminates into a confrontation about the amount of cleavage in her Facebook profile pictures. J takes a 6 months leave of absence. When J returns to work, she is offered a year's salary if she leaves and signs a waiver for not suing her employer. J takes the money.

J tries to find work as a freelance journalist but finally ends up doing product demonstrating in an apartment store. J also does and appears in various art projects.

The same time J works as a product demonstrator, she applies to study in several schools and is finally accepted to study nursing in a university for applied sciences. Although she goes to school, she is still hesitant if she really wants to be a nurse when she graduates.

During the analysis of J's interview there are three big themes that rise up. First of the themes is J as a journalist and the reasons for why J finally quit her job in the magazine industry. The second theme is J as an artist. It is clear that most of what J does as an artist revolves around her gender identity. Doing art and being an artist is somewhat inconsistent with J's new career as a nurse and it seems that J justifies the career in nursing by stressing the instrumental values of nursing work. These values are the flexible working hours, salary, etc. J states that the nursing work is not

necessarily something she identifies to, but it allows her to do her art work and express her true identity in other spheres in her life. The third big theme is the future that encompasses her current studies and plans for her future job. This theme includes nursing. Gender is something that is ever present in all of the themes and in our interviews.

J did her career as a journalist in a magazine where she was hired as an editorial assistant in the mid 90's. As she had graduated from art school she first worked with stuff related to the magazines visual image and photographing. During our conversation it becomes clear that although photography is a big part of the magazine work, it is not considered as work that you do if you want to keep working in the same magazine. At some point J is asked if she wanted to stay in the magazine. The condition was that she starts to write articles. Somehow writing is seen as more legitimate magazine work than photographing and other editorial work. To me this seems strange, as the only legendary professional that J mentions working in the magazine is a photographer. The photographer is portrayed as a personality who has a strong personal vision that he lives out by being a photographer. None of the journalists are mentioned in this respect. I'm not sure if this is partly because he is a (heterosexual) man in an office that consists mostly of women. Perhaps this is an example of doing gender. This is a theme that we, to my regret, don't pursue further. So, J starts doing odd editorial jobs and ends up doing serious work – writing.

We have our second interview in my home sitting around the kitchen table. I have promised to buy beers and pastries and drive J from her place to mine and back when the interview is over. Although I have met J before, I feel somewhat nervous about the interview when driving to my place. I think J feels the same way as her voice sometimes almost disappears when she is talking. I think the three beers we drink, help to ease the tension. There are two cats that are constantly jumping on J's lap. It's a beautiful summer day.

When we talk about the magazine work, J's gender is a total nonissue, until it comes to her leaving the magazine. Although J understands how magazine industry in general has changed...

*"I think there might have been some 12 people working in the editorial staff." ... "So, it was not a big office. Not even if. I mean that nowadays the staff size is four or five people, so..."*

The reasons for J's dismissal are attached to her being a transgendered person. Although it would have been easy to say that for the magazine industry, times were tough, and most of the people had

to leave, the reasons that lead to J leaving the magazine were in J's stories all related to gender and personal relation with the new editor:

*“Well, in my case, I had terrible amount of schism with my employer about what I can do and what I can't do. So, it was so that in a way that they had used to somehow to the fact that I do just, that my life just revolves around that fucking magazine...”*

*“And in the end it was so conservative the whole magazine corporation that, well... Even N.N. (famous Finnish stylist) has been hosting for example some sex trade shows. And there has been almost every kind of people. And I think it was absurd that in my case then. I mean that, I feel that it's always me that ends up being inspected, I mean, oh (in a terrified voice) you do like that. I mean that even if everyone else would have been doing it for five years, but then they single me out...”*

When asked why J thinks she is always singled out, she answers she doesn't know but continues:

*“Well for example when I had to, well when I was reprimanded in the magazine about my Facebook profile. Supposedly there was some talk inside the editorial staff about my Facebook profile pictures. I mean that there were such large cleavages in the pictures. And then my boss yelled at me. I mean that she foamed, and held a magazine in her hands and shouted, if I could ever imagine that there was such a cleavage in the cover of the magazine. I was like, what did I just hear.”*

Even though J recognizes that the editorial staff has over time decreased from 12 to 4 persons, she sees that the reasons that lead to her sacking had nothing to do with her professionalism. I feel that her doing projects like hosting a sex trade show can be interpreted as doing transgender by provoking the gender system and coming out as transgendered person in similar way as described by Connell (2010). Taking this viewpoint, it might also be argued that she does “wrong” kind of gender behavior, something that is not allowed for a transgendered person (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Frazer 1999). In my view the story of J sounds somewhat similar to the situation where individuals aim to uphold their status in the gender dichotomy by resorting in overly gendered behavior (Schilt and Westbrook, 2008). In this reality J sexualizes herself and the situation by, for example, appearing in dresses that are too revealing (in Facebook-profile pictures), and in contexts where sexuality is an issue that somehow has to be addressed. I suggest that J's editor, in J's

opinion, felt the need to uphold the gender dichotomy and the heteronormativity by asserting her power as an editor. There might be a place for a transgendered person in J's workplace, but her sexuality has to be controlled when it does not fit the norm in her workplace. So, J's boss tried to return the unsexualized nature to the situation (West & Zimmerman, 1987) by asserting her authority and thus trying to manage and control J's identity as a transgendered person. The aim here is not that J need to pass as woman, because everyone in her office knows her history. It is to condition her to do the right kind of transgender the same way described by Jenness and Fenstermaker (2014). An example of this is when J's editor tried to appeal to the magazines brand. As this did not help, she finally got rid of the person who was a threat to the magazines image and her status as the person in charge of upholding the gender system and in the magazine. In her interview J tells me she has not had this problem with her previous editors. Perhaps her last boss was uncertain of the situation. There was no set way to counter the situation and she decided to intuitively tackle the "problem" before it went too far. This is perhaps also what happens when J is referring to situations where she is always singled out.

J identifies herself as a forty something woman. Although she a couple of times admits that someone else may see her as a transgendered person, she always first wants to be identified as a woman. As an artist J is always in front of the camera or on the stage, never behind the scenes. Almost all of her art projects are somehow related to gender and queer identity. I myself find this in contradiction with wanting to be identified as a woman, as most of the art projects stress J having a trans-background. While it seems to me that J's art projects are mostly related to her being a trans-woman, J never admits that straight off, or mentions it herself. This is also a kind of elephant in the room that we seem to dance around. I later contemplate that this is perhaps related to who in each situation wields the power of putting J in a certain box – if it's J herself who can use her gender as an advantage, or someone else putting her in a box. Naturally, this dichotomic view of the power relation is not accurate description of what is actually happening. What in my opinion matters here, is how J herself sees the situation – if she is perceived as a professional and an expert, not as something to be ogled at. This is also related to the art projects she is participating. Although J is the one in front of the camera, the roles she is taking are transgendered women but not necessarily J herself, except in the situations where she is promoting her other work. An example of these could be the interview she gave to a women's magazine and her appearance in a TV-show. This how I originally interpreted the situation.

When the art projects are viewed through the lens of doing gender they can be seen in a slightly different light. In my opinion, they provide a safe sphere where J has an opportunity to do

transgender with minimal conditioning consequence (Jenness & Fenstermaker, 2014). This is something that is also referred by Connell (2010) when she writes how her interviewees were able to do more visible transgender depending the context.

As an artist J sees herself as a visual, out of the ordinary person, with a tendency to perceive the world differently than others.

*“... I know this is somehow illogical, but I was laughing during the medicinal mathematics. I mean we had an exam and my second exam didn't go through yet, but anyway, I realized that my teacher didn't understand my way of thinking up the formula. What I mean is that it is visual too. Mathematics is visual. I mean that I see immediately if something can be divided with a number and I do it the easiest way possible and not by using a formula.”*

Some might argue that not being good in math is universally seen as feminine trait and emphasizing this and the subject of being a visual person is doing gender. However this is an argument I don't necessarily feel comfortable making without discussing it with J first.

