Young Trans People: The Sociology of Identity and Language, Epiphany, Existential Learning, Authenticity, and the Recontextualisation and Mythologisation of Gender

University College London

By Natacha Kennedy MA, PGCE

PhD Thesis

I, Natacha Kennedy confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.
Impact Statement

Given the current media attention and political action directed against trans people in general, and young trans people in particular by a range of different groups, it is hard to see how this thesis will not have an impact. The News International Media Empire including The Sun, Fox News and The Times, groups of individuals characterizing themselves as ‘radical feminists’, extreme right-wing ‘Christian’ evangelical groups, alt-right politicians, neo-Nazis, His Holiness The Pope, a range of B-list celebrities and some politicians up to and including the President of The United States, have all engaged in activities intended to harm transgender people.

Most of the harm caused to trans people by these groups is caused by the distribution and publicising of false information about trans people, as well as scare stories that monster us and Other us. This thesis presents research that undermines a good deal of that false information but also analyses the cultural processes that cause the oppression, delegitimization, exclusion and erasure of young trans people. In that sense this study can be regarded as a first to study these exclusionary processes on a wider scale, and in contrast with the vast majority of published research about trans people, focuses in the oppressive processes rather than problematizing those who are oppressed by them. To that extent this thesis can be regarded as different from much antecedent scholarship and can be regarded as an attempt to open a conversation about this culture as opposed to objectifying (young) trans people as the problem. It is intended that elements of this study will be employed to help secure human rights for trans people around the globe and to analyse, categorize and expose the activities of oppressive anti-trans processes, groups and individuals.
Dedication and thanks.

First and foremost I would like to thank my wonderful partner Amano Takako for her undying support and love, and without whose inspiration and intelligent advice this thesis would not even have been a dream. Without her I would never have considered myself capable of even commencing a masters, let alone completing a PhD. Her support, and belief in me, even through the most difficult times, was crucial. She is a very special person indeed. This thesis is dedicated to her.

I would also especially like to thank my supervisor Professor Paul Dowling at UCL for his truly inspirational ideas and support, and for his important suggestions and guidance at the times they were needed. I would also like to thank Dr John Gray at UCL who picked up the pieces after Professor Dowling became ill, and whose clear and forthright feedback, forbearance and encouragement guided me in the final stages.

I would also like to thank CN Lester and Christian Van Schijndel for their help in finding participants, Dr Natasha Whiteman and Dr Russell Dudley-Smith for their advice, Roz Kaveney for her ideas, Emma Snowden and Maggie Pitfield at Goldsmiths for their kindness, support and belief in me and Dr Betty Liebovitch for her calm encouragement and advice. I would also like to thank Amanda Kipling and James Brenan for helping me find the peace and light in which to think and write productively.
Abstract

This thesis recruits Social Activity Method (SAM) to construct a description of the way young trans people come to understand themselves to be transgender, learn about what it means to be transgender, organise their social interactions and how they engage with a culture and society that is not altogether comfortable with them. It also examines the ways trans people and others draw on cultural referents to come to terms with perceived change. The ways trans people try to bring about change, are also looked at, in this instance moving society and social systems towards accommodating them more and engaging in self-justification where necessary. The latter of these is also examined from a historical perspective suggesting there is a development of justification strategies over time, which is significant.

Social Activity Method is the mode of analysis for this thesis. This is constituted as a mode of qualitative analysis that produces a constructive description as opposed to an attempt at forensics. An organisational language is constructed from an analysis of data from the perspective of the formation, maintenance and destabilising of alliances and oppositions. A constructive description focussing on modes of action strategies recruited can then be constituted. Data was predominantly taken from extended face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 16 young trans people aged between 18 and 28. This was supplemented with a small amount of data from print media.

One of the purposes of this study is move towards a more nuanced and complex characterisation of the concept of cis-mythologisation, to replace ‘cultural cisgenderism’ (Kennedy 2013). This attempts to extend this characterisation into a more complex social cultural environment where the cultural erasure of trans people appears to co-exist with open
delegitimization and active discrimination against them, by characterising (cis)gender as mythologised to the extent that trans identities, bodies and lives are denied legitimisation, this characterisation will be constructed from the evidence in this study, and will draw on cultural and linguistic elements, the notion of authenticity and the way diversity of trans people is often obliterated, in particular by others seeking to theorise about this group.

This data is also drawn together pointing to a number of different conceptualisations. The issue of language and identity is one such concept, and the ways trans people come to experience the revelation that they are transgender is another, and is related to Butler’s concept of gender performativity. The question is asked about whether identity is dependent on the language with which to express it. The concept of authenticity in relation to identifying as transgender also emerges from the data significantly in relation to the different social interaction strategies employed by participants. This raises the issue of authenticity and its situatedness in relation to trans people, and the way the authenticity is constructed in relation to the sociocultural environment.
Contents

*Impact Statement* 3
*Dedication and Thanks* 4
*Abstract* 5
*List of Figures* 11

**Chapter 1: Introduction** 13

1.1 Background 13
   1.1.2 Position statement 16
1.2 Research aims and rationale 18
1.3 Participants 22
1.4 The study in outline 26
1.5 Theoretical Framework 28

**Chapter 2: Literature review** 29

2.1 Butler and performativity 31
2.2 The agnotology of trans people 32
   2.2.1 History 32
   2.2.2 Psychology 39
   2.2.3 ‘Radical feminism’ 45
2.3 Young people’s online interactions 55
   2.3.1 Life online; connectivity 56
   2.3.2 Online information-seeking 57
   2.3.3 Coming Out 59
2.4 Autobiographical accounts 62
2.5 Media: Cisgender people’s perspectives 67
2.6 Sociological and related material 71

**Chapter 3: Methodology** 86

3.1 ethical issues 86
   3.1.1 Ethical issues in antecedent works: ‘Epistemological Violence’ 86
   3.1.2 Operational ethical issues 96
3.1.3 Researcher safety and well-being

3.2 Research design

3.3 Research Methods

3.4 Social Activity Method (SAM)
  3.4.1 Epistemological and ontological position
  3.4.2 Introduction to SAM
  3.4.3 The development of SAM
  3.4.4 Employment of SAM as a research method: Examples
  3.4.5 Responding to a critique of SAM
  3.4.6 SAM in this thesis

3.5 Limitations

Chapter 4: Epiphanies & Learning
  4.1 Modes of epiphany
  4.2 Self learning

Chapter 5: ‘Authenticity’ in question

Chapter 6: Pathways
  6.1 Comparative analysis
    6.1.1 John and Shane: Independence and certainty
    6.1.2 Fiona and Samira: Competing identities
    6.1.3 Jake, David and Hannah: Overcoming resistance – activism
    6.1.4 Harry and Steve: Independence and (non-)acceptance
  6.2 Modes of identity allocation
  6.3 Issues and implications
  6.4 Cis-mythologisation
  6.5 Emergence

Chapter 7:
  Recontextualisation & Mythologisation of (trans)gender
    7.1 Gender in the DS- and the DS+
    7.2 Recontextualisation
    7.3 Mythologising

Chapter 8: Enfranchisement and Justification Strategies
8.1 Enfranchisement strategies
8.2 Justification strategies
  8.2.1 Participant data analysis
  8.2.2 Analysis of data from the media
8.3 Historical data

Chapter 9: Conclusions
9.1 Summary
  9.1.1 Referring back to the research aims
9.2 Constituting a social model of authenticity: Alliances and oppositions
9.3 Recontextualisation: Identity and Language
9.4 Performativity
  9.4.1 Beyond performativity
9.5 Other factors
9.6 Reflections from constructing this thesis
9.7 Implications and Recommendations
  9.7.1 Challenging the ‘Docile Victim’ narrative
  9.7.2 Acknowledging Diversity
  9.7.3 The Conveyor Belt Myth
  9.7.4 Future Actions

References

Appendix 1
**List of Figures**

| Fig 3.1 | Table of Participants | 105 |
| Fig 3.2 | Social Activity Method | 109 |
| Fig 3.3 | Signifying Modes | 113 |
| Fig 3.4 | Cultural Referents for Change | 118 |
| Fig 4.1 | Modes of Epiphany | 136 |
| Fig 4.2 | Modes of Self Learning | 143 |
| Fig 5.1 | Social Interaction Strategies | 158 |
| Fig 6.1 | Modes of Identity Allocation | 194 |
| Fig 7.1 | Modes of Recontextualisation | 215 |
| Fig 7.2 | Mythologising Modes | 237 |
| Fig 8.1 | Enfranchisement Strategies | 249 |
| Fig 8.2 | Justification Strategies | 259 |
| Fig 9.1 | Modes of Identification | 314 |
“I am not trapped by my body, I am trapped by your beliefs.”

Sass Rogando Sasot.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Sass Rogando Sasot, from whom the above quotation was taken, is a young Filipina trans activist who started the first support group for trans Filipinas and who, in December 2009, became the first trans woman to address the United Nations. Her tiny frame made to look even smaller by the grand architecture of the UN building and much larger people around her, her voice quaking with emotion and holding back tears as she spoke, included the following passage;

Nonetheless, even though the truth of human diversity is so evident and clear to us, we choose to hang on to our current beliefs about gender, a belief that rejects reality and forces people to live a lie. This is the belief that leads to attacks on our physical and mental integrity, to different forms of discrimination against us, and to our social marginalisation…. This is the belief that motivated the rape and murder of Brandon Teena on December 31 1993. This is the belief that led to the stabbing to death of Ebru Soykan, a prominent transgender human rights activist in Turkey... This is the belief that keeps the list of transgender people being harassed, killed and violated growing year after year. And it is very unfortunate that our legal systems, religions and cultures are being used to glorify, justify and sanctify the violent expressions of this belief.

So we question: Is human life less precious than this belief? Is our right to life, to dignified existence, to liberty and the pursuit of happiness subservient to gender norms? This doesn’t need a complicated

1 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrOc6CIQjtc
https://www.outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/335-1.pdf
answer. You want to be born, to live and die with dignity – so do we! You want the freedom to express the uniqueness of the life force within you – so do we! You want to live with authenticity – so do we!

This speech took place almost year to the day after another young trans activist Cynthia Nicole Moreno working in Honduras was murdered. She was shot four times in the chest at point-blank range in broad daylight in a street in Tegucigalpa\(^2\). To date no one has been charged with her murder. She was 32 years old. Ten years before that the parents of 24-year-old trans woman Tyra Hunter began an ultimately successful bias suit for $1.75 million against the District of Columbia government. Their trans daughter died following a car crash after being refused medical treatment by paramedics at the scene of the accident and medical staff at DC General Hospital because they discovered she was transgender. Even the subsequent report of the outcome of this court case in the Washington Post used male pronouns and her former male name in the news report\(^3\).

While trans people have been fighting for recognition for many decades it is only recently that they have begun to emerge as a political group and the celebrities, such as Laverne Cox, Caitlyn Jenner, Kellie Maloney, Paris Lees, Munroe Bergdorf, and Chelsea Manning have caught the media’s attention, partly as a result of increasing acknowledgement of trans people bringing them further into public consciousness.

As trans people have slowly emerged from the closet their struggle for human rights has spread from the courts to the media, however most recently the media has seen a campaign of disinformation against trans people’s human rights mounted with the help of orchestrated campaigning, in particular in the Times and the Daily Mail characterised by

\(^2\) [http://transgriot.blogspot.co.uk/2009/05/its-hell-to-be-transgender-especially.html](http://transgriot.blogspot.co.uk/2009/05/its-hell-to-be-transgender-especially.html)

\(^3\) Bill Miller Washington Post Aug 11 2000

Barker (2017) as a ‘moral panic’ and by Lester (2017 p1) as ‘The Production of Ignorance’. Meanwhile the death of a trans child from suicide reported in August 2017⁴ received a fraction of the column inches of a minor assault that took places following what has been described as a ‘Provoke and Publicise’⁵ incident in London’s Hyde Park when a trans person was provoked into a fight with an anti-trans activist. So this thesis is written against a media and political background of considerable antagonism and opposition to trans people’s human rights, predominantly from a coalition between the extreme right and a group of people describing themselves as ‘feminists’⁶.

So although trans people are still facing marginalisation, discrimination and increasing misrepresentation and othering in the media, they have managed to fight for some rights and a degree of tolerance and acceptance in other areas. So the picture of how trans people are perceived, tolerated or accepted is varied and in some ways contradictory. For example the Church of England has issued guidelines for schools that trans children are to be treated with respect for their gender identification, while the NEU (formerly the National Union of Teachers) has failed to discipline a teacher for failing to do that⁷. Yet there are increasing signs of change, for example American media celebrity Cara Delevingne has recently come out to identify as gender fluid⁸, and non-binary identifying people are gradually becoming more apparent and recognised. Yet it needs to be said that while both the British Prime Minister, the leader of the opposition and the former president of the United States have spoken in favour of trans rights

⁴http://www.bucksfreepress.co.uk/news/15506437.Transgender_teenager_found_dead_in_bedroom__struggled_with_gender_identity_issues___inquest_hears/?ref=twtrec
⁵http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=404
⁶https://handsacrosstheaislewomen.com/home/
⁸https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/05/11/cara-delevingne-emotionally-speaks-about-realising-she-was-genderfluid/
the current US president has worked hard to remove trans people’s human rights, and appears to have done so in some cases.

So it is against this polarising cultural and political background of both increasing acceptance and increasing non-acceptance of trans people that this study is set. This is exemplified in the TEDx talk given by Nicole Maine in 2016 where she describes experiencing both acceptance and discrimination in school and at home and how it affected her. Her speech concluded that it is the attitudes of others that are key, and she firmly places the responsibility on everyone else to be inclusive of trans children and young people. In doing so she illustrates the main themes of this thesis, also encapsulated in Sass Rogando Sasot’s aphorism at the start of this chapter.

### 1.1.2 Personal Position Statement

With regard to my own position vis-à-vis the topic under investigation in this thesis, I am a transgender academic at a London university and a trans human rights activist. A former primary school teacher, I am a passionate campaigner against the dehumanisation, silencing and misrepresentation by the media and anti-trans campaigners, of trans people in general, and young trans people and trans children in particular. My position will hopefully become clear throughout this thesis, is that trans people have agency, are human beings and that trans identities are as valid as cisgender ones and should be regarded as equal to them.

This might not appear to constitute a particularly radical or remarkable position, yet, as the literature review demonstrates, a significant amount of material claiming to constitute itself as ‘scholarship’ is created in opposition to this. Published material as diverse as Cauldwell (1949),

9 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bXnTAnsVfN8
Stoller (1968), Raymond (1979), Green (1987), Gibson (1988), Blanchard (1989), Haussman (1995), Greer (1999), Bailey (2003), Cantor (2011), Lawrence (2012), Jeffreys (2014), Brunskell-Evans and Moore (2017) and Littman (2018; 2019) have been criticised for this, in particular by Riddell (1980), Kaveney (1980), Stone (1991), Conway (2007), Serano (2007; 2008; 2010), Moser (2009), Bettcher (2014), O’Shea (2016), Tosh (2016), and Lester (2017). There have, of course also been many other implied criticisms of these publications and the dehumanising narratives of such material on a wider scale and of the way this material has been used by corporate media to campaign against the rights of trans people, including trans children\(^{10}\) and young people (Barker 2017, Braidwood 2018).

This study therefore takes as its starting point the view, which ought to be uncontroversial, that young trans people’s identities are valid, that they should be accorded the same human and civil rights as anyone else and, consequently, that they have agency. It is notable that this perspective is evidently not accepted by a significant number of individuals producing publications in this area. This declaration is consequently required for that reason, something which is significant in and of itself in that this thesis must therefore situate itself in opposition to these publications, narratives and the ideologies behind them. That such a simple and basic position as an affirmation of the humanity – and consequent agency and human rights – of human participants in a study needs to be asserted, speaks volumes about the nature of material produced by some claiming to be scholars in this area.

The notion that young trans people are human and have agency is one of the reasons that Social Activity Method has been chosen for this study, because of its focus on the description of strategies and modes of action.

\(^{10}\) https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/trans-teenagers-have-become-an-experiment-87vn5m8fw
As such almost all data, apart from some supporting material from the media, has been collected directly and unmediated from young trans people through face-to-face interviews.

1.2 Research Aims and Rationale

The overall research aim for this study is to produce new sociological knowledge about the way that young trans people manage, handle and deal with transitioning while young. This includes self-learning, coming out, organising their social lives and campaigning for human rights, as well as everyday life as a young trans person before, during and after transition. It will also attempt to focus on attempting to construct a characterisation of what will be termed ‘cis-mythologisation’; the processes against which young trans people and trans children – as well as adult trans people – need to struggle in order to assert their identities and fight for a place in the world. ‘Cis-mythologisation’ is viewed as developing from the concept of ‘cultural cisgenderism’ – a tacit but ‘omnirelevant’ (Garfinkel 1965 p118) cultural process that marginalises trans people, developed in Kennedy (2013).

This will involve,

a. A literature review of antecedent scholarly and other publications to identify likely themes in the experiences of young trans people in relation to this, as well as theoretical perspectives that might be of relevance. This will be in Chapter 2.

b. Fieldwork, with face-to-face interviews with 16 young trans people to identify the obstructive social relations and cultural processes against which participants need to act. It will include self-learning strategies and the strategies and modes of action engaged in to achieve their desired
outcomes and live their lives during and after their transition processes. An analysis of this data will be presented in Chapters 4 to 8.

c. A discussion of the findings in relation to these aims and to identify other issues and additional themes that may emerge from an analysis of the data. This will be presented in Chapter 9, the concluding chapter of this thesis.

Although this study draws on data primarily from interviews with young trans people aged between 18 and 28 one of the main aims is to begin a the constructive characterisation of *cis-mythologisation*. While cultural cisgenderism may have been useful to describe the process of cultural erasure that existed up to that time, as is argued by Kennedy (2019), that the cultural environment, in both the UK and other similar countries has changed since then as a result of the systematic and coordinated attacks on trans people by the media and opaquely-funded hate groups. It is intended that a more nuanced definition of cis-mythologisation will be attempted, drawing on data analysed throughout this thesis. So prior to this analysis cis-mythologisation is regarded as the *cultural process of resistance to people identifying as transgender, which delegitimises them both explicitly and tacitly*. It is important to make it clear here however that cis-mythologisation is a cultural process rather than an individual attitude, as argued by Ansara and Hegarty (2012), and which will be examined using Social Activity Method (SAM) (Dowling 1998, 2009, 2013) and which will be explained in greater depth in Chapter 3. This is the sociological method applied by the author, and is the way her sociology is engaged in as a practice. This mode of inductive and deductive constructive description has also enabled two other main concepts to emerge from this thesis; that of authenticity and that of the relationship between language and identity. These have emerged through an analysis of the diversity of experiences of trans people from epiphany to the ways they organise their social interaction, so the diversity of experience within the group is also a theme
as well as the way that this diversity is often erased and obscured in scholarly research.

So this thesis aims to construct a description, using an organisational language constituted by SAM, of the different experiences of young trans people in different areas with the aim of better understanding the processes that affect their lives and the ways they come to identify as transgender.

However this thesis has also been constructed in such a way as to avoid prejudging the outcomes of the analysis of the data collected, so questioning was designed, as far as possible, to enable responses to come unprompted from participants by allowing them to speak as far as possible uninterrupted by the researcher. At the end of each interview an open question was asked whether they had any further to add that might be of interest to the researcher.

As the next chapter will show, scholarly study of trans people dates back to the late 19th century in the field of psychology, however most of the scholarly material from then right up to the early 21st century pathologises or problematises trans people. Material from other disciplines or domains, most notably, psychology, neurology and radical feminism, has very often been based on similar fundamental problematising assumptions (Tosh 2016 p118). Some scholarship since the early 1990s (eg Stone 1991, Feinberg 1992, Munro 2005, Salamon 2010, Tosh 2015, Spade 2003, Serano, 2010) has attempted to examine trans people’s lives without making this initial assumption. This scholarly material has also included some empirical studies (Namaste 2000, Hines 2007, Costa & Matzner 2007, Beemyn & Rankin 2011, Raun 2016, Nicolazzo 2017). This thesis attempts to continue in the same vein as these studies to produce a constructive description (Dowling 2009 p86) of the cultural processes that have resulted in trans people’s exclusion, erasure, delegitimisation, problematisation,
misrepresentation and marginalisation in the wider context. It will do this mostly through examining the effects these have on young trans people, and the consequent strategies they recruit.

This study is important because trans people have been largely erased from public awareness for many centuries (Stryker 2006) and this erasure, while less pervasive in recent years, is now accompanied by much more widespread delegitimisation\(^{11}\), stigmatisation\(^{12}\), othering (Lester 2017 p1)\(^{13}\) and problematisation\(^{14}\). The apparent changing nature of the exclusionary processes of cis-mythologisation, can consequently be regarded as a significant topic, not merely in terms of its effect on trans people but in the way it affects others and their perceptions of trans people. It is also important in two respects. Firstly because trans people are beginning to coalesce as a group (Burns 2018 p304), which is resulting in their campaigning, at different levels, for political, civil and human rights. Secondly trans people have started to campaign against misleading portrayals of them, in particular in the media\(^{15}\) and while some of the misleading and delegitimising material published can be regarded as transphobic, much can also be regarded as the result of cis-mythologisation.

There is of course some overlap between these two terms, with overlap between the individual attitude and cultural process, the former being influenced, in some instances by the latter. Evidence from empirical research (Kennedy 2012) suggested that young trans people, and indeed older trans people also, were aware that coming out and being open about

\(^{11}\) http://www.newsweek.com/trans-women-are-parasites-occupying-bodies-oppressed-says-academic-846563?amp=1&___twitter_impression=true
\(^{12}\) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bXnTAwSvFt8
\(^{13}\) https://cnlester.wordpress.com/2017/07/25/the-production-of-ignorance/
\(^{14}\) http://metro.co.uk/2018/03/19/people-must-allowed-discuss-trans-issues-without-fear-called-bigots-7398359/
\(^{15}\) http://www.transmediawatch.org
identifying as transgender would be taboo and problematic. Although this had never been made explicit to them, they were aware of it from a very young age. So this effect resulted initially in the characterisation of the concept of ‘Cultural Cisgenderism’, Cis-mythologisation has, until now, however not been characterised empirically in any detail, and nor have its effects. For something that appears to be so ubiquitous and to have such significant consequences, it was felt that this left a gap in the way trans people’s lives are researched, both in the quotidian and in terms of their transitions.

It is also regarded as important that this is researched from the point of view of those problematised. This research centres trans people and consequently instead of problematising trans people it problematises the cultural processes that constitute obstructions or impediments to trans people’s lives. This is of significance because, to an extent, it problematises the problematisers.

### 1.3 Participants

The participants in this study have all been anonymised but have been given pseudonyms so that they can be identified individually. Their pseudonyms were chosen to anonymise their identities while reflecting their gender and ethnic identities. The age range limits of the study was between participants’ 18th birthday and the day before their 28th birthday. In practice the youngest participants were 19 and the oldest participant was 26. However age did not reflect length of time since coming to identify as transgender; the oldest participant was also the most recent participant to identify as trans. All participants were resident in the south-east of the UK or London, except two who were in the Copenhagen area of Denmark.

Participants will be briefly introduced here starting with the trans men.
The Trans Men

**Andy** is a student at a university in the South-East of England, he is a confident and interesting chap to talk with and has been transitioned for four years. He is high-functioning Autistic.

**Steve** is a student at a university in the West of England and has been transitioned for three years; he is confidant, relaxed and has an independent outlook.

**Jake** is working at an arts project concentrating on set design. He enjoys being part of a creative community and would best be described as a confident and happy individual with a strong sense of humour, he has been transitioned for just over a year but aware he identifies as trans for longer.

**David** is a worker with an LGBT charity that visits schools to talk about LGBT equality, he has the personality of a strong, calm and confident individual with an optimistic outlook. He has been transitioned for seven years.

**Wesley** is at a university in the South-East of England and spends university holidays living at home with his mother. He also has a girlfriend who is very supportive of his transition with who he would like to get married once he graduates. He has been aware of his identity as trans for many years but only out for less than a year.

**Harry** is a very confident young man with a girlfriend who is also trans, he has just finished school and is looking to go to university after he has completed a gap year. He has been transitioned for three and a half years all of which time he has spent as a pupil in a girls school, which he has attended since he was eleven.
John is a very confident and sporty young man who is in a permanent relationship with a cisgender gay man, he is currently working in education and has been transitioned for three years.

The Trans Women

Melissa is a quiet young trans woman who likes heavy metal music and lives in the south of England, she has just finished university and is waiting to start a job in IT.

Fiona is a sex worker who lives in London and makes a good living. She is slightly built and keen to talk, she comes from a small town some distance outside the capital and has been transitioned for 18 months.

Hannah is a student at an FE college in London and is currently living at home with her parents, she is calm and seems to have a quiet assertiveness. She has identified as transgender for about eight years but has only been out for two of them.

Samira is a from an ethnic minority and lives in London, she is also from a working-class background and has a strong South London accent, she is bright, cheerful and has a good sense of humour, and lives with her extended family on a council estate.

The Non-Binary People

Phil has identified as trans for the longest of all the participants, he is a student in a university in the South-East. He is very intelligent and has a
very confident and talkative character. He has a permanent cisgender boyfriend with whom he lives.

**Shane** has just completed his degree at a university in London and is currently doing voluntary work and has helped organise a small charitable organisation for trans people. He has been transitioned for four years.

**Caroline** identifies as on the feminine side of non-binary and is a student at a university in the East of England, they have a cheerful and positive outlook and reports being into the Goth scene. They have been transitioned for around a year.

**Victoria** lives and works in London and has an intersex condition but also identifies as non-binary transgender. They present as female and describe themselves as non-visibly disabled, they have a confident and intelligent personality.

**Brett** is a student at a university in the South East of England and has been identifying as non-binary transgender for just under a year. They have been in a cisgender heterosexual relationship with a man for a long time, and are the oldest participant, despite being one of the most recent to transition.

Given the ages of participants and the nature of trans people’s identities it is to be emphasised here that the data from these participants is treated as a ‘snapshot’ of the way they identify and experience living as young trans people. It is recognised that this is likely to change, in the case of at least some participants, yet the resources are not yet available to the author to produce a valid longitudinal study that might track these changes more fully. So the decision was made to capture data from participants as a snapshot with the acknowledgement that the detail about their identities, situations and ways they interact may change over time.
1.4 The Study in Outline

After the Literature Review which is Chapter two and the Chapter about Methodology and Ethics which is Chapter three the data analysis chapters look at the empirical evidence.

Chapter 4 addresses the experiences of participants in their *epiphanies* as trans people, looking at how they came to identify as transgender. While this might be regarded as constituting a phenomenon that needs to be investigated by psychologists rather than sociologists, it is regarded as more appropriate that it comes under the discipline of sociology. Butler (2004) argues that identity is only ever formed in relation to others, and consequently can be regarded as falling within this domain. In terms of SAM, identity formation can be regarded as part of the formation, maintenance and destabilisation of alliances and oppositions, and it can also be regarded in this case as the consequence of cultural processes, which this data helps illustrate. This chapter further examines the way participants, having experienced epiphanies, go about learning about what it means to identify as transgender.

Chapter 5 focuses on the way different participants subsequently come to organise or manage their social interactions, and elucidates the different interaction strategies that they recruit in this. This brings to the fore the question of authenticity, and constitutes a concept that is examined in greater detail with the different strategies employed by participants raising, relationally, different issues in relation to what constitutes authenticity in relation to transgender people.

Chapter 6 traces the different pathways that participants take through their development from epiphany, through existential learning to implementing their social interaction strategies. In this chapter the different routes taken by different participants are compared and
contrasted. This chapter also examines the different ways identities are allocated and the consequences of this.

Chapter 7 initially dismantles gender into the tacit and the explicit elements for the purpose of examining it from the point of view of recontextualisation. The different modes of recontextualisation identified in Dowling (1998) are applied to the processes of identifying as a gender. This is followed by an examination of the ways gender is mythologised, that is to say when the principles of recontextualisation are denied.

Chapter 8 characterises two main issues in relation to the way trans people, and their allies, have gone about the process of enfranchisement. Firstly this characterises the different types of activism in which participants engage, to change the world on different levels and in different ways, it subsequently examines the different justification strategies recruited in order to argue for their legitimisation. In addition to analysing participant data for this, some data is taken from the media, including from a press conference given by President Obama’s legal team in arguing against restrictions on the human rights of trans people in North Carolina. This subsequently compares how these justification strategies have been used throughout history, to compare with Foucault’s characterisation of the emergence of homosexuals during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The conclusion draws these different constructive descriptions together to produce a more general analysis that features the concepts of diversity, authenticity and culture – in both explicit and tacit terms – together as it works towards a clearer and more nuanced characterisation of the concept of cis-mythologisation is arrived at.
1.5 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical starting-point of this thesis is that there is an interaction between young trans people’s agency in epiphany, self-learning, socialising and the struggle for social inclusion. However this conflicts with restrictions on that agency caused by, for example, negative attitudes and assumptions of others and social and cultural structures that marginalise young trans people. The term ‘interaction’ here is important because the restrictions on agency can also result in young trans people developing their agency in different ways in response to these attempts to restrict or prevent them from transitioning or otherwise living their lives as they wish.