J has conflicting feelings towards her future profession as a nurse. It seems that she distances herself from nursing in general but at the same time she talks about it when she is justifying personal traits such as sensitivity or being a unique personality with a talent of seeing things differently. Here, actually doing nursing is just a way to pay for doing the “visual” projects that J sees are part of her real identity.

When we talk about school and studying I feel that there is a world where there are hierarchies among schools according to whether they are vocational, polytechnic or universities. I see “talking about schools” as its own discourse. It offers a platform for discussing how studying is done. Here gender seems to be a nonissue. A “male nurse” is a common stereotype in the female dominated nursing profession (Statistics Finland, 2009), but we never manage to discuss how gender and sexuality might have played a part in J choosing nursing as her future vocation. I try to bring up J's gender in several occasions but somehow also manage to mumble or even stop J from discussing it.

As I have said earlier I have tried to explicate my own feelings during the analysis. The situations where I have felt that there is something that I can't discuss about, like bringing up gender, or when I think that something is relevant to the identity work process though it is not articulated, like the hierarchy between schools are examples of how I have interpreted the situation during the interview and how this has guided the conversation.

J applied for vocational school for nursing but didn't get in. After this she applied into university of applied sciences and got accepted. This acceptance into the higher level school allowed, in my opinion, her to use the earlier rejection as a conformation for her being a more complex, artistic, etc. person:

*"But I got into university. I think that they saw me (in a vocational school for nursing) as somehow the wrong type. I mean that I wasn't simple enough of a person."*

In Finland there is a quite obvious hierarchy between different levels of schooling and between schools in different areas in Finland. In my own experience as a student, I feel that it is generally acknowledged that in the bottom of the pyramid are vocational schools, then come universities for applied sciences and polytechnics. In the top of the hierarchy there are universities (in a cultural sphere that values working class background this hierarchy might work the opposite way around). It is also in my view quite often that universities for applied sciences are lumped together by people who study in the polytechnics and that the distinction is emphasized by the latter. This in my opinion is due to the certain type appropriation of attached meanings. J's utterance can thus be seen as adding to her identity. It also balances the fact that J is currently working part time as a product demonstrator in an apartment store which she had earlier talked about in almost an apologetic tone.

When we discuss J applying for different schools, she admits that she did not study for any of the tests. J speaks in a heightened tone of voice and J laughs a lot. I tell J that I'm surprised that she didn't study at all and she replies,

*"Well I never... what's my point, is that I'm not a terribly... I'm not a crammer. I'm not. I mean that it's difficult for me to... or what I mean, is that I'm a fast reader and learner, but I'm not interested in reading any of that. It's like that I prefer to see things as for example as a formula in somewhere so that I can learn it. So that I see that ok here it reads like this and this. But I'm such a visually oriented person. What I mean is that I read only the compulsory stuff like for example in school. (Ends with laughter)."*

I feel that I can identify with J, as I have seen this phenomenon many times during my own studies. People seldom admit to cramming for a test. I think it is considered somehow more favorable if the educational success is the result of inherent traits. People seem to present themselves as somehow gifted, although gifted is never the word that actually is used. J tells me she's not actually that into



nursing. It is also as if nursing is something she actually doesn't want to identify herself with. It's not worth the effort. Actually studying to become a nurse, would mean it was an investment, and as such, a part who J actually is and wants to be. The talk where you stress the fact you never study, can also be a general way of talking about studying in J's school. Be that it may, this way of talking about studying, is, in my view, a narrative practice attached to studying.

I feel that, by emphasizing that she is a visual person J stresses her artistic identity and the same time moves away from her identity as a nurse. This is made even clearer when J talks about actually working to achieve something. As an example J mentions participating in a singing contest taking a lot of time. This is clearly something she identifies, and wants to be identified herself with:

*“P: Aa... and then you had lots of these other projects. Like the song contest and hosting the sex trade show and whatnot. Were there only these two things?”*

*J: Uhm... it's terrible but I can't remember just now. The song contest took a terrible amount of time as I had to go to singing lessons and whatever the whole time.”*

In the previous citation J says she doesn't remember if there were other art projects, but as we discuss further how J sees herself as visual person the different projects start pouring in. I can't help but to think how the interview and this thesis would have turned out, if I hadn't seized the hints I thought J was throwing my direction. I felt that it was almost like she was waiting to tell me something she herself was interested in, but the same thinking that I was just after her CV as a journalist. This is a something that I see represents how the practice of narrating can limit the topics present in the discussion. When I validate J's intention to start introducing her art projects that she perhaps regards important the stories start pouring in.

J as an artist is one of the big themes I identified during my analysis of the second interview. Being an artist was somehow detached from all the career related more specific and clear narrative. I had the notion that in order to being a career artist J would have had to be able to support herself by making art. And at one point J mentioned that she actually got paid for doing a cameo role for a movie. If J actually wanted to be an actor, she would, in her own words, had to study acting and there are few roles for 40+ women, even fewer if you were transgendered. I try to hint that she is actually doing so much of these projects that some might say she already is an artist, this but I don't think I make myself clear. We didn't go further into the subject of art as a career. I didn't want to press the matter further but let J explain the situation with her own words. Perhaps if I had gone further I could have learned more on why J thinks a 40+ transwoman can't be an artist but I realize this only after our interview.

*“J: I don’t know. But what I mean is. I mean that if I wanted to be something, I should have gone to study into theatre academy when I was twenty.*

*P: Why? Can you justify this in some way?*

*J: It’s just something I have always loved to do.*

*P: I mean, why do think you are too old to go there now?*

*J: I don’t know. I don’t know. I’m too old because there are now roles for fortysomething women. They are invisible in the mainstream media. So, why should I study for a profession and then be just the right age for not being hired for anything. Plus, because I am transgendered, nobody would hire me because of that.”*

*P: Mmm*

*J: It would be totally senseless.*

This part of the conversation is illustrative of how J does both woman and transgender. By mentioning that there is now roles for women there seems to be even less roles if you are a woman and a transgendered person. When J refers to women her age, she uses the word “they” to move towards gender identity of a transgendered woman. Nursing as a profession is the sensible thing to do for a forty something woman and especially if you are a transgendered person.

As an artist J sees herself as a visual, out of the ordinary person, with a tendency to perceive the world differently than others.

*“... I know this is somehow illogical, but I was laughing during the medicinal mathematics. I mean we had an exam and my second exam didn’t go through yet, but anyway, I realized that my teacher didn’t understand my way of thinking up the formula. What I mean is that it is visual too. Mathematics is visual. I mean that I see immediately if something can be divided with a number and I do it the easiest way possible and not by using a formula.”*

The word visual appears seven times during the interview. The first time it’s mentioned is by me when I ask J if she sees herself as a visual person. Later on J validates this visuality by, for example telling a story about her medicinal math exam quoted earlier. The word visual popped in my head as I hear J tell about her studying to become an artist. So, was the visual person already there or did it just born from my notion of an artist as a visual person? I started this line of constructing an identity by choosing the word visual. Either way, this in my view illustrates how chance of context gave us

the word visual and how it a moment later got used in the crafting and narrating of an identity. Being visual and doing art can perhaps also be viewed as a feminine craft. She has always “known” she was going to study art, perhaps the same way she had “always known” her sex and sex category didn’t match her gender. This though, is something J never mentions during our discussions and while I may think this is a possibility it seems quite farfetched.

Overall J describes her art projects with focused attention. Her voice is clearer, she does not laugh, mumble or use nearly as much filler words as she does when she for example is telling how she studies to become a nurse. I understand this when I listen to the recording of J is describing her photo exhibition:

*“Yes and it was a retrospective exhibition that was now. So, in that I was in 1999, even though I worked in the magazine (she laughs as a cat brushes itself against her face). You are coming into my mouth (the cat’s tail brushes her face. I feel that J says this to somehow provoke me, or perhaps to provoke the cat. Either way, I see this as an ever so slight deviation of our interview practice that is eventually ignored.) Yes. Well, we went to two photo competitions. One was some British photo competition and one of our pictures ended up in National Portrait Gallery, and they printed postcards of it and everything. I mean that it was in National Portrait Gallery. One of the pictures from the series was actually featured there. So that in the opening it won some of the series. I think it might have been something like the most innovating digital photo or something like that. And then there was one art competition in Sweden that we also participated. And then we also held an exhibition in the Kluuvi Gallery. But this all I did when I was working, so after work I went to school (J and her friend do the project in J’s friend’s art school) to do the exhibition.”*

At first I have great difficulty at understanding why J seems to stress that she is a woman and still is doing various art projects that depict her as something “different and out of the ordinary”, i.e. queer. At one point of the coding process I go through most of the art projects J mentioned during our interview. I start to get a feeling that perhaps being a prop in her own art gives J the opportunity to do the gender she actually thinks represents a part of herself. Perhaps art as a social sphere allows for J to do transgender in a way that is not allowed in other spheres of her life. For example when J mentions that she appears in a music video:

*J: “But to that music video with a famous Finnish rap artist, I fit like a glove.”*

*P: “Mm... I haven’t seen it.”*

*J: "Yes, but it's. Well, it's anyway there is. Well, there is this message that a person can be the way she is."*

This is an issue I try to raise with J but somehow I'm lost for words and stutter. I manage to say something, but I feel J first dodges the issue. After a while J tells a story of how people usually approach her just because she has a trans-background:

*J: "Well, I mean that nobody... Well I remember when I was approached by M.M. (another famous Finnish stylist), and she does that transformation series to, to... well anyway, the reason she approached me was because she had one of these transgendered, like in a Cinderella story, and she wanted me to be there. Well, I was like why should the show work only with me? She's a human being like the rest of us. Like if (J laughs). I mean that, it would have been nice if she had contacted me about if I would've wanted do that with her..."*

*P: "To do these transformers?"*

*J: "So, that I could've been for example as a stylist."*

It turned out that J was asked to be in the show mainly because she was a trans-woman working in media industry, and they knew some people, not because she was a professional with a talented eye for doing the show. I realize that by doing this thesis I have done the same thing. My only interest in J has been her as a representative of her gender. I mention this to J. After a moment she continues by telling me a story about how she was happy to attend a Sexpo organized seminar as an expert by experience. I take this story as a kind of absolution for myself, although I wonder how difficult it must be, when you have to be constantly on your toes on how other people see you. Are you considered as a professional or just a representative of your gender? I see J's gender intertwined with her identity as a professional. Her gender seems to be a strong determinant on how she herself or people around her are able to see and define her. She is well aware that her trans-background is something that is a trendy subject (halperin, 2003) and interesting to a lot of people but she herself is usually not in control of how this relates to for example her professionalism. As I interpret, the phenomena is perhaps related to the amount of freedom and power and how these are linked to what is seen.

J's gender identity changes according to the context. Sometimes she is clearly a woman. This situation seems to be the norm when there are only two genders. For example, when we discuss about applying for theater studies she notes that there are few jobs for a fortysomething woman.

When she is a transgendered women the situation is framed in a way that it allows the existence of more than two genders. This is the case with art projects, etc. When J is in a context that somehow allows people to be outside the heteronormative gender dichotomy she stands out. Different contexts allow her to do gender, express her sexuality and resist gender system in different ways. Sometimes her gender in a way betrays her, and she is labeled and put in a box. The situation resembles Judith Butlers idea on how the body supposedly expresses our identity (Frazer, 1999) explained in the literature review part of this thesis. J is identified as a transgender and as such she is either stripped or assigned with power that is attached to her gender. Either way, she loses the power of defining which kind of gender she is able to do.

Although, when we are submerged in talking about gender, J sees her gender mostly as a handicap, she also knows how to use it to her advantage:

*“...Well, it’s sort of the same thing as if you tell someone you have this friend that is transgendered. I mean the same moment she has done porn and stuff. It’s the same type of stereotypic that. I mean I think it’s sad that you are remembered, and after last autumn when I did this interview to this women’s magazine. I decided to do it just because the art theater project we had. Because I was able to slide in there some artistic value. I myself didn’t have any. I mean any personal ambition to be there for the sake of this thing, but I did it just because I could market our theater project. And it paid off. I mean we were in the music festival and everything. (J laughs)”*

When we talk about J’s career, her becoming a nurse or J as an artist it’s almost without exception that she cites what she has done and in a chronological order. As pointed out earlier, I see this as an example of the practice of narrating career. When I ask specific reasons for career choice or participating in a certain art project she gives logical reasons that in my mind seem somehow superficial. I find it strange that we don’t talk about art in general or her ambitions for doing it, though art projects are present when we talk about J as a visual person.

Earlier it has been established that nursing as an occupation is female dominated. This can be seen partly as doing gender. For example there is no talk whatsoever about J working as a welder. This forms the background when J and I discuss about how J sees herself as an emphatic and sensitive person. At first we go through the field of nursing and what type of nursing job J might see herself doing. Finally I press the matter and J tells me a story of a person that gave a lecture about seatbelt safety at their school.

*“.... So, he came by our school and he had a severe brain injury, I mean, he was lecturing in our school. I realized even then that I could not be dealing with these kind of people because I’m too sensitive. I’ll start crying or something.”*

I feel that by talking about a field that is dominated by women and emphasizing feminine qualities J has been able to define her personal characteristic as someone who is emphatic and sensitive towards others. I.e. a feminine person. I think this also adds to her identity as an artist. Perhaps artist is a visual and sensitive person who is able to see things differently than others. Artist does art but her identity as an artist is revealed when she does more ordinary things in a different way than other people.

Later on, when I present my framework for identity work, I mention temporal identities as something which travel as discursive resources to the next conversation. They are claims on earlier identity work that is later referenced by using terse stories that seem to work as antenarratives (Boje, 2004) for later narrating. Even more so, it is the themes that seem to travel and frame the situation in a way, that they allow a specific set of discourses to be used as repertoires and resources. This and the fact that the first interview was framed so that we talked about issues relating gender reassignment, might explain why J justifies her leaving the magazine industry with gender issues. It is the same theme that has travelled to our next interview session from the previous narrative identity practice. Boje (2004) talks about antenarratives as bets for later narrating. This time it seems that the narrative practice didn’t allow for the “bet to win”. If the theme had been turmoil in magazine industry, it might have been that gender in J’s leaving would have played a significantly smaller part.

When we talk about J’s career or her art projects I find it exceedingly hard to bring the subject of gender into the conversation. As soon as we start to discuss the reasons for J leaving the magazine the theme changes and gender becomes an openly admitted issue. J’s gender as a reason is used to steer the conversation away from J being a bad journalist (which I don’t think J is, but might have worked as a reason for her dismissal) and the turmoil in magazine industry isn’t enough of an issue. Though both could have used to validate se same claim.

I see the turmoil in magazine industry as a subject that did not activate. In the earlier interview with J we were talking about problems related to gender reassignment process and work. Because these types of stories were something that J was “supposed to” tell me she used gender trouble to validate her sacking. As much as gender is a reason for the sacking, using gender trouble as an argument means that J does not have to use other reasons to validate for losing her job. I think this is because

of the practice of narrating about gender. I also think that losing one's job is always an experience that goes deeply into one's personality and identity. Perhaps then the reasons also need to be personal. In my original narrative I incorporated the general turmoil in magazine industry as one of the reasons that made J leave, although J herself sees her gender as the prime reason. Gender as a reason creates totally opposite reality than the one introduced before. Here gender matters and is a main reason of injustice. On the other hand gender can be used as advantage for doing publicity work and promoting art as explained earlier. Whatever the case gender is something that in J's situation has to be included into the mix. I think that I myself, as a heterosexual man, would only seldom have to think that gender was a reason for me being treated unjustly.