One particular finding from the study of transgender people in the United States by Beemyn and Rankin (2011) was considered particularly important for this study;

Where the younger people differed, though, was in the amount of time spent in their previous identities. Just a few of the eighteen- to twenty-two-year-olds experienced a lengthy period of self-denial, few also maintained their previous identities for very long. (p162)

Beemyn and Rankin employed a mixed methods study which included a significant element of quantitative data like this. The present study is constituted as an attempt to examine trans people in this age group in greater detail, since it would appear from Beemyn and Rankin that trans people born from the late 1980s onwards are experiencing life differently from other trans people, most significantly in terms of experiencing epiphany and coming out at younger ages than previous generations. This has enabled this group to demonstrate greater agency from a younger age, but also presents them with the problem that, while cultural acceptance of trans people may have advanced generally, they may, individually, be in situations of relative powerlessness associated with their ages.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review looks at relevant scholarly material in order to provide a background for this study and to situate it in relation to other work in the field of transgender studies. Initially the relevant ideas of Butler will be summarised, then an examination of the agnotology of trans people, as explained by Lester’s (2017)/Tuana’s (2006) concept of the production of ignorance. This will be examined in relation to trans people, in three areas; historical and psychological discourses, and so-called ‘radical feminist’ narratives. The study of agnotology maintains that ignorance is not merely the absence of knowledge but that ignorance is actively produced and maintained by those for whom its maintenance is beneficial or desirable. These three areas, along with mainstream media have been responsible for the production of considerable ignorance about trans people, which affects both the everyday lives, realisation, self-learning, coming out social interaction and life organisation of participants in this study. It is this constructed ignorance that forms the background to the lives of most trans people and can be regarded as constituting part of the concept of cis-mythologisation.

Next there will be a brief look at some research relating to young people’s online interaction including themes such as online connectivity and information-seeking. There follows an overview of the relatively recent phenomenon of published autobiographical accounts of young trans people that deal exclusively with their experience of childhood and adolescence. A BBC television programme about transgender children and young people broadcast in 2015 will then be reviewed in order to situate the data from participants in comparison with the context of similar young people growing up in northern California but also to include an element of the gaze of cisgender people who are not all either overtly hostile to trans people’s existence or attempting to erase or spread ignorance of trans people.
Finally this literature review ends with a review of predominantly sociological material, in which this thesis is situated specifically.

2.1 Butler and Performativity

Butler’s (1990, 1993) ideas about gender are of particular importance to understanding transgender people and no thesis in this area is complete without an understanding of her thinking. In brief, Butler regarded gender as performative in that it is produced and reproduced by what one does, it is an act of production. To this extent one cannot be regarded as ‘being’ a gender but ‘doing’ a gender. She suggests that gender – and by extension sex, which she regards as having been gender all along (1999 p9) – is produced citationally from a culturally allocated restricted group of norms. Thus sex and gender already pre-exist in discourse in a way that restricts the possible combinations of behaviours and appearances available to reproduce citationally. She regards these restricted options as resulting from what she characterises as the ‘heterosexual matrix’. Basing her performative characterisation of gender on de Beauvoir’s (1949 p301) observation of the socially-constructed nature of gender, regarding gender in this way enables the discursive contexts in which the two sedimented binary genders are conceptualised. Already this can be difficult to apply to the existence of trans people. Although she considers sex and gender to be the same thing, she observes that since gender can be regarded as different from the physical materiality of the body, then, for example masculine women and feminine men can exist. However, as will be apparent later in this thesis, there appears to be a significant cultural difference, for example, between how people regard trans people, and the way they are prepared to constitute a someone as a ‘feminine man’ or a ‘trans woman’.
Drawing on Nietzsche she argues consequently that there is no subject position behind gender and that the subject positions ‘man’ and ‘woman’ are the effects of sedimented discourses. Consequently, as there is no subject position in terms of gender, she considers that gender is not unilaterally socially constructed by the individual but is the product of social and cultural forces which produce the restricted options for gendered citationality. However the effect of gender is argued to conceal the discourses that produce it by making gender appear ‘natural’ and pre-discursively essentialised, as revealed by Messner’s (2000) observation of a primary school soccer tournament, in which the socially constructed nature of gender was evident but interpreted as essential by parents.

Referring to how Althusser (1969) conceptualises interpellation; Butler argues that people are also interpellated into a gender (Butler 1993 p122) as Althusser argues they are interpellated as a subject. Only in this instance she argues that in the case of gender the interpellation is more of a two-way event, which can include an element of agency on the part of the individual not to respond in a way that passively accepts the ‘hailing’ but in ways that subvert or undermine it.

Drawing on Foucault she argues that there is a genealogy of the discursive production of gender, maintaining that gendered identities are therefore always unstable, something that can be regarded as problematising for cisgender and heterosexual people as historically sedimented products of the heterosexual matrix rather than things that are naturally-occurring. In a sense Butler is not only turning the way we regard gender on its head, as Prosser regards it (1998 p26), but also turning it up the other way again by acknowledging that the genealogy of the discursive conditions for the development of the current, culturally-constructed ‘immutable’, binary gender system constitute what Butler calls ‘the forcible citation of a norm’. In part this thesis aims to build on Butler’s ideas, as a result of an analysis of data from participants. How Butler’s ideas are of relevance to trans
people is developed in relation to the tacit/discursive and explicit/non-discursive

2.2 The agnotology of trans people

Lester (2017), drawing on Tuana (2006), argues that the ignorance about trans people is not simply a matter of an absence of information but, in many instances constitutes something that is actively produced. The production of ignorance, in relation to trans people can be regarded as constituted in the disciplines of history and psychology. The recent history of trans people can be regarded as, in many ways bound up with the development of psychological approaches to trans people, which is why trans history and psychology is analysed here together. Psychology has influenced the way trans people have gained access to health care, and how trans people have been regarded by others since the late 19th Century.

Subsequently this section also examines so-called ‘radical feminist’ material, which can also be regarded as constituting the production of ignorance about trans people.

2.2.1 History

The history of trans people is the subject of a small number of publications some of which have been criticised for making assumptions regarding the identities of the individuals whose lives are examined (Tosh 2016 p48). Boag (2005) also critiques some historical analyses (e.g. Gibson 1988) for making assumptions about the motives for what are often assumed to be gender transgressions or nonconformity. For example, in one of the instances described, Alan Hart, born in Albany Oregon in 1890 and assigned female at birth was reported in the Albany Daily Democrat, his local newspaper on 26 March 1918 as saying, following a hysterectomy a year earlier which had been, from a purely physiological medical point of view,
I had to do it.... For years I had been unhappy. With all the inclinations and desires of the boy I had to restrain myself to the more conventional ways of the other sex. I have been happier since I made this change than I ever have in my life, and I will continue this way as long as I live.... I have long suspected my condition, and now I know. (p481)

Despite this statement, and despite the hysterectomy, and despite Hart having lived as a man until his death in the 1960s, Gibson (1988 p91) gendered Hart as a woman and assumed he was a lesbian. Yet all these indicators point to the far greater likelihood that he was a trans man than a lesbian. There were, of course many lesbians, and indeed heterosexual women, who needed to pretend to be male in order to avoid gendered restrictions on activities in the past. Obviously we need to be cautious to an extent here, because, in context Hart’s actions could still not necessarily mean that he was a trans man, however Boag argues that the likelihood is that he was. However, this illustrates the difficulties of establishing whether an historical person was transgender or otherwise. In particular the assumption has commonly been made that people assigned female at birth cross-dressed in order to be able to do things that they would otherwise have been prohibited from doing, something Garber (1992 p69) characterises as the ‘progress narrative’. As such the assumption that Hatshepsut, who became queen of Egypt in 1503 BC was transgender, is challenged by Matic (2016) who urges caution in arriving at any gender identity for her.

The motives for gender transitioning, cross-dressing or otherwise engaging in gender-transgressive behaviour of those assigned male at birth have, in contrast, been characterised as some kind of sexual fetishism, often linked to homosexuality. Although the Progress Narrative for those assigned male at birth is evident in fictional characters, for example in the films Some Like
it Hot and Tootsie, these are rarely observed in historical figures outside fiction.

In the case of the Chevaliere d’Eon, Bullough (1975) suggests that she may have been the victim of political and financial manipulation and consequently her case should be regarded as one where her gender identity is characterised as ‘indeterminate’, although he offers no evidence to support this contention. The publication of her autobiography (d’Eon de Beaumont 2001) in English, although needing to be treated with caution, because it was intended for publication during her lifetime (although ultimately it was not), suggests that, if we were to employ today’s terminology, she would identify as a trans woman or as a feminine non-binary person, although of course applying terminology developed in the late 20th and early 21st century to an individual who existed in the 18th is problematic.

This presents us with the most difficult issue when looking at texts that deal with history of trans people; that the terminology we currently use, is either very recently or relatively recently arrived at. Hirschfeld (1910) was the first person to ascribe a specific descriptor to trans people, creating the term ‘transvestitus’, which focussed on clothing. The term ‘transsexual’ was first used, also by Hirschfeld (1923) a few years later, and introduced into English after the Second World War (Cauldwell 1949). The term ‘transgenderist’ was coined by trans woman Virginia Prince in the early 1970s, who described herself using this word, but this term was little used and fell into disuse by the time it was repurposed as ‘transgender’ by Feinberg (1992) two decades later. The corresponding term ‘cisgender’ was first used by cisgender sexologist Sigusch (1998) although the prefix ‘cis-’, originally developed for use in geographic contexts, was first used in conjunction with gender in German in 1914; ‘cisvestitus’ was coined by medical doctor, Ernst Burchard (1914) as a counterbalancing or opposing
term to Hirschfeld’s ‘transvestitus’. However, outside the disciplines of psychiatry and psychology these terms were little used before the 1990s.

We can be fairly certain that ‘Agnes’ (Garfinkel 1965 p285) identified as a transsexual woman, although during the interviews she pretended to be an intersex person in order to obtain surgery, something she corrected after surgery. We can be certain that Pilot Officer Roberta Cowell (Cowell 1954) also identified in this way as did Lili Elbe (Elbe 2004 [1933]) since the lives of these three are well-documented. However studies that refer to specific individuals who lived much before this time cannot easily be regarded as accurately applying current terminology, except in very rare and specific instances such as that of Alan Hart and Herman Karl, who is regarded - at the time of writing at least – as the first known instance of gender reassignment surgery in Western medicine, according to Lester (2017).

There is also some evidence that trans people in other cultures before that time have altered their bodies to fit their gendered understandings of themselves in earlier times also (eg, Williams 1986 p167). So identifying specific individuals as transgender can be problematic, and indeed there may even be non-transgender explanations as to why the 5,000 year-old body with male DNA was discovered by archaeologists buried in a grave assumed to be that of a woman, in Prague16. Not only was she buried with domestic implements instead of male accoutrements such as weapons, but she was buried with her head to the east rather than the west, as men were. What the archaeologists were, quite rightly, reluctant to say about this individual was whether she identified as a woman or as a ‘third’ gender, as, for example the ‘two-spirit’ people (sometimes known as the ‘berdache’) did in North America before European colonisation. In addition Weismantel (2013) reports a female skeleton buried in an Iron Age tomb

16 http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2011/04/06/5000-year-old-transgender-skeleton-discovered/
known as ‘the Vix grave’ in France decorated with artefacts normally only associated with men at that time. It is also reported that Roman emperor Elagabalus, who ruled the Roman empire from 218 to 222 offered significant reward for any court physician who could create a vagina on their body (Nugent 2008) in what may be the earliest recorded instance of anyone asking for gender surgery.

Historians of transgender people have consequently been increasingly careful to avoid making specific gendered inferences to individuals whose gender identifications, in any given instance, may be difficult to identify with any degree of accuracy, as transgender or otherwise. It is also being recognised that if they did identify as transgender then they have avoided making assumptions about whether they would have identified with any of the modern descriptors such as ‘transsexual’, ‘transgender’, ‘genderqueer’ ‘non-binary’ or any other. Thus Williams (1986) describes how some of the data from some early observations of two-spirit people may have been misleading because they were already affected by encroachment of white European culture (p4) or that, in some circumstances the lives of two-spirit people may have been deliberately concealed from anthropologists, including those in the late 20th century, in order for indigenous peoples to preserve their culture independently from white people (P13). While it seems that Williams had faith in the generation of anthropologists reporting on the two-spirit people, which included Coxe-Stevenson, Mead, Underhill and Landes, he does not feel that the anthropologists, of the late 19th century were uninterested in gender diversity amongst the indigenous population (p12). However he makes more general statements about the gender identities of two-spirit people, such as the way that, despite Coxe-Stevenson’s use of the female pronoun in her writing, they were not regarded, culturally, as women but as a third gender (p67).

Stryker (2006 p9) alludes to the idea that in Europe the transformation of the fundamental basis for culture at around the end of the 15th Century
from one in which the spiritual or psychic was pre-eminent, to one that was founded on the material as the fundamental source of meaning meant that gender became anchored in the apparently stable referent of anatomical sex. The idea here is what Foucault would describe as a new ‘episteme’ (Foucault 1980 p179) related to cultural changes experienced in Europe at this time. This suggests however that this kind of materiality had not been the case before this time. This idea might explain how older evidence, such as the Vix grave and the ancient body discovered in Prague, referred to above, constitute evidence that trans people had been accepted as transgender in those times. It might also suggest that the spread of European colonialism from the 15th century onwards resulted in the eradication of any kind of exceptions to fixed binary genders based on gender assigned at birth in many parts of the world, as demonstrated in Williams (1986). Stryker’s contention is supported, up to a point, by Laqueur (1992 p65) who contends that, in medieval times a woman’s sexual organs were perceived as an ‘inverted penis’ inside the body, and consequently women were regarded as either a development of men or as little different from men, having, essentially the same sex organs but differently configured. Whether this can be regarded as supporting Stryker’s theory is difficult to establish since, while it is based on an interpretation of the material, it does not appear to be the result of any physiological investigation.

The potential for misinterpretations with regard to how individuals’ might identify, or how to interpret the behaviour of people who might be regarded as having cross-gender, or gender non-conforming identities, is huge, as has been demonstrated with the case of Alan Hart. However it is also conversely the case that other historical figures have been considered to be transgender when they may not have been, the Chevaliere d’Eon for example. In the case of people like the Chevaliere d’Eon however, for the purposes of sociological study it is not necessarily important whether they are claimed as a transgender or a cisgender person. It is what her transition
from presenting as a man to living full-time as a woman in London from 1777 reveals about society and culture at that time that is significant. As one of Europe’s best sword fighters she would have been well-known both before and after transition. It is also important to consider that whatever a person considered themselves to be, they would only have been able to rationalise this with the language resources available to them at that time. This may explain why Williams (1986 p72) reports how some described significant differences among different two-spirit people; some whose expressed gender was consistent with their cultural description as a third gender, while others consistently presented in every way as women, right down to their facial decorations. The way these people did this suggests that they recruited the two-spirit identity to allow them the space to express a binary female gender identity as opposed to a third gender.

This resonates with some theorists, Ehrensaft (2016), Butler (1990), Munro (2005), and Bornstein (1994) for example, who describe a plurality of non-binary gender identities and expressions while sometimes seeming less forthcoming in talking about binary transgender identities. This is significant in that European-based societies appear to have developed a culture where binary trans people are more visible and culturally predominant while many other cultures have tended to characterise trans people as constituting a third gender (eg Costa & Matzner 2007 p135; Wiesner-Hanks 2011 p205).