Later on when I present the framework for identity work, I show how certain themes seem to allow for certain narrative practices to activate. What I mean, is that a specific narrative practice seems to allow for different types of discourses to be used as narrative resources. This, in my opinion, was just the case when J validated her sacking for gender related reasons rather than using a turmoil in the magazine industry.

In the next chapter I will tell the story of H and explicate our identity work.

## **4.2. The Story of H**

In the next two chapters I analyze the two interviews with H. H identifies herself as a fifty-something woman. She describes herself as a grey office worker, a women with a trans-background

As I have the recording and transcription of the interview we made in 2015 (Enroth & al., 2015) I have slightly different way of handling H's narrative. As with J, I will start with telling a short narrative that is based on both of the interviews done with H. I will then proceed with the first interview and explicate how the stories H tells me and the identity work evolve over time. I will end up the analysis by summarizing my findings and presenting an identity work framework that I have referred to earlier in this thesis. The narrative below has been crafted much the same way as with J.

H's career as an expert in the public sector started almost right after she graduated from Helsinki School of Economics and Business Administration in 1991. After teaching accounting and working briefly for three other governmental organizations, she finally ends up in the large governmental organization that is her current employer.

At the time of the second interview in 2016, H had been working as an expert and a civil servant for 19 years for the same big governmental organization. She had officially started her gender reassignment process some 12 years ago. During the gender reassignment process H had encountered some encouragement from her colleagues, although most of the work related experiences were negative in nature. For example some of the women in her workplace had complained about her using the toilet and showers reserved for women and her boss had tried to withhold a part of her sickness benefits regarding sick leave due to the surgical gender reassignment operation.

The exclusion and discrimination culminated when H's then supervisor announced her as a volunteer for a newly established, special, inter-organizational taskforce. H's offices were then moved to a different location.

Now H sees that the situation has mellowed down. She no longer aims for promotion or making a career, but concentrates on being a mom and a provider for her family. She claims she feels content in her work and is waiting for another 10 years of collecting her paycheck, and working for the same organization.

#### **4.2.1 The First Interview**

The first interview is held at my old flat. The three of us, E (a 25 year old woman student who was attending to the same course as I in 2015), H and I are sitting in the living room. I have bought pastries and brewed coffee. Our dog and cats are running around and prying for attention. At the time I have just had my first child. This has been a big shock for me, and I feel deprived of sleep. I also feel quite nervous as I don't know H from before, and I have a feeling that the issues we are going to talk about might be quite sensitive. I have earlier explained to H that we are interested in her experiences related to her professional life and her gender reassignment process.

H's stories are quite different when compared to J's experiences. Quite early into the first interview H tells a story of how people in her workplace reacted to her starting the gender reassignment process. Much in a similar way as in J's story, being outside the gender dichotomy, seems to lead H into a collision course with her superior and some other women in her workplace.

H is physically a tall and big person. After the first interviews that were conducted in 2015, I remember talking with J about how she feels about passing as woman. J said that it is quite easy for



her, but was then quick to point out, that this might not be the case for someone who is a big person. Later on I contemplate on the theme of sexualization that is somehow present in all our interviews. H is a large person in any standards, and married to a woman. When sexualization happens J is an object whose breasts can be commented in an office party, but the same doesn't perhaps apply to H. As she is married to a woman and is large she encompasses more masculine properties than J. This makes passing as a woman harder and as a result H is perhaps seen more as a man in certain cases. This is something we talk with H and she agrees to a point but does not mention her own experience on the subject. Rather she points out that people sometimes tend to go overboard when they go through the gender reassignment process. Later they "learn" to do the right type of women.

From early on, this difficulty in being accepted or recognized as a woman is what seems to frame the first interview. She for example tells a story of how she was denied from using the women's shower at her workplace. She finally comments on the whole episode,

*"P: ... But it didn't bother you, the shower?"*

*H: No. No, because well, it's the same as if I got to a public swimming pool. I don't go to women's side to peep on other women. I go there to swim. I go there to have a sauna."*

H is concerned that she is seen as a peeping tom. This happens because some people in her workplace sexualize H and the context of using a shower. The situation is sexualized and she is considered as an active subject. H's demand for recognition as a woman is interpreted as her being a peeping Tom. Here H makes a point of not being one and as a proof of this she is renouncing her right to use the showers assigned for women. This leaves H a little room to maneuver. If she doesn't want to be seen as a peeping tom, she has to submit to a situation where she has to use men's showers and it is even more difficult for her to pass as a woman. The example has similarities with examples given in the Schilt and Westbrook (2009) article. It is also, in my view, illustrative of the fact that each gender category is a base of power. If you want to be recognized as a woman, women have to let you in to their club.

Although H gives examples of how some of her colleagues have encouraged her during her gender reassignment, there are plenty of examples of how H is punished from not fitting into the gender-norm. One of these is that H is moved to do back-office work,

*“Well, for example after the transition I haven’t done a single trip abroad. Always when someone has taken over something that I have done before, she or he has traveled somewhere. So, this is a clear example of a diss.”*

H describes how her workplace and especially her superior see her after her gender reassignment process,

*“H: I mean that you can’t go upwards and you can’t go left or right. For the community it’s like they lower a sarcophagus on top of you.*

*P: What do you mean?*

*H: Something like in Chernobyl.*

*P: I see...*

*H: They pour concrete on you and the problem...*

*...*

*H: Yes, being shunned, that's the sarcophagus effect. You are kept like...*

*P: Hidden away?*

*H: It’s a melted down reactor but if it stays under the dome then it’s not a problem (laughs).”*

She is the meltdown reactor that is hidden under a tons and tons of concrete. It is clear that she is seen as something dangerous. This refers to her being a transgendered woman. She is a risk but as long as no one sees her everything is ok. I feel that somehow the situation and the practice we are emerged in allows for these kind of horror-stories. As with J, I and E kind of asked for horror-stories and those were what we got.

At the time of the first interview H had been working for 18 years for the same employer and even before that as a public servant for a different governmental organization. H tells us, that although she had done a long career in public sector, she mostly viewed herself as mother and spouse. She worked just for the money, didn’t have any friends at work, and was not interested in moving up in the organizational ladder.

It puzzles me how a person who is an expert in her field and has then been treated in the worst possible manner, would still want to stay and work for the same employer. Perhaps, in this situation the only thing you can do is to mentally detach from the organization and the people who exclude you. And start building your identities from another perspective.

I interpret that H, stressing the importance of her family, is a partial result of experiencing being excluded in her workplace. It is also, in my mind, very probable that her new gender identity as a woman allows for the new social identity as a mother to be used as resource in the identity work. It also actually allows her to be a mother and not a distant provider.

H tells us that she has always wanted to pursue a career in the public sector and as a public servant and describes herself as a grey sparrow of the public sector,

*“I have been working for eighteen years and even before that in a governmental organization, so I’m like this grey sparrow of the public sector.”*

When we talk about how H sees women and trans-gendered are treated in general and especially in her organization, she sees very little possibilities to influence in her career.

*H: I don’t anymore... but for women, I regret to say that they have a kind of a handicap. It’s like women are in competition with men but also with other women. Men are not in competition with women. It’s what they call white men’s privilege. He doesn’t have a handicap. And many times they tell women that they have a glass ceiling.*

*E: Yes, that has been talked about.*

*H: But for us it’s a terrarium.”*

We don’t talk about how H herself might be in competition with other women in her organization, but I see this as a good example of how gender is done in respect of career. Or at least how H sees it’s done. The earlier example of the shower incident is one example of this. In H’s view it was the women in her organization that raised the issue of her watching them, not men. I feel that, being outside both groups must be even harder than being a woman, but don’t mention this to H.