So this historical background sets the scene for this study, situated as it is in the early part of the 21st century at a time when the numbers of trans people coming out, becoming visible and coming to be aware of themselves as trans is increasing significantly in relation to what appears to have been the situation in the previous 500 years or so, during which time trans identities and expressions have been restricted, most significantly by cultural erasure. The next section looks at more recent literature on trans identities in the discipline of psychology.
2.2.2 Psychology

Krafft-Ebbing (1892) was the first scholar in the discipline of psychology to write about trans people. That which was non-normative in terms of sexuality and gender identity was at that time conflated and trans people were regarded as simply exhibiting a more extreme form of non-heterosexual sexuality and this constituted a ‘delusion’, something that has been recruited in ‘feminist’ and right-wing political narratives today. Tosh (2015) summarised Krafft-Ebbing’s typology as consisting of four levels of ‘severity’ thus: An attraction to the same sex (degree 1), ‘Eviration’ the development of a feminine personality (degree 2), ‘Metamorphis sexualis paranoica’, described as when a man would feel as if they were a woman (degree 3), or they believed that they were a woman (degree 4) (Tosh 2015 p62)

In particular Krafft-Ebbing not only conflated gender identity with sexuality but with what he described as a perversion, the interest of men in women’s clothing. Hirschfeld (1910) subsequently however, while being the first to coin the term ‘transvestite’, and ultimately also agreeing that trans people were ‘deluded’, started to unravel this conflation with sexuality (p30) noting that Krafft-Ebbings typology did not represent the reality of what were then termed ‘transvestites’” subjective understandings of themselves. However the conflation of gender identity with sexuality resulted in the first two iterations of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual - the DSM-1 & DSM-2 (APA 1952, 1968) - including trans people (or ‘transvestism’ as it was then termed) in the sexual deviations section. The DSM-3 (APA 1980) subsequently made the diagnostic distinction between two categories of trans people; ‘transvestitic fetishists’ and ‘transsexuals’ as well as, significantly, introducing the new category ‘Gender Identity Disorder in Childhood’.
Blanchard (1989) introduced the diagnosis category of ‘autogynephilia’ which constitutes a heavily contested (Lev 2005, Moser 2009, 2010, 2011, Serano 2010, Bettcher 2013, Tosh 2017) diagnostic type, the basis for which is the theory that trans women are transgender because of an attraction to themselves as women. Although this theory has been discredited, for example by Moser (2009) who applied it as a diagnosis to cisgender women and achieved a diagnosis rate of over 90%, Cameron (2013) and Lawrence (2012) continue to argue that it constitutes a legitimate diagnosis with Tosh (2017 p53) criticising this and also accusing Lawrence of misgendering those who identify as women. In relation to autogynephilia being classified as a paraphilia, Bailey (2003) argued that paraphilias tend to coincide, and linked autogynephilia with ‘sadism’, ‘masochism’ and ‘autoerotic asphyixia’ attempting to situate gender non-conformity within psychiatric discourses as linked to activities that are often regarded by many as deviant. By associating trans people with sexual practices like these the effect is to delegitimise them.

Lev (2005) and Tosh (2017) observe that the definition of what constitutes psychological normality has now become so narrow that when a diagnosis with such a broad scope is produced it will inevitably capture a large number of people within its reach. The case of autogynephilia is argued by Lev as indicative of the way psychiatric diagnoses have become increasingly wide in their scope thus progressively limiting the definition of what is ‘normal’ to a very restricted set of behaviours. This is illustrated by Blanchard’s assertion that ‘…normal sexuality is whatever is related to reproduction.’ (Cameron 2013 para 39) which suggests very specific, restrictive and conservative ideological beliefs about the nature of sex and sexuality.

The social effects of the continued pathologisation of trans people are difficult to determine, however the recent intense media attacks on trans people (Barker 2017) suggest that the effects of the existence of a
diagnosis of mental illness for trans people are significant\(^\text{17}\) and constitute an element of weaponised rhetoric employed to delegitimise them. The danger here, as Lev (2005) argues, is that, by diagnosing gender non-conformity as a paraphilia, disorder or perversion, the social and cultural conditions that cause the ostracism and non-acceptance of trans people will not merely be ignored as causes of distress and poor mental health amongst trans people, but these cultural conditions will be reinforced as acceptable by the diagnosis itself. This has been evident, until recently, in the way transgender children are regarded. Stoller (1968 p204) characterised trans children as having a ‘potentially malignant personality disorder’ and blamed excessive mothering, such as cuddling, as the cause, recommending that trans children’s demands to be regarded as their identified genders should be resisted, and that intervention in childhood should aim to avoid their becoming transgender adults (p206).

The ‘treatment’ protocols by psychiatrists for transgender children have, until recently included attempting, through psychological coercion, usually referred to as ‘Conversion Therapy’, to enforce behaviour and identification consistent with birth assigned genders (Green 1987, Zucker 1990). The goal of this ‘treatment’ is often justified in terms of preventing bullying and ostracism by peers at school, yet Lev (2005 p49) also makes the point that other children who suffer from abuse, such as those with disabilities or those suffering from racist abuse, are not required to change themselves or conceal their identities to avoid discrimination by better fitting into oppressive situations. Instead the social conditions that cause the abuse are normally addressed at an institutional or community level.

One study by a psychologist, which stands out as different from many of the more pathologising material is Brown’s (1988) empirical study of transsexual women in the US military. Despite being constituted as a psychological study, and carried out by a United States military psychologist, it is relevant to the sociology of transgender people, especially trans women. It is also particularly relevant to the issue of Conversion Therapy (Conversion Therapy, also known as ‘Reparative Therapy’ is a ‘treatment’ that has now been largely disowned by most psychologists as harmful and unethical\(^18\), which attempts to change an individual’s sexual orientation or gender identity, but which has been shown to have no effect on either and to cause significant psychological harm to its victims).

Brown’s study provided evidence of his research participants effectively subjecting themselves to a kind of Conversion Therapy by placing themselves in what he termed a ‘hypermasculine’ environment. These young trans women had attempted to force themselves to be more masculine by joining the military to try and ‘cure’ themselves of their gender dysphoria. Brown also suggested that trans women who did not enlist also engaged in similar attempts at hypermasculinity, including engaging in activities such as contact and dangerous sports in an attempt to purge themselves of their feelings. Serano (2007 p239) argued that which she called ‘traditional sexism’ affects trans women as well as internalised transphobia. Trans women who have not yet come to terms with themselves as trans women are just as likely to be affected by the cultural devaluing of women and femininity in relation to men and masculinity as anyone else and this in addition to the stigmatisation of trans people. Rather than regarding Brown’s study as one of psychological relevance it is productive to regard this as evidence of one of the cultural

processes that function to prevent trans women from coming to terms with their own gender identities.

In 1980 the definition in the DSM-3 (APA 1980 p261) departed from the previous diagnostic criteria of a disordered and erotic transvestism and desire to be the other sex, to an ‘incongruence between anatomic sex and gender identity’ felt internally. The criteria for identifying trans children included, ‘A repeated desire to be, or insistence that he or she is, the other sex’. This has been criticised by Spade (2003 p20) for producing the effects it intends to diagnose as he describes having to report conforming to a repeated insistence on cross gender identification and behaviour in childhood, in order to obtain from the gatekeeper the surgery he required despite his gender dysphoria not taking the form prescribed.

Going further in his analysis, Spade (2003) critiques the medico-legal systems of regulation that he characterises as reinforcing binary gendered behaviour and stereotypes, and the diagnoses described above as well as the system of medical legitimization for acceptance in one’s new gender that not only act to regulate gender expression and identity but produce particular types of gendered normativity. He does not merely argue, as does Stone (1991) that trans people have to become adept at manipulating the medico-legal system to obtain the treatment they require, but that the pathologisation of non-normative gender identities and expressions conversely produces a fiction of normativity for everyone else. Pearce (2018) provides a more detailed analysis of the medical systems that produce what she describes as a reification of ‘trans as condition’ (p200) within the psychiatric gatekeeping profession, and identifies the stress this can cause amongst trans people waiting for these gatekeeping appointments. She also suggests that these medical discourses have, to a significant extent, restricted the possibilities available to trans and non-binary people.
In an analysis of the nature of pathologising research, Ansara and Hegarty’s (2013) paper introduces what they characterise as ‘cisgenderism’ in psychiatric publications about transgender children. In it they identified an ‘invisible college’ of scholarly writers in this area, mostly centring on Prof Kenneth Zucker, who mutually cite each other’s publications which Ansara & Hegarty suggests gives them the appearance of more credibility. When the activities of this group are analysed through the lens of Tuana’s (2006 p5) ‘taxonomy of ignorance’ it can be regarded as being biased in favour of only those forms of knowledge that can become commercially profitable, in this instance the idea that trans children can be ‘cured’ through professional psychiatric intervention.

What seems to be happening however, at least with respect to transgender children, is that the attempts to normalise children by birth assigned gender previously employed by clinics working with transgender and gender non-conforming children are being replaced with what Ehrensaft (2016) describes as the ‘gender-affirming’ model (p14). This strategy, while being acknowledged by Ehrensaft as still a work in progress to an extent, is based on the following basic premises;

Gender variations are not disorders; they are not pathological. Gender variations are healthy expressions of infinite possibilities of human gender. Gender presentations are diverse and varied across cultures, requiring cultural sensitivity to those variations. Gender involves an interweaving of nature, nurture and culture – no one of these stands alone in shaping gender. A person’s gender may be binary; a person’s gender may be fluid or multiple. If people suffer from any kind of emotional or psychiatric problem connected to their gender, this is most likely because of negative reactions to them from the outside world. If there is gender pathology, we will not find it in the child but in the culture (otherwise known as transphobia). (Ehrensaft 2016 p 15)

This approach is more closely reflected in the WPATH guidelines for responding to transgender children as part of the internationally agreed Standards of Care (WPATH 2011), which regard any treatments that do not
affirm a child’s identified gender as unethical (p16). This is why a move towards a system of self-declaration of gender, which has been established in Argentina, Ireland, Denmark, Malta, Norway, and California and other jurisdictions is significant. It removes the gatekeeping process for everything except some medical interventions and goes a long way to removing the elements of normalisation and normalising discourse for which Spade (2003) and others have criticised it.

This means that an element of the material in this literature review is currently regarded at the time of writing, as politically a very prominent issue. The reaction, from the extreme right, in cooperation with individuals describing themselves as ‘radical feminists’\(^{19}\) as well as some conservative psychologists and psychiatrists (Dreger 2015) suggests that resistance to full depathologisation and acceptance of trans people will be mounted by a coalition of these as well as other politicians on the right. Of these, published material about transgender people characterised by its authors as ‘feminist’ will be analysed in the next section.

### 2.2.3 ‘Radical Feminism’

As alluded to at the start of this chapter, introducing this section the first thing to reiterate is the heavily contested status of most of the material in this section as ‘feminist’. This is intended to acknowledge that although some of the material in this section is regarded as ‘feminist’ by its authors and others sharing similar opinions, the designation of this material as feminist is by no means universally accepted (eg Serano 2006 p334) and is regarded by some as both un-feminist and transphobic\(^{20}\).

\(^{19}\) [https://www.thedailybeast.com/radical-feminists-and-conservative-christians-team-up-against-transgender-people](https://www.thedailybeast.com/radical-feminists-and-conservative-christians-team-up-against-transgender-people)

\(^{20}\) It is also important to declare that this section of this thesis is the least likely to be written objectively, as a trans woman who has campaigned, for a long time, against the objectives of the writers of these texts, it is important to state my profound opposition to both the spirit and the letter of these works and to make it clear that this section cannot easily be written objectively. Those who adhere to the ideologies espoused by these
The main ‘feminist’ writers in this area are Raymond (1979) Greer (1999) and Jeffries (1997, 2014), although Raymond initially made most of the arguments that the other two subsequently repeat in slightly different forms. One of the most well-known sections from Raymond is the opening paragraph in her concluding section in the Appendix ‘Suggestions for Change’,

I have argued that the issue of transsexualism is an ethical issue that has profound political and moral ramifications; transsexualism itself is a deeply moral question rather than a medical-technical answer. I contend that the problem of transsexualism would be best served by morally mandating it out of existence. (Raymond 1979 p178)

This statement is worthy of examination because it encapsulates the belief-system behind it. Firstly Raymond makes an alliance and an opposition which are crucial to her argument; the alliance is to attempt to widen the discussion about trans people’s existence by situating it as a ‘profoundly political and moral’ one rather than a personal one for individual trans people; or a ‘medical-technical’ one. Her strategy then, can be regarded as one of attempting to widen the ‘debate’ beyond trans people and to justify involving others, in particular those who adhere to her brand of feminism.

Raymond’s other arguments are summarised as follows: The primary ‘cause’ of transsexualism is regarded by her as patriarchal sex-stereotyping. Here, one of the main lines of feminist argument against the existence of trans people is that trans people are trans largely because of sex-roles as writers have also campaigned, not merely against my own human and civil rights as a trans person but also taken action against me personally, including threats of violence, stalking, both on- and offline, online abuse and doxxing, indeed the full range of techniques used by oppressive forces to silence and disempower those they wish to harm.

Bearing that in mind it is important that the arguments of these individuals are explored and analysed, my purpose in making the above statement was to be explicit regarding my own bias.
opposed to other reasons. Concerns about sex-role oppression feature large in many feminist critiques of patriarchy and this is their main analysis of the reason for trans people’s existence. A secondary cause of transsexual people is argued to be a medical industry that has grown up offering medical solutions for transsexual people, from psychiatrists to surgeons and speech therapists. Raymond attempts to argue that trans people constitute a new phenomenon produced by this industry. These medical specialists, being mostly men, are then said to be producing caricatures (or as she describes them ‘pastiches’) of femininity trained into being models of the type of women men would like to have around them.

She regards trans women as not women, but as ‘deviant men’. Although she doesn’t refer to them a great deal, when she does mention them she positions trans men as ‘women’. Trans men exist, in her ideology only as a ruse to cover for the central aim of a transsexual ‘movement’ the aim of which is to infiltrate women-only spaces and ultimately subordinate women.

She employs an essentialising argument that since transsexuals cannot change the basic sex indicator of chromosomes; XY for male, XX for female, no-one can genuinely change sex. She argues that if gender did not exist, neither would transsexuals, and since gender is a construct of patriarchal oppression we should be fighting patriarchy not allowing people to change sex. Transsexuals’ existence is regarded as constituting a reification of the oppressive system of gender, and the maintenance of patriarchy.

Raymond’s interviews with 13 transsexual women concluded that they exhibited highly stereotypical feminine behaviour and did not appear to exhibit ‘role strain’ that she claims cisgender women do. She also claims that transsexual women, having been socialised as males, can never be accepted as women in women’s spaces. Transsexual lesbian feminists are consequently situated as a kind of fifth column infiltrating the women’s
movement in order to divide women from each other and who will work on behalf of patriarchy to subdue the feminist movement.