Her own reflection and attitude about the situation, where she has gone through the reassignment process is dismal and dark at best. The situation H depicts as Kafkaesque,

*“Metamorphosis, well it’s a book that much feels the situation and in my view it’s ingeniously put from Kafka that that the travelling salesman thought that everything was all and well and could be done as before. But he didn’t realize how impossible it was in the stage where he has turned into a cockroach.”*

H refers herself as a cockroach, a meltdown nuclear reactor and later on as a freak. Although she herself perhaps doesn’t feel this way, she feels that her organization does. In H’s opinion her organization sees that the nuclear core has melted as she has undergone her transition and now they are faced with a disaster and a cockroach. Perhaps the people in her organization feel that H is not able to do either gender in a proper way and decide to hide her away.

We don’t talk about it but as I recall the cockroach is finally bludgeoned to death and the rest of the family leaves for a picnic. I can almost imagine how this disciplining of H makes her feel. After H refers to Kafka’s metamorphosis and she finds out that I am familiar with Kafka, she continues in referring to his novels. Earlier on I referred to Boje and al. (2004) defining antenarratives as bets. This, in my view, is an example where an antenarrative activates and is further developed in later narrating. Some of the episodes concerning her gender reassignment have led to bitter fights with both her organization and the Finnish government. This side of her transitioning she comments with a sarcastic remark:

*“Kafka’s The Trial would in my opinion be even more accurate. I mean that when you start the process and you think that this is a medically treated process but in addition to needing your own doctor, you need your own lawyer to get things fixed. I have said earlier that I didn’t know in advance that taking hormones would make me a lawyer.”*

Talking about law is a phenomenon that is several times present during the interview. When for example H tells us about the shower incident she cites the law and what’s stated about the obligations for the employer. I feel that although H validates her being accepted and recognized as a woman in her workplace using the proper law-lingo this leaves out all the ethical viewpoints and personal feelings. When I state that most people, in my experience, don’t first think about the law but just act on their feet, H admits this and agrees that people have their own agendas. Though knowing the law is something she does for her work, H refers to a social identity of a lawyer as something she is not but has been forced to be. When I ask if this is the case she agrees. She is not a lawyer but a public servant. The negative experiences regarding gender reassignment have led her to act as a lawyer. I.e. she feels that her feelings don’t matter to whoever is listening when she pursues her case. It seems that when you talk about law, there is no room for emotions or ethics.

Lawyer is not an ethical or emotional person – public servant is. The reference to lawyers leads us to discuss about H being a lawyer and she is quick to note that as she has a background in business she enjoys developing new stuff. This though is something that we don't discuss further. This is because we are talking about (mostly negative) experiences regarding gender reassignment. In the next interview this subject is much more present and H tells many stories where she has been a part of building something new.

It is clear that H feels that her organization sees her as toxic waste. I interpret that as a result, she, in my opinion, tries to mentally detach herself from the organization she works for but that doesn't accept her. Perhaps the other way of reacting to this could have been that H starts building an identity of an official "office freak". I don't know. Either way, H's claims mean that she has to take a stance towards her organization, how it sees her and how she sees it.

When H is asked about how she sees her organization and the persons who thrive there, the comments are as follows:

*E: What type of person in your opinion succeed in your work environment?*

*H: Well, unscrupulous. Unscrupulous people succeed, the kind of social climbers.*

*P: Ok, men, women? Regardless of gender?*

*H: Well, mostly men. There are some women in there as well.*

*P: Ok, well...*

*H: It's still quite male dominated community. Being a woman is a handicap.*

*P: Do you feel that you have close fellow workers there in your department or how would you put it? I'm not that familiar with your organization.*

*H: I don't have any. I don't have any."*

H is a transgendered woman and her organization is a fitting place for a man. In her organization men do career using unscrupulous means. Woman don't do career. They go to work. Transgendered people are shut out or isolated from the outside out side world.

In my view, the masculinity of her organization, the unethical people who thrive there, her new gender reassignment, aspiring to match the new sex category, and the fact that she's being discriminated, have resulted in her understating her interest in her career and her work. This might

seem conflicting in the light that she states, that she has from a young age wanted to pursue a career in the public sector, and sees herself as a person of a high moral, an attribute she sees attached to a social identity of a public servant and to herself. This type of orienteering between sometimes conflicting identities and finding a fit between them, is nevertheless just what identity work is all about (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Next citations are an example of how H talks about women in general, family and herself:

*H: I am a very family-oriented person and I'm the person from whom the girls in our family come to ask for food.*

...

*H: In general. In general women tend to aim for the expert positions. I also have done that because I have a family and you have to be able to lead a life that fits both family and your job. I mean in the managerial jobs you have to be on call for your phone and whatnot. I don't... and going for beers after work. I don't want them. And that's a bit of my own choice also.*

...

*H: I'm not bothered, as long as it doesn't affect my salary. But I haven't gone to the office other than make money.*

These are all in my view book case examples of doing gender and especially doing woman. H has always been the caregiver and provider in her family. I see that H raises this issue refers to her identity and her gender in a way that she used to be a man and being the one who cooks is not usual behavior for a man. I feel that remarks as these are perhaps used to validate later gender reassignment.

It is made clear many times during the interview that H does not aim for a manager position. The earlier remarks of women aiming for expert positions is illustrative how H does woman and woman's career. Later on I give an example how H, during the interview switches, from doing woman to doing man. This "switching" is something that for example Connell (2010) sees as typical for doing transgender.

The first interview centered on how H's gender reassignment had influenced and been reacted to in her workplace. The tone of the first discussion was overall quite dim compared to the second

interview. Three big themes that were present in H's first interview are crudely work related gender trouble, family life, and the differences between men and women compared to a life of a transgendered individual.

The world is a harsh and unforgiving place when you're something else than a heterosexual man or a woman:

*“So, I have stopped all together to explain things. I see that I am not obligated to report to other people at all. And these things before and after the reassignment process, when a person has to make her gender, it's much easier after the reassignment process cause you don't have to do anything anymore. You are confronted as yourself. I mean that in a situation as this, we talk about transitioning, transition process. When a person is in this process of transitioning she has to, in a way, climb up to the Berlin Wall. She has to get through all the barbed wire. And there, she is stalked from the both sides of the wall.”*

I see that the horrible stories about cockroaches and meltdown reactors are mostly result of framing the situation and activation of a particular narrative practice. Nevertheless, I see that the stories need a matching identity work process that stresses H's identity as a family oriented person, a mother and a woman. Though the story above is dim, it can in my view, be seen as doing transgender as in this story the transgendered person is outside the gender dichotomy.

H uses a lot of army references when explaining her organization and explaining men. I see this as adding to the masculine nature of her organization which further detaches her and her workplace. Here H seems to be “one of the guys”. This is also something E makes a note of after the interview. It is also representative of how for example Connell (2010) and Thanem and Wallenberg (2016) see transgendered people shift between doing man or woman and later perhaps even underdo gender. To put it bluntly, I see that H shares feminine values attached to public identity of a woman and a mother, her public identity as an expert, and high moral standards attached to public identity of being a public servant. H sees that her workplace is a masculine environment that encourages people with ill will and alternative motives. This is not something she identifies with, and says this many times during our interviews.

There is also another interesting aspect to the first interview. The conversation is highly interpersonal and isn't only about H's identities or identity work. For example, often the army

remarks H uses are told in order of making a point about fundamental differences between women and men. As the caption below illustrates: Men eat sandwiches and are interested in sex, woman make the sandwiches and are interested in perhaps something more than only sex.

I also feel that they are aimed more towards me. I feel that E, who has not done a tour in Finnish military, is gradually excluded out of the interview, as women, in my experience, usually don't participate in the telling of army stories.

H and I also talk about childcare. I tell about my mixed feelings as a parent and H tells me how this kind of talk is typical for men. When I talk about my feelings of inadequacy, I feel that H negates them by labeling them just as typical male talk. She refers to men being people who don't admit to being interested in babies and other family related stuff. During the interview I feel frustrated. It's as if I don't get a say in who I am as a man. Later on when I analyze the conversation I think I understand that H uses my comments on having trouble with a new baby in validating her own identity as a mother. One example of H's army related remarks is when she tells how a man is a simple creature:

*"H: Well you know what kind of a creature a man is and how he functions. And if you have been with them in the army you know what they think (laughs). I mean that if they are not thinking about sex then make them a sandwich.*

*P: Well... that's quite sexist.*

*H: (Giggles and laughs) it is, but it's true. You can say this about army boys."*

It has been noted many times over that H is not a man, hence she is not a simple creature. I on the other hand am a man, the referencing to "army boys" is a kind of softening of the sexist remark. This is not a slight towards me, it is a remark that is aimed at building H's identity as woman.

E doesn't comment any of these remarks. After the interview E told me that towards the end she started to feel quite distressed and felt that she couldn't say anything. This was due to both the dispiriting tone in H's stories but also that E didn't feel she knew enough of some of the themes present. This resembles an example by Boje (1991, p. 11 – 12) where he describes how terse telling to shut certain people out of the conversation. Also E is a woman and women usually don't do army stories. This all makes me puzzled as I feel that issues raised by E have always been much more to the point and even articulated better than my own. In the end of the interview I feel that I need E's output, and I have been forced to conduct the rest of the interview alone. Have we just participated in doing gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987) in a way that resulted in E shutting up and acting as a



younger woman should? The notion feels quite off-putting. I, as the older man have been tasked to carry through, though I feel that actively listening and picking up the essential stuff from our interview has been really hard for me. I really would have needed the help. I can only imagine how E feels.

After analyzing the first interview I feel exhausted. No wonder the first interview felt so hard. I had been doing my own identity work in relation to H's utterances and felt forced into doing gender in a way that felt bad.

When I go through the transliterated interview, it seems that talk a lot about family and family values which are used to justify H's identity as a mother and a caretaker and to distance H from the organization she works for, but whose values she doesn't share and who has mistreated her. Men are seen as sometimes scrupulous but simple creatures who are not seen as family oriented or capable of admitting this. Supporting and nurturing a family is a woman's job.

H also talks a lot about law on gender issues and in general. Here the world is built upon commonly agreed rules and things should be done "by the book". The world seems to be made of and governed by commonly agreed rules and concepts. When we talk about gender issues, there is a special vocabulary that includes terms such as "white man's privilege" "hetero-, homo- and trans-sexual" "masculine" etc. In these stories, men are in the top of the hierarchy in respect of power, followed by women, and then come the "freaks" as H describes the people who don't belong to the heterosexual gender-dichotomy – the transgendered like herself.

In the next chapter I will proceed by explicating my analysis of the second interview with H. After this I will proceed to my conclusions.

#### **4.2.2 The Second Interview**

It is summer time and just the two of us are sitting in an old log cabin. It's about three o'clock in the afternoon and the weather couldn't be nicer. We are having tee and pastries. H and I have been Facebook-friends for a year now. I, for example, know that she is into gardening (I'm into gardening also). Somehow H doesn't seem as intimidating as during the first interview.

Overall, in the second interview, the atmosphere seems more relaxed than in the first one. I start by explaining, that stories that I'm mostly interested in, are related to H's career, and I'm interested in

how she justifies her career moves and decisions. It is almost as if this framing of the conversation makes the situation easier. Things are not as near the skin as they were in the first interview. It might also be that the weather is nicer.

Almost right off, in the beginning of the interview, H tells that she has always been interested in working as an expert for the public sector. A bit later she validates this by referring to the “soft” side of the business. Here the public sector is opposed with the private sector. Where the private sector has flexible morals, it is evident that this does not apply to the public sector.

*“... Many times when you get into this soft side, well a type of moral flexibility is included in these things. I mean that I aim to uphold a high moral standard.”*

H tells me that she is hinting to the differences between the two sectors. I try to get H to speak more about the subject and when I press her, she replies,

*“P: Don’t hint. Tell me how it is.*

*H: Ok, here’s how it is. The soft side of the business life is, that it’s simply bullshitting and the kind of stuff that is not right. That they rip out your hide and if they get a chance they eat one of your kidneys.”*

It is obvious that H sees herself as someone deeply invested in the public sector. We talk about H’s early career and how she used to work for several governmental agencies. Gradually we start talking about broader subjects. How the Finnish countryside is becoming uninhabited and how in the future there will be robot cars and such. H tells me she doesn’t believe in them, but wouldn’t rule out some types of special shuttles for grannies. From time to time H comes back and tells about episodes in her life when she was a part of something changing. Later on, when I analyze this part of the conversation, I get a feeling that there is a kind of a continuum from being a part of a change in both of these offices and perhaps also contributing to the future. There is a strong feeling of inclusion in these stories, opposed to the interview we conducted in 2015. Overall the tone is brighter. There are no more sarcophaguses or terrariums, although the space seems to be the same.

*“H: I think I have here a thing, that when I turn fifty four, I feel serene and I don’t have to go forward or back.*

*P: Ok*

*H: I don’t have to turn to the sides either. I’m just getting along.”*

When I had the interviews with J we didn't craft nearly as much of social identities as with H. With H different social identities rise up as we talk and are easily recognized. When we talk about parenthood, a mother, as a caretaker and a provider, comes up. In the talk about gender for example there can be found hints that social identity of a transgendered individual is partly defined by the fact that he or she is usually alone and struggling as an object of oppression. The transgendered individual is also new to the situation. She makes mistakes and goes overboard when doing her new gender. In the end she survives and finds a right way of doing her gender. The social identity that is most explicitly articulated is the identity of a public servant:

*"... But, your standard office bearer. Well, they are not the ones who run the show. I mean that the most of the ones in civil service are introverts. The types that pounce about within their own world."*

Public servant is a person who toils (sometimes only a half of the normal work day) with others but still alone, somewhere in the back-office. In the second interview the social identity of a public servant comes even clearer. She has high moral standards and is there to offer a service and not make a profit or misuse her power, whatever the newspapers or wicked people might say about her.

*"Well there are these commentators that say things like, "well public servants (virkakyöstit, a Finnish word for public servant with negative connotations) just eat Danish pastries". That simply doesn't apply."*

...

*"Working in public service is mostly about that you follow the norms. And with them there is no room for politicking"*

During the first interview when H mentioned politicking, I felt then that it was a flick aimed at me. This time I don't feel this way. All these social identities come together as a whole. H distances herself from her earlier organization and her current organization is almost a nonissue in the final interview. She is there to earn, so that she can be a woman who feeds her family. Working in the public sector is instrumental. In addition to bringing food to the table, it allows for H to spend time with her family. Although she doesn't identify with her organization she shares the values of a public servant and identifies strongly as being one.

*"And I also want, that when I do this job of course I have the money in my mind, but I also, in some sense, want to support these ideals of justice state and incorruptibility"*

Earlier in the chapter covering narrative identity I mention how H is puzzled by what she has said in the previous interview. She refers to an evil spirit. I see this as an example of how the practice of

narrating shapes the stories that come forth in each episode. In the first interview the negative experiences attached to her organization and gender reassignment were allowed and encouraged. Both E and I were eager to hear these stories and perhaps H was in a bad mood. The second time around H seems almost apologetic that she doesn't have as juicy stuff regarding her career. The same themes are still present, but as the practice of narrating is different they are not depicted in as a grim light as in the first interview. Perhaps it's also that the normalizing power of the gender system has taken its toll. When you spend enough time in a sarcophagus you start to accept and even like its walls. The identities adapt to the situation:

*“P: Yes, well... What you earlier told about this subject, well, it sounded quite horrific.”*

*H: But on the other hand you learn into it. For example if you're in a war in Syria, I think, you at some point get used to it.”*

The example above illustrates also how gender system disciplines people to concede to it. This is something that is discussed for example by West and Zimmerman (2009).