She attempts to liken gender affirmation surgery, ethically, to Nazi experimentation and torture in concentration camps (although at the end she contradicts herself by saying that these are not equivalent practices). Although Raymond says that gender reassignment surgery should not be outlawed, she contradicts herself by saying that gender reassignment clinics should be closed and replaced with counselling to help trans people accept themselves as they are, something many believe would constitute Conversion Therapy. However while these ‘radical feminists’ claim that trans women are constructed by a patriarchal psychology profession their ideology has much in common with the psychological pathologisation of trans people (Tosh 2016 p95).

The assertion that the existence of trans people, in particular trans women maintains the patriarchy, constituting a reification of gendered hegemony is dismissed by Valentine (2007 p246) as ignoring the way the construction of identity results in new alliances and oppositions more widely in the population not just with reference to trans people. The idea that such a small, and relatively disempowered group can sustain what is constituted as a centuries-old power structure that subordinates women (Wiesner-Hanks 2011) is not a sustainable position. Indeed it is suggested that the purpose of this text is purely rhetorical and aimed at a very specific audience. It also suggests that her assertions are based predominantly on unsupported assumptions. Both of the contemporary critiques of Raymond, Kaveney (1980) and Riddell (1980) criticise Raymond for an element of subterfuge. Kaveney criticises the covert nature of her attacks on trans women as being masked by what she constitutes as, superficially, a text that purports to be about the medical professionals’ manipulation of trans women in a way that, Raymond claims, reinforces the patriarchy. Riddell, choosing to adopt a feminist mode of critique, and consequently
employing the same academic means as claimed by Raymond, describes the text as ‘dogmatic, theological in the worst sense.’ (p194). Additionally she criticises Raymond for attempting to conceal her own feelings behind deliberately opaque academic language (p112), which enables her to pretend to have sympathy with the plight of trans people. Also she refers to Raymond’s ‘paranoia’ (p145). Raymond’s paranoid fantasies of trans women constituting male ‘infiltrators’ into the women’s movement and that her idea that trans people constitute a plot to ‘exterminate biological women’ (Kaveney 1980) suggest that her emotional state in the production of this text was not necessarily stable, something that implies this may be the reason for concealing her feelings.

In addition Riddell criticises Raymond for uncritically adopting a bi-essentialist perspective which conflicts with her criticism of patriarchal scientific ideology, pointing out that Raymond denounces sex researchers for assuming that biology and socialisation are destiny (Raymond 1979 p49) but then makes just that assumption herself; ‘It is biologically impossible to change chromosomal sex, and thus the trans-sexual is not really trans-sexed’ (ibid p126). Riddell then criticises Raymond for asserting dogmatically, that trans women are men, apparently based on this bi-essentialism, which she also claims to reject. Kaveney also criticises this insistence on chromosomal sex as irrelevant since it is ‘only perceptible to an expert with a microscope’. Riddell critiques Raymond’s argument that trans women cannot be accepted as women in women’s spaces by describing how she herself, and other transsexual lesbian feminists, were already accepted as women in such spaces (Riddell 1980 p150).

Riddell’s most detailed criticism however, is of Raymond’s assertion of a medico-patriarchal conspiracy to produce ‘Stepford Wives’ whose purpose is to undermine feminist struggle by infiltration from within. In so doing she describes how gender identity clinics struggled against the medical establishment and, in direct contrast to Raymond’s unsupported
assertions, represent the result of much hard struggle by trans people as opposed to an imposition by the medical establishment. She describes these clinics as a very small part of the medical system and as both marginal and striving to justify their existence in the face of opposition from those in that establishment with more influence (p151). The attempt to constitute gender reassignment surgery as instigated and impelled by this medical establishment rather than pressure from trans people themselves is, like much of the way Riddell argues her case against Raymond, constituted as a myth that needs to be consistently maintained in order for the logic of all Raymond’s other arguments to be valid. Riddell suggests that if this argument is shown to be false, then everything else she asserts about trans people cannot be sustained. Consequently the notion of gender affirmation surgery as imposed from above, by a patriarchal medical establishment or by the state, rather than existing as a result of pressure by trans people themselves has been maintained since then (eg Jeffreys 1997 p97) with arguably no evidence in order to support these beliefs.

Additionally Riddell’s criticism of Raymond focuses on her assertion, an assertion also needing to be made alongside her claim about the patriarchal medical establishment’s creation of trans women as constituting a fifth column in the women’s movement, that transsexual people have only existed since the 1950s. This is something Lester (2017), Williams (1986), Boag (2005), Bolich (2007 p45) Stryker (2008 p38) and others have contested with evidence. Again this constitutes an un-evidenced assertion that needs to be maintained for the rest of Raymond’s case not to be undermined to the point of being invalidated.

Despite Riddell’s discrediting of Raymond in this way Hausman (1995 p140) effectively repeats Raymond’s notions of transsexuals as manipulated dupes of this patriarchal medical establishment. This is also despite Stone’s (1991) critique, which further refuted the notion of trans people being
manipulated by a medical establishment. Here she describes how transsexual women, before their gatekeeping appointments with psychiatrists or psychologists, were accessing the diagnostic criteria from shared copies of the manuals that these professionals were themselves using to diagnose them. In effect Stone showed that, if anything transsexual people were manipulating the medical establishment rather than the other way round. The effect of this critique was not merely to further delegitimise Raymond’s case but to counter her positioning of transsexual people. Tosh (2016 p118) drew on Riddell’s critique of Raymond to point out that the way she situates trans people as ‘deluded’ effectively represents a means of silencing them.

Raymond positions trans people as, in effect, not knowing what is best for themselves (while she does), a strategy designed to be deliberately silencing and disempowering for trans people. Stone’s paper had the effect of positioning trans people as the opposite; as active agents in the creation of their own lives and genders rather than deluded and hapless victims. A further example of this disempowering narrative is from Greer’s (1999 p82) assertion that trans women exist as a consequence of their ‘failed masculinities’. Whilst it is unclear what ‘failed masculinity’ means it can be regarded as a misogynistic notion which situates women as inferior to men. It was also a notion that has subsequently been shown to lack evidence supporting it. The existence of previously successful trans women like Caitlyn Jenner, Ayla Holdom21, Fallon Fox22 and Pilot Officer Roberta Cowell (Cowell 1954) for example, suggests that at least by these outward measures of success ‘failed masculinities’ is a difficult concept to substantiate. Raymond’s assertion that transsexual people constitute historically constructed subjects is repeated by Hausman, who notes that

21 https://attitude.co.uk/article/7137/attitude-pride-award-winner-trans-raf-pilot-ayla-holdom/
22 https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2015/feb/16/fallon-fox-trans-mma-athlete-interview
endocrinological interventions have only been available only since the 1920s, and surgery since the 1950s. This is criticised by Prosser as erasing the agency of transsexual people in making these technologies available, in particular erasing the way technologies were developed in non-European cultures (Williams 1986) again, as Tosh (2016) has observed, the narratives deriving from Raymond’s arguments attempt to position transsexual people as passive victims, devoid of any agency, of an overbearing medical establishment.

It needs to be added that these ideas are largely expressed using a rhetorical narrative that is expressed in deliberately neutral, scholarly language, as if to characterise an academic debate. However Riddell (p189) observed that ‘My living space is threatened by this book’, a succinct but significant commentary highlighting that the issues being discussed are far from academic and potentially, if they are not challenged, negatively affect the lives of trans people in a profound way. The debate against these ‘radical femininists’ needs to be regarded as an existential struggle for trans people rather than a dispassionate or abstract intellectual debate. It is not insignificant that the radical feminist narrative frequently uses terms like ‘transsexualism’ or ‘transgenderism’ whereas counter arguments tend to use phrases like ‘trans people’ ‘trans men/women’ ‘non-binary people’ or ‘transsexuals’. The former arguably employing language that signifies not merely an attempt to situate this debate as dispassionately academic, thereby giving it greater credibility, but which also attempts to dehumanise, reflected in their persistent situating of trans people as without agency.

One of the most significant observations to make in analysing this text and those that followed as a consequence of it, such as those of Greer, Jeffreys, as well as others in the media and online, is how the arguments contained within it, rest on a number of assumptions that are either entirely or largely unsupported or which are countered by a considerable weight of
evidence, evidence which has itself not been contradicted. Raymond’s
narrative may have been repeated often since The Transsexual Empire was
published but critiques made of it, rather than being responded to, have
largely been ignored by those supporting what can only be described as
Raymond’s ideology. What is also clear is that Raymond’s notions of a
psychiatric conspiracy do not appear to have withstood the test of time;
the small amount of time most trans people now spend with psychiatrists
(only two appointments are normally required in the UK) is unlikely to be
sufficient to enable these psychiatrists to produce the kind of typical male
sexist version of women she describes, and trans women have, for a long
time, not always been required to present in a particularly feminine way to
get through these gatekeeping interviews\(^2\).

The criticism of Raymond by Riddell and Kaveney amongst others, also
centres on the accusation that the basic premises of Raymond’s conclusion;
that trans women are men, had already been decided by her, and that the
rest of the text was written as a justification for this position. What is clear,
looking at it from a sociological perspective, is that it can be constituted as
an attempt to construct an alliance with cisgender people, especially
women, and more particularly feminists, through an opposition – and
consequential othering – of one particular group, trans women.
Consequently, although this text attempts to position itself as an academic
or scholarly text, it should predominantly be regarded as a political,
rhetorical or ideological text, indeed Kaveney has, more recently,
concluded, the following regarding adherents of Raymond’s narrative;

\[\ldots\text{aspects of their feminism – the anti-intellectualism, emphasis on}
\text{innate knowledge, fetishisation of tiny ideological differences, heresy}
\text{hunting, conspiracy theories, rhetorical use of images of disgust, talk of}
\text{stabs in the back and romantic apocalypticism – smack less of}
\text{feminism than of a cult. (Roz Kaveney. Radical feminists are acting like}
\text{a cult. The Guardian 25 May 2012)}\]

Because the ideas in the text have, despite their self-contradictions, inconsistencies and the weight of evidence against them, gained a small but vocal following amongst some people, some of whom describe themselves as feminists, it cannot be considered an irrelevance in terms of the lives of transgender people. Attempts by members of this group to delegitimise, stigmatise and otherwise exclude trans people socially, politically and culturally, have represented a very real obstruction to trans people’s campaigns to obtain healthcare, human and civil rights as well as to integrate within society at all levels\(^\text{24}\), including in academic environments.

One of the main conclusions that can be drawn from this material however is the nature of the belief-system that it represents. Rather than constituting a rational, or even radical feminist argument against the acceptance and inclusion of trans people, it needs to be regarded as predominantly an affective response to the existence of trans people, in terms of generating a kind of emotional hatred for women they perceive as men, a hatred that, on occasion, can be regarded as having turned into fanaticism\(^\text{25}\). The radical feminist paradigm for what can constitute a feminist has however also been challenged; Rubin (1996) argued that;

\begin{quote}
Womanhood is no longer a necessary nor sufficient qualification for feminist identity. A feminist is one who acts in concert with feminist ideals. (p308)
\end{quote}

Noting that practice, as opposed to biology needs to be located at the heart of a feminist identity Hines (2007) also argues that


\(^{25}\) http://theterfs.com/terf-quotes-2/
...a feminist viewpoint need not depend upon female socialisation in order to enable the feminist voices of transgender women to be heard. (p101)

The notion of ‘feminist’ as constituting an identity may be significant here in understanding the radical feminist opposition to trans people, in particular trans women, particularly taking account of the way such an identity can be dependent on affect and represent an emotionally-constituted in-group alliance that also needs to maintain a significant opposition in order to sustain itself (Eco 2013).

The next section moves this literature review on to a brief look at research about young people’s online interaction, connectivity and information-seeking.

2.3. Young People’s Online Interactions

In contrast with the, apparently often deliberate production of ignorance by those in positions of power, this section aims to contextualise this study by examining, in general, young people’s online interaction, one element of which is their online engagement with information-seeking and with others in the same position as them, with the intention of either finding out information that is otherwise unavailable or otherwise distorted. One of the few theories as to why trans people have begun to emerge as a coherent group with their own voices and agenda is because of the arrival of mass access to the internet (Whittle 1998). Most of the participants in this study used online social networking to connect with other young trans people online in order to come to an understanding of themselves as trans people, access emotional and personal support and signposting to help learn about their options. The few who did not, still used the internet to find out information from non-interactive online resources. This section examines literature in relation to this, starting with the more general, then looking at specific groups and at online information-seeking.
2.3.1 Life online; connectivity

Takehashi (2014) demonstrates that there are different cultures of connectivity amongst young people in Japan and the UK which produces an ‘always on’ and ‘always connected’ culture, although the difference between the main UK platform, Facebook, and the main Japanese platform, Line is significant. While Facebook has quite restricted controls over how one organises one’s social life online, Line allows users to establish different, entirely separate, groups. This highlights the issue with Facebook, in Dugay’s (2014) study of what she calls ‘content collapse’, in the Facebook feeds of young gay men in particular. Content collapse is where material intended for one audience is seen by another, very different audience, which may have a different interpretation of it, for example material intended for friends on the gay scene may be seen by homophobic relatives. For Line users, different groups can be isolated from each other, so people can be out to one group but not to another. Dugay notes how gay men and lesbians who want to avoid family members knowing they are gay, use careful tactics like social steganography, sending coded messages within other messages, to communicate that they are gay or lesbian to some groups but not others, or to engage in plausible deniability. So for example a gay man might not say on his Facebook page; ‘I am gay’, he might instead say ‘I support gay rights.’

However the situation is different for young trans people because often the most important thing on one’s Facebook page is to have your name. As such neither social steganography nor plausible deniability would work in most instances. One of the most common strategies for a number of participants was to start a new Facebook account in this situation, rather than attempt to alter one’s existing account. This obviously brings its own set of problems such as having to monitor two Facebook accounts. Takehashi argues that the function of Line in keeping different groups
separate is not primarily to protect people like gay men and lesbians who might not want to be out to family members but to create a positive group commonality or bond within each separate group in keeping with the Japanese ‘uchi – sato’ (in-group – out-group) culture with the ‘uchi’ in-group representing a particularly intimate group of friends, which needs a strong group culture in order to overcome individual differences within the group. This may be a productive way of regarding online spaces for young trans people, in particular protected safe spaces such as Mermaids’ online forums for young trans people, referred to by Phil in Chapter 4, and another participant’s offline ‘queer’ social space described by Brett in chapter 5. It would appear that, although young trans people do not usually wish to socially isolate themselves from other groups, they still need to have spaces, even long after transitioning, that enable them to experience a group bonding of sorts.

2.3.2 Online information-seeking

Although it is likely that the increased availability of information online has enabled young trans people to come out at a younger age, there are other groups who have used the internet to access information but not necessarily in the same ways that young trans people appear to be doing. Todd and Edwards (2004) describe how non-drug using teenage girls starting high school used the internet to find out about drug use. They came to the conclusion that the pattern of information-seeking here was very different in that these girls did not want to share their questions about drug use with others in their peer groups because they feared others might believe that they were users or considering becoming users.

Although the lack of group engagement in this context represented a big difference, they also considered that these girls were formulating the kinds of ‘deep questions’ about motivations and reasons for example, that might also be discussed in online forums for trans people. These girls did
however attempt to find answers to these deep questions from drug users themselves, suggesting that they did not trust the ‘official’ information presented to them from other sources such as schools and health professionals.

In contrast Burek Pierce’s (2007) review of literature relating to young people searching for information relating to reproductive health suggests that a considerable amount of online false information was a problem. When this was combined with poor research skills amongst the most at-risk groups (of contracting sexually-transmitted diseases) it resulted in a wider gap emerging between those who were at lower risk of this and those from higher-risk groups. The internet appeared to have benefitted those who already possessed good online research skills while those with poor skills often failed to find accurate guidance.

Mehra’s and Braquet’s (2007) study of ‘queer’ youth coming-out experiences would appear to be closer to the experiences of young trans people, in particular since many young trans people also consider themselves to be queer. They constructed what they describe as a series of ‘phases’ in the coming out process; self-recognition, disclosure to other queers, disclosure to family and friends, positive self-identification and integration and acceptance. These different stages can be observed in the case of many young trans people, in particular the first two of these. It is arguable that the other three stages, may not fit into their typology, in particular it would appear that positive self-identification is more likely to be bound up with participation in online groups of young trans people rather than following on from coming out to family and friends. This may be because online social networking has developed greatly since Mehra and Braquet’s study. In addition, in many instances coming out to friends and coming out to family appear to need to be considered very differently, as some of the material in later chapters suggests.
The need to socialise with other queers reflects the need of most participants to engage with communities, mostly online, of other trans people, although as Raun (2016) has shown in his study, of YouTube videos by young trans people that user-generated content by young trans people has become more widely available, such that some do not always feel the need to engage with other trans people because they have access to a wide variety of instances of online video material created by people like them, for example Harry in Chapter 4 p134.

Shelley’s & McInroy’s (2014) study of young LGBTQ people’s identity development online was interesting because it broadly showed how Cass’s (1979) six stages theoretical model of homosexual identity formation were still relevant with the addition of the availability of online environments. What is significant about Cass’s perspective however is that it centres the agency of those coming out, something that young trans people would appear to have in common with young LGB people, despite attempts to situate them as passive. One difference between the observed online information-seeking of young trans people and others, especially young LGB people is that the information-seeking needs for many are much more technical and detailed than others. The need to research specific detailed medical information for many (although not all) trans people means that, in addition to the social and cultural resources that they need to find out about, is more “hard” information in the form of medical options available.

2.3.3 Coming Out

Rossi’s (2010) study of young lesbian, gay and bisexual people coming out to parents found that, like participants in the present study, they tended to come out to mothers first and then more directly to mothers than to fathers. Often there was an initial antagonistic reaction which became reduced over time. Most also reported coming out to friends before coming out to parents. In a study, published in the same year by A’Dugelli
et al. (2010) also found that initial disclosure to mothers was more common than to fathers but also that those who had come out to parents were more likely to be open about their sexuality than those who had not. However this appeared to come at a price for some who had reported more physical and verbal abuse as well as suicidal ideation than those who had not, suggesting that the fear of negative responses to coming out is well-founded. Haas et al.’s (2010) study of suicide attempts by LGBT people also found an elevated risk of suicide attempts by gay or bisexual men, but not as high as those of trans people.

So there are similarities and differences between LGB populations and trans populations. Only one participant in the present study came out to friends first while all others (except two who may never come out to parents) disclosed to other trans people, normally online, suggesting that the perception is of less acceptance by peers than amongst gay and lesbian people. Trans people, regardless of whether they identify as male, female or non-binary do seem also to some out to mothers before fathers. However the data from trans male participants suggests that fathers often subsequently became more accepting than mothers. Baiocco’s et al.’s (2015) study of coming out to families in Italy also confirmed that lesbian and gay children preferred to come out to mothers than fathers but further suggested that more traditional religious beliefs and right-wing ideologies tended to reduce acceptance amongst parents as did rigid and ‘enmeshed’ (meaning tightly-knit) families, often these families did not have the resources to cope with difficult situations. In these situations maintaining an outward façade was also considered important.

This may resonate with some ethnic minority groups in the UK. In the present study the two participants who appeared not to have come out as trans to parents appear to come from these types of family although the participant from the ethnic minority background was the participant who seemed to have obtained the most support from their family, including her
extended family. Pistella’s et al’s (2016) study subsequently showed that coming out to family was more likely and more likely to be successful amongst families that were higher-educated and less conservative politically and socially. Trussell et al (2015) additionally noted the importance of extended family members, such as gay or lesbian aunts and uncles in helping young people to come out, and subsequently to challenge homophobia and heteronormativity within the family. Whether homosexual extended family members might help young trans people in coming out is something that is not yet explored.

What is noticeable from these studies is that the fear of being disowned and thrown out of the family home was noticeable in its absence, whereas from the autobiographies of young trans people examined in section 2.4 below, the fear of being disowned was a strong feature common to almost all of them. It would seem, from these studies, and from these autobiographies that young LGB people appear to fear these consequences rather less than young trans people. In conclusion, one of the most significant pieces of research, carried out by Olson et al (2016) found that trans children who are supported and affirmed in their identities manifest levels of depression that are no different from cisgender children, and that levels of anxiety are only slightly raised. This demonstrates that, unlike Wallen et al (2007) who found high levels of internalising disorders in trans children, these disorders were little or no different from levels found in cisgender children. This demonstrates how important parental support can be and indexes this as a factor beyond the control of the individual trans child.

When looked at in conjunction with Baiocco et al (2015) which suggests that traditional religious or right-wing political ideologies in family members, especially parents often result in negative reactions to gay and lesbian children coming out the issue is made clearer. It would be hard to avoid the conclusion that trans children, who often come out at much
younger ages than cisgender gay and lesbian children, are particularly powerless and at the mercy of parents’ decisions to support and affirm them or not. This would appear to be one of the factors beyond their control. Also as demonstrated by some participants, the local neighbourhood could also be regarded as a source of powerlessness, as Ross et al (2001) characterise.

2.4. Autobiographical accounts

The first known autobiography of a trans person by the Chevaliere D’Eon (D’Eon de Beaumont 2001) probably written around 1800, although it was not published until 191 years after her death in 1810 despite apparently being written with the intention of being published during its author’s, very eventful, lifetime. Another notable historical autobiography was that of Lili Elbe (Elbe 2004), which formed the basis for the film The Danish Girl (Hooper, 2015). What is important to mention here is Lester’s (2017b) critique of this film. Lester explains how all the known historical material about Lili Elbe is considerably at variance with the film, in quite significant ways, to the extent that Lester considers that it is misleading, in particular portraying Elbe as a victim rather than a protagonist with agency of her own. Whilst it may be less likely that autobiographies are significantly at variance with the author’s experiences it is likely that they have been through an editing process which may have, for example, emphasised certain elements while de-emphasising other elements, in order to sell more copies or garner better reviews.

Amongst other historical autobiographies are those of Pilot Officer Roberta Cowell (Cowell 1954) and Jan Morris (Morris 1974). More recent autobiographies have included books by Khosla (2006), Andrews (2014), Jacques (2015), Jennings (2016) Kergil (2017), Kiss (2017) Bertie (2017) and McBride (2018). What is noticeable about these books is how some, especially those of Bertie, Jennings, Kergil and Andrews focus, to a much
greater extent on life as a trans child or young person, whereas those published by older trans people sometimes included material about how they felt, but nothing about dealing with parents, schools etc. as a child or teenager as the younger writers did. For example Sarah McBride’s book starts the moment she is about to hit ‘post’ to come out to her entire university as a trans woman, when she was a student in Washington, and Juliet Jacques’ story also focuses on her life from the time she was at university. These two authors write about concealment for the early part of their adult lives although for Jacques this period lasts longer because she is referring to a time that is around 15 years earlier than that of McBride, consequently McBride is able to be fully out from the age of 21 whereas Jacques is not able to be out until much later in her life, although she comes out, chronologically-speaking before McBride. Charlie Kiss writes about misinterpreting his masculinity as being a butch lesbian, including taking part in the women’s Greenham Common protests before coming out as a trans man and transitioning, such that his experience is consistent with Beemyn’s and Rankin’s (2011) observations about a greater availability of possibility for young trans people and trans children in more recent years, as well as Halberstam’s (1998) chronicling of the 1990’s ‘border wars’ phenomenon.

So those autobiographies of the younger trans authors, describe trans childhoods in terms of how they managed epiphany and coming out to parents and school friends while still minors, whereas the others needed to manage epiphany and coming out as adults.

Jazz Jennings’ (2016) story is different from the others in this group in a sense because she came out to her parents and transitioned while very young, in pre-school/kindergarten, and consequently much of what the others needed to go through; epiphany and coming out was behind her by the age of 5. It also meant that her mother engaged in elements of the (self-)learning for her, probably through online resources, although Jazz
engaged in activism from a very young age along with her parents, initially about toilet access in school and then involving a confrontation with the United States Soccer federation. Both these two got to meet President Obama as a result of their activities campaigning for trans rights. The internet was also a factor in the way all these young people came out and engaged in existential learning, although in some instances that was indirect, as in Jazz Jennings’ case.

What is interesting is how Jennings and McBride, although born only 10 years apart experienced life, at least childhood, in considerably different ways. Jennings came out as a toddler and lived as a girl from then on while McBride felt unable to come out until she was 21. Although both women come from liberal and supportive families, and both can be regarded as human rights campaigners, McBride was not able to live her life in the same way that Jennings did until she became much older. Apart from Jazz Jennings all the other authors, including McBride, were concerned about rejection by parents, although for the ones who were minors it was a much more immediate concern,

The alternative was too huge and scary to comprehend. I’d read so many heartbreaking stories online about trans kids who came out to their families and were rejected and tossed out onto the street. I didn’t think Mom would ever go that far, but also I knew that it would destroy me to live in a home where I was forced to be someone I wasn’t. (Andrews 2014 p103)

One of the most significant events described was acquisition of language, such as the term ‘transgender’ which enabled them to search and expand their knowledge about trans people extremely quickly in a very short space of time, as well as engaging with other young people in a similar situation. In addition to epiphanies the moments of coming out tended to be vividly described, including the tension building up to them and immediate reactions, particularly of parents, afterwards,
Seeing my mom uncontrollably sad and confused, my dad went into calm-attorney mode and began asking questions. Obviously the first ten questions were some version of ‘Are you sure?’ The answer to that question was simple. ‘I’ve never been more certain about anything in my life. I know this as much as I know that I love you two.’ After all I had spent my whole life thinking about it. ‘I feel like my life is over. I feel like you are dying.’ My mom repeatedly cried. (McBride 2018 p27)

The descriptions of the autobiographies reporting these coming out scenes with great clarity, before, during and after the event were a good deal more vivid than those of the interview participants. This can be put down to the need, as well as the time, to go back over events and rewrite them in detail, possibly also with the input of others involved at the time, whereas these factors were not present for most interview participants.

The way the media was referred to seemed to have greater prominence in the more recent autobiographies with Jacques describing in detail throughout the different ways different types of media portrayed trans people contrasting profoundly transphobic material like Ace Ventura Pet Detective (Shadyac 1994) to films like Salome (Bryant & Nazimova 1922) and The Adventures of Priscilla Queen of the Desert (Elliot 1994) and print journalism, like articles by Julie Bindel in 2004 in the Guardian, which are widely regarded as abusive to trans people.

The wider historical spread, and wider age-range of authors compared to that of interview participants is interesting in that it situates the present study in a historical perspective. The rapidly-developing cultural background to this study affecting young trans people is something that can be inferred from these texts, and consequently the situation can be regarded as something that is in flux at the time of writing.

26 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/jan/31/gender.weekend7
It is significant that the interview data in this study, was collected during a time when relatively little anti-trans material was being published in the media, so there were few references to this material, something that would almost certainly have been different from around 2016 onwards, as McBride described how her social media became full of threats and hatred following media coverage of an attempt to pass a law in Delaware to prevent trans people from having access to the appropriate toilets;

My social media accounts were filled with threats. The dark web, the underground websites that have become home to the ‘alt-right’ trolls, filled with conversations about gang-raping me or murdering me. In the days after my post, my workplace was forced to heighten their security protocol because of the threats that were coming my way. The most common message wasn’t a threat so much as a violent request, frequently appearing as three letters ‘kys’. Kill yourself. (McBride 2018 p 236)

Indeed Jazz Jennings has also described27 how she received a considerable quantity of hate mail, something not insignificant given her status at the time, as a minor. This is a reminder that the hostile media environment prevalent at the time of writing (Barker 2017) might well have made a difference had the interviews been taking place now.

However the contrast between the younger writers and older autobiographers is stark. Long periods of concealment or suppression were evident amongst the latter, whereas they were either short or non-existent for the former group.

The next section examines some cisgender people’s regards on the way young trans people and trans children change or appear to change as they come out and transition in different ways.

2.5. Media: Cisgender people’s perspectives

The issue of the way trans people in general, and young trans people in particular, are portrayed in the media has become increasingly significant, (Barker 2017, Braidwood 2018), especially in the UK as anti-trans activists have sought to use the media to portray young trans people as being ‘transed’ by trans activists, parents and professionals such as psychologists and teachers. Such is the volume of this material that an analysis of it would require another thesis, so this section briefly looks at a programme broadcast prior to the instigation of this extended media attack on trans people. A 2015 BBC TV programme presented by Louis Theroux is significant as it is more representative of media output before these media assaults. Much media output about trans children produced since then, for example a more recent and more controversial BBC television programme, ‘Transgender children – Who knows best’ is widely regarded as having an undeclared anti-trans agenda.

The Theroux documentary looks at the lives of trans children in the San Francisco area and reveals the way trans children are regarded and regard themselves. In this programme presenter Louis Theroux interviews a selection of families of transgender children and young people. This includes Nikki, a 14-year-old trans girl who has recently come out, a 6-year-old trans girl called Camilla, who has been attempting to assert her gender identity for around a year and a trans child whose gender identity may not yet be clear called Crystal/Cole. The experiences of these families contribute to a further analysis in section 3.3 of the next chapter, to

---

28 E.g. https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/trans-teenagers-have-become-an-experiment-87vn5m8fw
https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/children-sacrificed-to-appease-trans-lobby-bq0m2mm95
30 https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x5o7zdq
exemplify and explain Social Activity Method. In addition to the children themselves he interviews their parents and siblings as well as Dr Diane Ehrensaft, a psychologist who specialises in transgender children and young people. Theroux returns to these families a few weeks after his initial interviews to show how they have progressed.