When we talk about H's early career she mentions that she used to do teaching. When I ask her why she didn't continue that path she says that continuing as a teacher would have required her to take up pedagogic studies. After this she continues:

*“And well, I looked at the books and it was such a dismal stuff that I simply couldn't do it. Anyways I started to have this thing where I even then, this trans-genderedness and all were boiling under my skin. And the playing with costumes stuff. So the roleplaying was just a bit too hard.”*

After talking about other things we return to why H didn't want to continue as a teacher. She is telling a story how she had to do a lot of studying to really understand the strategy work she was a part of in her organization. I see this referencing of studying hard as an opportunity to ask more about the costume stuff and –play we were talking about earlier. I bring up the subject and state that earlier she wasn't willing to study and now she was. H gets quite agitated when I mention this:

*P: Yes... but it wasn't as hard (the studying for strategy work) as the pedagogic studies?*

*H: (In an agitated loud voice) but I'm not interested in pedagogic studies!*

*P: Well, this was what I wanted to hear.*

*H: Well, as I said I'm not interested!*

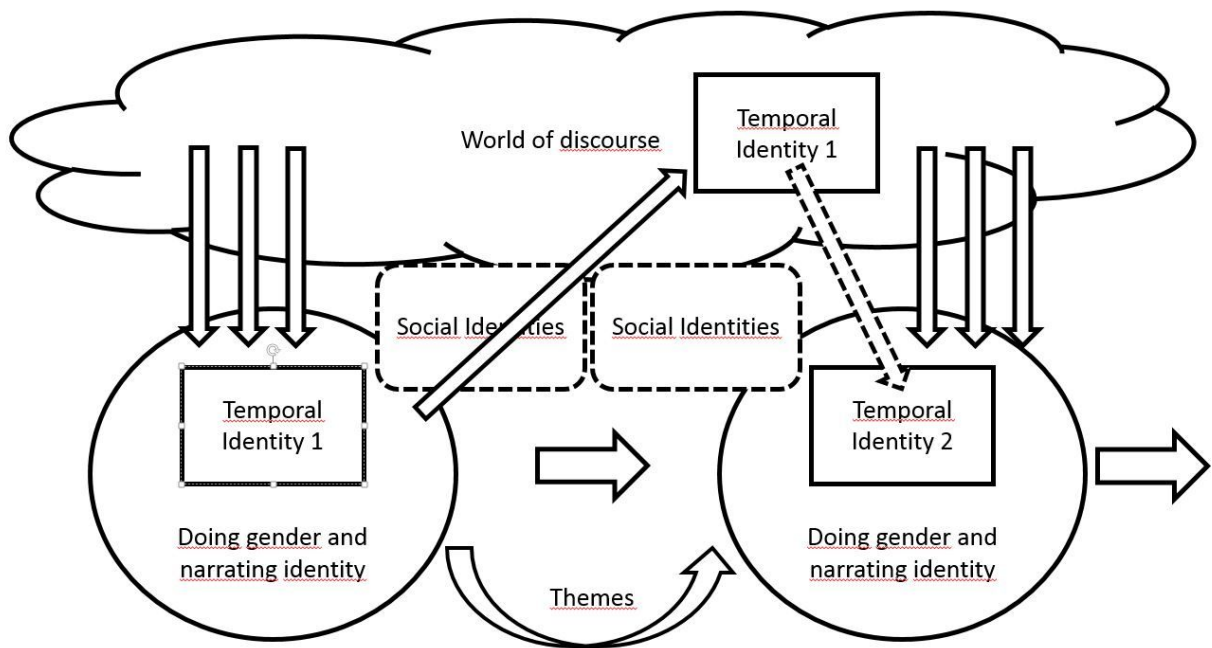
*P: Ok."*

In my field notes I have written, "Is a teacher more in front and looked at than a public servant?" I think that this is something what H also was thinking when I asked my question. Perhaps it's hard to even discuss or consider that something you build your whole career and a big part of identity on is based on not being able to publicly be or do the gender you think is you. Of course now the spade has been called a spade. Still, you can't turn back time and dwelling on the past might just be too hard for H. It might also be that I interpreted the situation entirely incorrectly.

Overall during the second interview H tells where she has worked and what types of things she has done. It sometimes resembles almost cataloguing of organizations, dates and tasks. I many times find myself encouraging H in this while this is not what I'm mainly interested in. The practice of narrating career takes over. Nevertheless, most of the previous themes are present and I can easily recognize the temporal identities from the previous interview that are shaped and added to make new ones in this interview. I also start to wonder if the mood is mellower because we have come to know each other better and we don't have to resort to using as crude social identities as in the first interview.

## **5. Conclusion**

The following framework is based on the two sets of interviews, where we have crafted stories about career and identity. It adds to the frameworks and models for dialogical and conversational identity work by McInnes and Corlett (2012) and Beech (2008) by trying to elaborate how the constructed narratives, antenarratives and terse stories transfer between consecutive phases of identity work.



(Figure 2)

The framework for identity work depicts how narrative identity as a practice happens in episodes that proceed in temporal sequences – in other words, each narrative identity circle is an identity discussion that we had. I call them narrative identities as they are similar to narrative career practice introduced by LaPointe (2010; 2011).

As it turns out, identity work is done in relation to the context. In the first interviews the dominant practice was narrating about experiences during gender reassignment process. The second dominant narrative identity practice was narrating career. In my view each narrative identity episode can encompass different practices that activate if they are allowed to and are in line with the framing of the situation. For example, in the first interview with H the dominant practice was narrating gender inequality and in the second narrative identity the both narrative career and gender inequality were present.

I always tried to identify big themes that were present during each interview. It seems that these themes traveled to the second interview as I or my interviewee brought the subjects up. This for example allowed for the activation of the gender inequality narrating during the second interview although the narrative career was still the dominant way of telling stories.

During each discussion we co-crafted a personal identity that I call a temporal identity. Temporal identity from the first interview seemed to be something that was used for crafting the second temporal identity in the second interview.

Narrative identity circles in the framework represent the episodes in which temporal identities are spoken out. As well as the practice of narrating they represent the interpersonal level of identity work that is mentioned in earlier chapters. They are fundamentally interactive in nature (Beech, 2008; McInnes & Corlett, 2012) and can, in my opinion, also be seen representing the practice of narrating (LaPointe, 2010).

In the first discussion we used different discourses as discursive recourses for the first temporal identity. Beech (2008, p.52) describes these episodes as encounters and adds that “In any particular encounter, there is the shadow of encounters past and the foreshadow of encounters yet to come and so identity work may be a *mélange* of different identity projects.” This “shadow” in my opinion has similarities with the temporal identity, that can be used as a resource or it can limit the conversation.

As well as discourses and temporal identities, social identities work as material for identity work. To the framework I have also included the concept of social identity (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Watson, 2008). Social identity is further explained earlier in the chapter about identity work. In the framework above the social identities work in a very similar way as they are depicted to function earlier in this thesis. This is why I have situated them between the realm of discourse and the narrative identity episodes. For example H refers to herself in several occasions as a public servant which sometimes refers to the gray invisible laborer stereotype, sometimes the stereotype of public servant who works only half of the time she spends at work, and sometimes to the public servant with a high moral stance.

What makes identity work so interesting is that the episodes are just singular events, but happen over time and form a kind of a continuum. I.e. you can't step to the same river twice. In the second stage of the interview it was obvious that the first temporal identity worked as something to build upon. The first temporal identity was used as resource in the next narrative identity episode with social identities and different discourses suggested by McInnes and Corlett (2012) as the organizational or discursive level of identity work. Which discourses were present in each episode depended on the context. E.g. when discussing careers the talk about gender was almost nonexistent

while it had in the first interviews been dominating the conversation as we were talking about work related experiences during the reassignment process.

This thesis deals with how two women with a trans-background do identity work as they are interviewed by me (and E in the first interview with H). It turns out that how identity work turns out is highly context specific. By context I mean that there seem to be so many things that effect it, I had great difficulty in identifying them.

Gender is an ever present force that shapes our action and identity work. According to the prevailing practice of narrating, gender, when it was not discussed openly, loomed in the background and allowed or inhibited the crafting and usage of specific gender related social identities and how different discourses could be used. One example of this was when H denied being interested in education while it seemed to me that she didn't even give it a chance because of risking being seen as transgendered. As discourses limited how identity work could be done and gender could not be excluded, it can be said that to "genders extent", both of the interviewees and I were "prisoned" by our gender.

As my interviewees were both trans-women they were able to, depending on the current story and practice, switch between gender identities of a woman and a transwoman. In J's stories gender was, after the reassignment process, an ever present label that she had used to sometimes use as her advantage, but sometimes resulted in confrontation when she did the "wrong kind" of woman (West & Zimmerman, 1987), or wrong kind of transgender (Connell, 2010). Being forced to take gender into account, and rebelling this, was also something that had in my opinion shaped J's career decisions and finally her identity work. J was no longer a hardcore journalist but later started to build her identity around her art and being a visual, artistic person. Doing art provided J also a safe sphere to be openly transgendered. J's new career as a nurse was also partly doing woman. Nursing as a profession is female dominated and in addition J's mother had worked as a nurse thus providing her with a model for doing gender.

In J's identity work, gender played a part, but although for example most of her artwork dealt with gender themes, also many other themes were present in her identity work. When doing identity work J's gender as a woman and a transgendered woman were both present depending on the current theme. I.e. sometimes claims for future plans were validated using, for example, the social identity of fortysomething woman actress and sometimes the social identity of a "typical" transgendered person.



The two consecutive interviews with H show how dramatically the context can shape the identity work. This claim was made visible for example when the “sarcophagus” of the first interview was finally transformed into the calm and serene place of the present. This in my view is explained by the micro-level of the context – the weather was nice, etc. but also with the narrative career practice that activated when the interview was framed differently. This is why H was able to brush off me bringing up the gender discourse when talking about her negative experiences discussed in the first interview – a theme that had travelled to the second narrative identity.

This is also illustrative of how the disciplining towards gender-norms finally has lead H to concede to her status in her workplace and to start building her identity on the more socially acceptable social identities that match her personal identity and her gender – the mother and public servant.

In a way, talking about career can be seen as its’ own discourse as well as a practice. In both of H’s interviews there is a clear notion that “doing career” is clearly a man’s thing. He is someone who actively goes forward. Though a woman works, she is not building a career. A woman works so that she is able to provide for herself and for her family. She either has or hasn’t got the opportunity to work. For a woman, career and job have only instrumental value that helps her to live out her womanhood in other spheres of her life. Although I believe we could have talked about it, there was no room for the “typical” transgendered social identity in respect of career. I’m not sure if there even is one. Career, in these interviews, was seen as either asexual or a young man’s game. The people present were only men or women.

During my thesis work I have come to wonder if reaching gender equality, as long as there are gender categories, is even possible. What I have come to realize is that even the notion of social identity is in itself essentialist – especially when we are talking about gender. Claims about certain gender identity are in this way sweeping generalizations. As West and Zimmeraman (2009) (and many others) point out, I find it difficult to understand how they could ever be used to validate a claim for individuality or equality. If gender is at play, it’s always about politics of power.

In the second interview with H, she quite early on describes that she is content in her current status as a mom and a public sector specialist. When viewed through the lens of queer theory this change in attitude can easily be explained by H conforming to the gender norms, although H herself claims she’s too old to go jumping through the hoops and making career. Perhaps it’s both. H’s narrative is about finding her own place in a society that is built around two genders. In addition to fighting gender norms she would have to do career and that’s a younger man’s game. I can only imagine how hard she has to fight and choose her battles in the current gender system.

This is a qualitative study and the interpretation is my own subjective account of what has transpired between me and my interviewees. I make no claims about other transgendered people and their identity work. Explaining identity or identity work with such crude causalities might seem arrogant to some, but I urge you to remember that this just my representation of my own interpretation of the things that happened. I believe identity work to be ongoing and ever changing. This thesis has been an attempt to explicate what happened during the talks we had with my interviewees, nothing more nothing less.

I have tried to show the identity work process and other interesting phenomena that rose up during our conversations. I think the most profound insight I myself got, was that experiences of exclusion transform identity. We tend to identify with what we are a part of. We seem to always operate in gender system that allows for specific gender behaviour. It is also easy to start disciplining people who don't fit gender norms, and start defending the prevailing gender system by excluding the person we think is a threat to it. This happens automatically as gender is done as a practice.

Gender system is a system of power that usually conforms us to find our own identity within that system. Although we repeat it by doing gender, the system is also ever changing. Perhaps taking this into consideration and seeing ourselves do identity work in relation to gender norms helps us to change the system for better. Both of my interviewees told a story where their superiors excluded them because of not doing the right kind of gender. Recognizing this mechanism in their own lives, helps either the person in power, or the one that is being discriminated against, to take a timeout and, if possible to make the practices visible. This helps all the practitioners to change the gendered action that gender system is conforming them to do and eventually change the gender system.

Personally I think that the world needs something that allows for redoing gender and crafting of different type of transgender social-identities – ones that don't have people succumbing to gender norms and finally learning to do a right type of gender. For example, I would like to hear stories in which a transgendered woman finally discovers that she can be whoever she wants and is accepted and welcomed the same way as people who already are considered a part of the prevailing gender system. Perhaps what we need are positive role models, etc. or just exposure to something different and queer. I feel that writing this thesis has helped me personally in my journey of trying to be a better me. Possibly, seeing how we do gender and craft and manage our identities helps us, as it helped me, to do these things in a more meaningful way in the future.

Most of the negative experiences regarding the transitioning that came up during our talks were related to how people react to disruptions in the gender system. Although many researchers

advocate for more stories from the transgendered the subject could perhaps be studied further by for example interviewing the family or colleagues of transgendered people. This would possibly bring forth new insight of the dynamics related to experiencing gender reassignment and why people sometimes experience such powerful need to advocate inequality.

## **6. Epilogue**

After the analysis I asked both J and H for comments on what I have said. Neither J nor H had anything they wished to dispute but their comments were as follows:

“J: Hi, I just skimmed the text. I’ll read it through again later. But well, my life seems to be one big transgenderism :D Well, you see it like that.”

I told J that I actually wasn’t analyzing her but our conversation. J told me that she realized this.

H told me she had actually got to travel a couple of times during the last two years. There was no sarcophagus because she felt secure at work. She also told me that the army stories were so juicy just because she saw me little as a precocious feminist and wanted to tease me. Looking back, I can’t deny this. I was constantly on my toes for not saying something offensive. In any other situation I would have most likely told the story about sex and sandwiches myself. H also noted that perhaps she should have been more cautious about what she was saying. I hope not, because then I wouldn’t have gotten all the juicy metaphors.

We chatted a bit longer and got to a conclusion that people tend to sometimes say foolish stuff about themselves and others. It is only when these things are made visible that we actually see how silly they are. When they are not visible, well... there is no telling how far the stories we tell each other and to ourselves will take us.

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