One of the most significant features of this programme was the way that Theroux attempted to establish an element of fixity in gender identity terms for the children he interviewed. Throughout most of the programme he asked questions designed to establish who these children were as though they had fixed, unchanging identities. Theroux makes use of a variety of different questioning techniques to establish some kind of solidity in terms of identity, including asking for pronouns, asking for predictions, referring to the media and with reference to genital confirmation surgery. It appears that he regards his role in this programme as establishing gender identities as far as possible in a fixed way. Yet despite all his efforts he could not establish with fixity, at least not within the gender binary, the gender identity of one child;

Having spent time with Cole and Crystal I was still unsure as to which was the truer identity, whether she’d had her true nature repressed or had never been trans in the first place...? (Theroux, narration)

Although it is significant that he uses female pronouns, suggesting no difference from an earlier interview, when s/he was exclusively referred to as a girl, here his narration suggests the need to offer three alternatives, all of which suggest a fixed, non-fluid position; either this child is either a transgender girl, a cisgender boy who was not ever trans or a transgender girl whose identity is repressed.

The possibility that Crystal/Cole may be non-binary, or gender-fluid however temporarily, whether as a means of coping with a difficult situation or because s/he identifies in that way at that time, is not included,
the possibility that instability, in gendered terms may be an alternative, is not considered.

What is evident from the way most of the parents in this documentary respond to their transgender children is how the ones who are accepting and supportive of their children are resisting the temptation to make generalisations about them. They are treating them as individuals and their discourse is overwhelmingly focused on their own children individually. Indeed the experience of having a transgender child would appear to have changed the way one mother views the world, which appears to have shifted dramatically. Referring to the cliché, ‘Just be yourself’ as rather empty-sounding advice demonstrates how their departure from the apparent shallowness of the way identification is culturally regarded and established;

I think the biggest thing is... she’s taught me to be more authentically myself, its something that I never... I’ve always just thought, ‘Just be yourself...’ that’s different when you have a child that’s telling you, well I was born a certain way but this is who I really am... and you kind of re-evaluate yourself too...

This would suggest that the cultural tendency to regard some identities as fixed, can be challenged as a result of parenting a transgender child.

One of the things many trans people complain about at present is the way they are misinterpreted and misunderstood by cisgender people, especially in the media31. This may be because relatively few people have had the experience of going through a gender transition, either themselves or with someone close to them, so there is no widely-available cultural interpretation of this process on which they can draw to come to an understanding. The construction of a number of different

conceptualisations from a bricolage of available, but necessarily inadequate, cultural resources, means that there is a significant degree of difference in understanding. This may be why so often cisgender people who attempt to write about trans people in the media, appear, from the perspective of trans people and those close to them, either to fail to understand or deliberately to misrepresent them. This also might explain why some groups of individuals fail to come to any kind of understanding of trans people. Either they do not have adequate access to cultural resources to conceptualise change sufficiently well, or they have not been close enough to a trans person to have assembled these cultural resources.

An alternative explanation for people’s transitions has been provided which acts to portray trans people, as so many other minority groups have been in history, as a danger, in this instance, to some ideology of gender purity.

This programme can be regarded as an example of where constructed ignorance and more positive understandings should not necessarily be regarded as two completely separate entities. Ignorance can coexist with understanding, as in the case of Crystal/Cole, where constructed ignorance appears to exist alongside understanding, as a consequence of power dynamics stemming from one parent’s religious-influenced ignorance. One example of the way Crystal/Cole and her/his sisters seem to deal with this situation is by accepting that there are situations where Crystal is forced to be Cole, but not abandoning Crystal the rest of the time.

While there is no space to enter into a more detailed analysis of this programme here, data from it is used in Chapter 3 Section 3.4 as a means of explaining Social Activity Method, a more profound analysis will be presented there. This programme is included here in slightly more detail than other material in order to facilitate this.
2.6. Sociological and related material

This section focuses more on material that either explicitly characterises itself as sociology or which can be regarded as similar in approach (but which may, like that of Costa & Matzner (2007), constitute itself as in a different discipline, such as Gender Studies or Gay and Lesbian Studies. This is the discipline in which this thesis is situated. Although there are elements of the material in this section that might be regarded as constructing ignorance predominantly the material here sets out to promote understanding.

Before Garfinkel (1965) there was little that could be characterised as empirical study of trans people outside the disciplines of psychology and psychiatry. Garfinkel’s study of a woman who appeared to be intersex to whom he referred using the pseudonym ‘Agnes’ (p118) became, subsequently, a study of a transsexual woman who had taken her mother’s hormone pills secretly since she was 12 (p287). This study illustrated a specific instance of de Beauvoir’s (1949 p267) idea of the social construction of gender by examining the way Agnes constructed her own gender identity. One of Garfinkel’s most significant observations at the start of this study was that although what he described as ‘sexual status’ had an ‘omnirelevance’ in daily life, it also constituted a fixed and unnoticed background (p118). He described her history as ‘constructed’ when she appeared to maximise evidence of her femininity and suppressed her masculinity, which he characterised as ‘poorly managed’. In the context of the late 1950’s, when his study took place Garfinkel described the way gender was perceived at that time as the following;

There are only two sexes. This binary is enforced as a moral order. People include themselves in this order. There are no exceptions to this order, which is immutable. This immutable binary gender system is regarded as essential and communicated using specific signifiers. Individuals are recognised as gendered subjects from birth or before,
and this recognition continues after death. This order is considered natural and no transfers between statuses are possible. (p122-123)

Against this background his observations of Agnes tended to regard her as ‘achieving’ a gender status, in a not dissimilar way to the one argued by de Beauvoir. It must be stated here that, it is reported that it had taken Agnes three years to ‘learn’ her gender role which, he described as not having been fully mastered, describing her actions as similar to those of ‘a recent and enthusiastic initiate into the sorority of her heart’s desire.’ He described her as needing to pass as a woman, not merely for her own sake but because the possibility of discovery could have very negative consequences for her. It seems that, at that time there would have been much more severe consequences for her if she were discovered, which resulted in, for example, her being prepared to forego taking a job offer if the physical examination resulted in the doctor attempting to examine her below the waist.

For Agnes however, the requirement for secrecy regarding her gender history meant that her learning of gender performance took place under different conditions, as Garfinkel (1965) describes,

On these occasions Agnes was required to live up to the standards of conduct, appearances, feelings, motives and aspirations while simultaneously learning what those standards were. To learn them was for her a continuous project of self-improvement. They had to be learned in situations in which she was treated by others as knowing them in the first place as a matter of course. They had to be learned in situations in which she was not able to indicate that she was learning them. They had to be learned by participating in situations where she was expected to know the things that she was simultaneously being taught. (p147)

In response to this it was observed that ‘She had a way of permitting the environment to teach her the answers that it expected to its own questions.’ (p168). Agnes considered herself to be a woman, and consequently she regarded the vagina she wanted as the outcome of her
operation was something that she should always have had by right. However Agnes also needed to manage her social presentation very carefully in order to advance her claim to womanhood, in a cultural milieu in which she would instantly be delegitimised as a woman if her background information became known.

Much of Garfinkel’s work reads as if to situate Agnes as engaging in a kind of deception, something that has been a regular element of the way trans people are portrayed in the media. However, what also becomes clear are the reasons why she is compelled to do this; that the likelihood of social non-acceptance was very high, as consequently passing was essential to her daily life, and consisted of a perpetual readiness either to take action to avoid detection or to escape from a situation in which detection was either likely, imminent or had occurred. However probably the most significant concept he draws from his study is that of regarding genitals as a cultural event rather than a biological element that constitutes gender, something that is drawn on by Kessler and McKenna’s (1978) research, described below.

In contrast the ethnomethodological study by Kessler and McKenna (1978) focussed on the perception of gender by others. By presenting participants with dawn images of people with various different primary and secondary sex characteristics they were able to demonstrate how the process of attributing a gender operates, as a practice in which gender is externally imposed on the individual. Their conclusions suggested that, out of all other characteristics, the presence of a penis constituted the element most likely to cause someone to be gendered, which also constituted a strong overriding factor even when many female characteristics were also present. In their conclusion they draw on Garfinkel’s (1965) concept of cultural genital; genitals someone is assumed to have, as opposed to something known to physically possess. Their conclusion is that gender attribution, as well as constituting an everyday act, needs to be regarded as
a social act as opposed to a biological one, but based on the assumption of
a genital associated with overall presentation. Although these two studies
approached the subject from different directions, from that of the
individual presenting as a gender and of those externally attributing a
gender to someone else their conclusions both draw on this concept of the
cultural genital.

What is significant however is the way that attaining a gender is presented
as an act of considerable individual agency on the case of Agnes, on the
one hand, as opposed to one where the active agent(s) in the process are
those who are externally doing the attribution of gender, on the other. The
difference, in the cases of the participant in Garfinkel’s study as opposed to
those taking part in Kessler and McKenna’s study can be regarded as the
level of engagement. While the process of attributing a gender to others by
Kessler and McKenna can be characterised as a casual, everyday action,
carried out regularly, often and usually with little consideration, in contrast
Agnes needed to put a considerable amount of careful thought into all
aspects of her gender presentation and performance. These ranged from
the repeated everyday actions that Garfinkel described as needing to be
acquired while in the process of performing them, to the longer-term
management of information about herself, including the construction of a
new history. They also included taking care to approach potentially
problematic situations with strategies that might provide her with a way of
salvaging the situation without giving herself away. While Kessler and
McKenna focus on the way gender is interpreted in the everyday, Garfinkel
resonates with Butler’s (1990) idea of gender as a site of personal agency.

In contrast with the virtual removal of genitals from gender in the
conclusions of Kessler and McKenna and Garfinkel, Ekins & King’s (2006)
study of what they describe as different modes of ‘transgendering’;
migrating, oscillating, negating and transcending seems to focus rather
more on genitals (p227). The way male genitals are concealed to present a
more feminine appearance is examined in different groups of people who they consider to constitute part of the ‘transgender’ umbrella. However their analysis of the different ways genitals are concealed involves including groups, such as ‘sissies’ and fetishists that would not usually be regarded by most transgender people as necessarily transgender at all. Indeed the four categories of types of ‘transgendering’ that they present, seem to constitute impositions constructed by non-trans people on experiences of a group, some of whose members are not regarded by most trans people as actually constituting trans people. To that extent their categories appear to constitute unrealistic external impositions that ignore the realities of most trans people’s subjectivities, in part by including people who are not transgender. Indeed some of their material may be considered ethically problematic not merely because of this but because of the way they construct some groups of people in way that constitutes misgendering, something regarded by most trans people as abusive if done deliberately.

Valentine (2007) in contrast, problematises the entire notion of the concept of ‘transgender’ as constituted in Feinberg’s (1992) publication, widely credited with introducing the term in its modern meaning. His publication questions whether the term is useful, from both an academic perspective and as a tool for activism. With reference to a variety of different populations, but predominantly those marginalised by intersecting factors such as race and class, he suggests that the term may have limited validity for promoting understanding of different trans people by subsuming very different populations under one umbrella term. He also questions the use of it politically as a rallying-point for activism because it leaves out so many members of those marginalised by intersecting factors. He does however avoid providing a definitive answer to these questions, also acknowledging that the term has also been very effective in many ways. It is likely that, since he carried out his fieldwork in New York City in the late 1990s, the increased usage of this term will have resulted in many
of his doubts about its effectiveness and usefulness being assuaged. It is also the case that his book reads very much as it is written; from the perspective of a cisgender gay man, which, if it is read from the perspective of a transgender woman, can make some of his assertions difficult to understand. However it constitutes a very useful account of how the rapidly-changing terminology and descriptors evident in trans communities can vary in both the extent of their acceptance and the ways in which they include, exclude, centre or marginalise different sections of the population that might be regarded as transgender. Rather than, as Brubaker (2016) and Ekins & King (2006) as well as Raymond (1979), Jeffreys (1997) and Greer (1999) who gloss over the processes by which designations they employ are derived, Valentine explicitly questions these and consequently the assumptions we make about the entire process of labelling.

In a not dissimilar way to that of Valentine, Namaste’s (2000) sociological study of marginalised trans people in Quebec questioned a number of prior assumptions about the study of trans people. Her study critiqued the way studies about trans people were produced, in particular in relation to areas such as AIDS, social exclusion, bureaucratic problems and sex work, coming to the conclusion that trans people were produced through erasure (p265). In addition she takes issue with Butler’s (1990, 1993) and Garber’s (1992) external gaze on trans people, through their use of drag as a metaphor for gender transgression (p14). In particular drawing on Foucault (1969) and Derrida (1967) Namaste critiques what she characterises as Butler’s and Garber’s failure to account for the institutions and social conditions that produce subjects, in particular by ignoring the social context of the production of gender transgression, suggesting that the failure to do this results in a failure to understand the nature of trans people’s lives. Her study focuses in particular on the quotidian in trans people’s lives, in particular those in marginalised groups such as ethnic minority trans women, sex workers and lower-class trans people. She also repeatedly critiques Queer Theory arguing that it is unable fully to account for trans
people, something echoed by Hines (2007 p83) and resonating with Prosser (1998).

In particular Hines and Prosser take up this criticism of Queer Theory as failing to account for the centrality of the body to trans people. In addition Namaste also includes many critiques of Queer Theory for what she regards as the way it co-opts gender transgression in a way that fails to account for the everyday lives of trans people and its failure to account for elements of the diversity of trans people’s lives.

Focussing on disadvantaged trans populations in Namaste’s research is significant because it makes the point that, by failing to include such populations as young trans people, sex workers, members of ethnic minorities, that scholarship about trans people is actively producing erasure of these trans people. In many ways her work highlights the issues faced by trans people today who are also from other disadvantaged or marginalised populations such as the poor, sex workers and the young. She observes that this erasure affects different populations in different ways. Her conclusions critiqued the bulk of scholarly research about trans people at that time for participating in the production of erasure that situated trans people as predominantly evident only within medicalised or psychiatric discourses, as opposed to research that more genuinely represents the wide variety of trans subjectivities. In many ways Hines’ (2007) study of trans people appears to do what Namaste suggests and empirically examines the everyday lives of trans people, in this instance focussing on the themes of intimacy and care in particular, as well as examining issues around identification.

Brubaker (2016) in a fairly superficial way attempts to interrogate the processes by which ‘trans’ is constituted as an acceptable means of
describing Caitlyn Jenner as ‘transgender’ but not Rachel Dolezal\textsuperscript{32} as ‘transracial’, however, the way he does so itself employs an element of coercive categorising which is glossed over unproblematically in order for him to make his argument. What his study does do however is reveal the extent to which the case of Rachel Dolezal has been used by those who wish to harm trans people, as a rhetorical weapon with which to delegitimise them, once more demonstrating how trans people live lives that are persistently under threat of delegitimisation and the consequent threats to their ‘living spaces’ to which Riddell (1980 p189) alludes. Brubaker however, after a lengthy, but relatively shallow tour through aspects of transgender and transracial material comes to the conclusion that transracial cannot be compared with transgender. His argument, largely unconnected with the material presented in the rest of his book, is grounded in the concept of heritage. While he argues that race constitutes a genetic (as well as a cultural) inheritance from the past, gender cannot be regarded in that way, since each new generation contains all genders the ancestral connection is not there, ‘The individual may be understood, in the prevailing language of liberal individualism, as owning her body, but she does not own her ancestry.’(p140).

Brubaker’s (2016), Butlers (1993), Raymond’s (1979), Blanchard’s (1989) and Garber’s (1992) is the kind of scholarship that Namaste critiques for employing an external, cisgender gaze on trans people’s lives which can constitute an erasure of trans people’s subjectivities through this privileging or centring of this ‘cisgender gaze’ which she contends, is productive of the erasure of trans people.

Insofar as young trans people and trans children are concerned, and in contrast to Lester, one of the most important and influential publications

with reference to trans children was Ansara & Hegarty (2012) which, rather than using material published by psychologists and psychiatrists as academic references, analysed it as data. In so doing it revealed the ways in which a group of psychologists and psychiatrists forming an ‘invisible college’ routinely treated childhood gender dysphoria as a pathology and consistently referred to trans children using names and pronouns associated with their birth assigned genders, suggesting that those engaged in these practices might be dehumanising, silencing and erasing such children.

In addition the study of young trans women in Thailand by Costa & Matzner (2007) appears to constitute an example of a study that avoided the dehumanising, silencing and erasure of young trans people, undertaking it during the same time period that the data for Ansara and Hegarty’s study covered. The difference in approach between Costa & Matzner’s work and that of Ansara & Hegarty’s ‘invisible college’ being clearly manifest. In a not dissimilar way to Valentine (2007) Costa & Matzner also question the different descriptors of *sao braphet song/kathoey* and the way they can be regarded as fluid or routinely interpreted in different ways which might otherwise be regarded as meaning ‘homosexual’ in English. Significantly in this study the descriptor ‘gay’ is also shown to be less stable in the way that Valentine also constitutes the term ‘transgender’, indeed it may be regarded as more unstable than the term ‘*sao braphet song*’ which is used to refer to trans women in Thailand.

Their conclusions suggest a complex picture of life for Thailand’s *sao braphet song* in terms of issues like family and social acceptance (p147), which is often determined by issues such as academic achievement in school or university and by appearance. They also situate the dominant ideology of gender as manifest in all cultures not just in Thailand as does Wiesner-Hanks (2011), as having an influence on acceptance, which they
describe as often conditional. They cite the influence of the dominant Buddhist culture in Thailand as constituting a source of pressure on children to be cisgender and heterosexual in order to produce another generation for the family. Interestingly strategies used by participants to explain their existence reflect the nature-nurture debate but also include the cultural notion of karma, which situates *sao braphet song* as being transgender or gender non-conforming as a form of punishment for doing bad things in a former life, thus being transgender or gender non-conforming is regarded, not only by others but by the *sao braphet song* themselves as a negative in and of itself.

One of the most interesting responses in this study, which came from a number of participants was how they regarded men and masculinity with a significant level of disdain. Participants often described violent, abusive, selfish and drunken fathers in ways that suggested they did not value and had no respect for men and masculinity. At the same time they reported high levels of respect for mothers and grandmothers diligent, patient, hardworking, responsible and showing strong leadership. Many reported that their mothers were strong role-models for them while fathers were the opposite (p145).

One of the themes of all the above studies is language. Namaste recruits Foucault’s analysis of the discursive production of the subject and in her work she continues to question the use of language insofar as it is used as a means of characterising groups. However, in all of these works, different terms appear to be contested and sometimes in a state of flux, reflecting the way different trans people regard both themselves and others.

The three studies that stand apart from most of the other material empirical work in this section are those of Nicolazzo (2017), Pearce (2018) and Raun (2016) and these three constitute the studies that are closest in their manifestation to this thesis. These most recent studies focus on participants who are young trans people, as does this one, all use empirical data and all constitute qualitative analyses using narrative methodology. Nicolazzo’s research was location-focused on young trans people attending one particular university in the United States whereas Raun’s examined
different vloggers using Youtube to communicate about their experiences as young trans people, in most instances as they are going through transition. Raun situates his study in sociology and media studies and Nicolazzo situates hers as gender, sexuality and self-help, probably reflecting her earlier background as a university student affairs officer. So while Raun’s is written in a more academic style, Nicolazzo’s appears to have also been written with the idea that it might also be regarded as a helpful text for trans people intending to go into higher education. Both identify as transgender, Raun a trans man and Nicolazzo as a trans woman. The other study produced most recently is Pearce’s (2018) study of trans people engaging with medical systems for trans-related healthcare, is again produced by a trans woman. Her sociological study is significant in that it draws on data from more recent years, which reflect the maturing of trans people’s identities and understandings of themselves which has taken place since the early years of this century. While her study is focussed on issues relating to health provision the present study is focussed on other elements, indeed what is noticeable in this study is how little participants referred to medical elements of their lives. Whether that was down to an assumption of shared knowledge with the interviewer or the general direction of questioning which was not focussed on this area is difficult to establish. However it suggests that the ways Pearce obtained access to data relevant to this specific area are worth learning from. What this study and that of Pearce have in common would appear to be a regard on the ways cis-mythologisation affects trans people.

One of the potential tensions in this thesis relates to Namaste’s (2000) observation that too many studies of trans people focussed on their transitions as opposed their quotidian lives, and that this can produce the effect of defining trans people exclusively by their transitions. What this study aims to do is to bridge the space between studies that focus on trans people’s everyday lives, such as those of Namaste (ibid), Hines (2007) and Nicolazzo (2017) on the one hand, and those like Raun (2016) which
include more emphasis on the process of transitioning, from a sociological perspective. In the case of the participants in this study, most were either in the process of transitioning, whether socially, physiologically or both, or had transitioned very recently.

Consequently the process of transitioning and their quotidian lives were interwoven in most instances, or had been interwoven in the recent past. Stone (1991) criticises Morris (1974) for the detail in her autobiography, which presents her as effectively experiencing a total transition from male to female at one single point when she has surgery. The reality, for most trans people is that transition takes time and, in the UK context that timescale seems to be increasing quite considerably as waiting lists for gatekeeping appointments and for surgery on the National Health Service fail to keep up with increases in demand. In one instance, for example, a young trans male participant was known as a man while away at university while he needed to de-transition at his mother’s suburban home when he went to stay there during the holidays. In another case a non-binary person reported that they doubted they would fully come to a final decision about what their gender identity was for many years. A third participant described just her epiphany as a trans woman taking around two years, another, although she realised she was a trans woman at quite a young age took many years to come out and begin her physiological transition. This study looks at the strategies recruited by young people in order to live their lives at liminal and potentially difficult times.

So this study attempts to bridge the gap between looking at the quotidian lives of young trans people and the specific effects of transitioning from one gender to another by examining the ways different trans people do this. However it is important to bear in mind that the analysis, rather than

focussing on examining the lives of individual trans people intends to focus on the sociology in terms of the formation, maintenance and destabilising of alliances and oppositions in the social, which constitutes Social Activity Method (Dowling 1998, 2009) which will be explained in the next chapter.
Chapter 3 Methodology

As described in the last chapter many antecedent publications have started from an initial premise that problematises trans people. Many of these can be regarded as engaging in what is characterised by Teo (2010) as ‘epistemological violence’. This chapter will be structured in a slightly different way than it might otherwise have been by starting with an examination of the ethical issues before moving on to a characterisation of how Social Activity Method analyses the data, and a description of the research design. This is done because many of the issues relating to ethics which have been discussed in the previous chapter are relevant to the ethics section of this chapter.

3.1 Ethical Issues

Ethical guidance from the British Sociological Association (2017) was referred to when compiling this section, in addition Whiteman (2012) was borne in mind with its emphasis on research ethics always being situated in the context.

3.1.1 Ethical Issues in Antecedent Works: ‘Epistemological Violence’

The ethical area that seems to be most commonly criticised in antecedent studies of trans people is what Teo (ibid) characterised as ‘epistemological violence’. Epistemological violence is constituted by Teo as presenting data in a way that can be regarded as misrepresenting, by selective interpretation, groups of participants and in particular groups that can be regarded as disadvantaged minorities. Teo characterised epistemological violence as an ethical issue based on the final manifestation of the research, including how it is presented and the data interpreted. He argues that epistemological violence occurs in instances when any disadvantaged
group is subjected to othering, and in particular when this explicitly situates the other as problematic or inferior. This is characterised as the case in particular when alternative interpretations of the data are available. Indeed Teo maintains that,

> Interpretations of inferiority, or problematisations, are never determined by empirical results; yet, they have a negative impact on the Other. Thus interpretations are the actions of a subject against an object that one must label violent. (p299)

In the present study, it could be argued that reflexivity with participants having greater access to the way their data was used might have helped ensure that trans people were not misrepresented. If it had been possible for participants to have the opportunity to review the way their data was used in the study, this would act, at least to an extent, as a check on misrepresentation. However practical considerations have prevented this from happening. So the main consideration then is the interpretation of data and its analysis by the researcher and the way it is presented in the conclusion. In the light of antecedent ethical issues this is regarded as crucial.

This study aims to avoid the ethical issues that were problematic in many antecedent studies about trans people. This section will now consist of an analysis of some examples of this. Bailey (2003), Raymond (1979) Brunskell-Evans & Moore (2017) and Littman (2019).

The first of these to be examined, and the one with the most well-documented ethical transgressions is Bailey’s (2003) book ‘The Man Who Would be Queen’ which represents a more extreme example of epistemological violence as well as other ethical issues, and has been widely criticised by trans people (most notably by Conway 2007) not merely for its epistemological violence but for the way it was operationalised. Bailey was accused of failing to maintain proper
separation from his participants in a number of ways that are detailed fully by Conway. This included the suggestion that he had had sexual relationships with some participants and had agreed to provide some with letters of diagnosis that might help them obtain access to gender reassignment surgery. He was subsequently demoted from his position of chair of psychology at Northwestern University in the United States. In addition to Conway’s criticism, in his defence of this publication the author accused his detractors of ‘censorship’, when they were explicit that they were not attempting to do this\(^\text{34}\).

In addition to attracting criticism for epistemological violence (Riddell 1980 p155) Raymond (1979) has also been criticised for ignoring her own empirical data and constructing an interpretation that situates trans people as not merely highly problematic but also a threat. In an example of a contemporary response to Raymond (1979), Riddell (1980) criticised her for effectively ignoring the empirical material she obtained from interviewing 15 transsexual participants and only using a small number of very selective quotations from this data;

> Nowhere in her book does Ms Raymond give any accounts of transsexual life experience. She interviewed 15 trans-sexuals, two of them men the rest women. The only place she gives any information about these individuals is in the section which shows that trans-sexual women conform to sexual stereotypes. None of them emerges as a real person with a biography. No sensitive or caring collective account of the life experience of trans-sexuals, either pre-operative or post-operative, is presented. Instead the most damning quotations are put together, sometimes totally irrelevant information is presented as if it made a point. (p152)

The ethical problem here can be characterised as one of intentional but non-explicit bias on the part of the researcher. Riddell’s critique suggests that the writer’s conclusions had been arrived at prior to data collection

\(^{34}\) Christine Burns (2004) “A Thousand Liars...Or Just One?”
http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/TS/Bailey/Lambda%20Literary%20Foundation.html#Queen
and that much of that data was then excluded because it did not conform to the narrative that the author was attempting to construct.

The issue here might, on the surface, be regarded as one in which Raymond positions herself up as the ‘absolute arbiter’ (Riddell p154) of the experience of transsexual people, by positioning anyone who disagrees with her perspective as either supporting patriarchal oppression of women or, as Tosh (2016 p92) maintains, ‘deluded’ and situated as unknowing about themselves as trans people. In effect she constructs a discourse that excludes anyone who disagrees with her arguments.

In a much more recent publication, Littman (2017) has also been criticised (E.g. Serano 2018) for significant ethical problems. In apparently attempting to constitute a new psychological diagnosis described as ‘Rapid-Onset Gender Dysphoria’ (ROGD), Littman uses data from participants who are members of online groups ideologically opposed to the existence of trans children\(^3\). Her attempt to characterise ROGD constitutes a particularly striking example of epistemological violence of the kind that Teo characterises. Her data is compromised by the way that it uses indirect data – problematic in itself as data was taken from observations carried out by professionally unqualified people who have said they are parents who have observed what they believe to be a sudden change in another individual. The observations of non-experts, who were active participants in websites where those opposed to children identifying as transgender assemble, were then unproblematically regarded as reliable data. This can also be regarded as an ethical issue since informed consent of the real subjects of the study was not sought.

---

\(^3\) [https://genderanalysis.net/2017/07/fresh-trans-myths-of-2017-rapid-onset-gender-dysphoria/]
This was subsequently taken as evidence that ROGD exists despite there being other, very plausible (indeed more plausible), explanations for the observed phenomena. Those explanations include the idea that children supposedly exhibiting ROGD have felt different, from a gendered perspective, for a long time prior to coming out, but have concealed it for other reasons – reasons that will be examined throughout this thesis. The exclusion of the possibility of identifying as another gender or the fear of being excluded, bullied, ridiculed or even disowned (including by those parents who contributed to the survey) constitute plausible explanations that undermine the theory of ROGD.

There is a very real fear amongst young trans people, of being disowned, mistreated or suffering other negative actions from parents as a consequence of coming out to them, as was evidenced in Kennedy (2012) and also by a number of participants taking part in this study. Indeed additionally, data provided in this study in particular by Brett, Hannah, Phil, Victoria and Shane demonstrated negative reactions from family members to coming out yet all reported knowing about their gender identity being different in some way well before coming out as trans to their families. So not only did Littman seek second-hand reports of children and young people coming out as trans from second-hand sources, which is problematic, but she also excluded other possible explanations from consideration, choosing to focus on the explanation that was most useful for those attempting to argue against the humane treatment and inclusion of trans children in schools (eg Transgender Trend 2018 p46). So the interpretation of this data by this researcher can be regarded as epistemologically violent because the conclusion drawn can be regarded as having a negative effect on a minority group, delegitimising them without reliable evidence on which to base such a judgement.

More recently Brunskell-Evans & Moore (2017) have been criticised on ethical grounds for being responsible for what has been described as
'bogus scholarship’, with Pain (2018) describing their publication as ‘...epistemological chicanery...’ ‘[m]asquerading as scholarly text...’ and critiquing it in particular for excluding voices of the population they describe as ‘abused’ by ‘transgenderism’. Other studies, such as that of Garfinkel (1965) have been critiqued to a much lesser extent for its epistemological violence (eg. Raby 2000), in this instance by foregrounding Agnes’ (necessary, from her point of view) mendacity.

So the ethical issues, most significantly and commonly that of epistemological violence, appear to constitute a disproportionately high problem within the field of transgender studies. This is not at all insignificant given the size and level of marginalisation of the population in question. This study therefore intends to maintain the highest possible ethical stance given the nature of the study and the methods employed. Ethical questions have, in particular, been considered based on the British Sociological Association’s (2017) Statement on Ethical Practice.

The modern concept of research ethics developed from the Nuremberg Code (Nuremberg Counsel for War Crimes 1947) and was designed to protect not merely participants (Article 1) but the rest of society in that it requires any inquiry to ‘yield fruitful results for the good of society.’ (Article 2). It is arguable, from the examples described above, and many others produced in the past besides that have similar starting points with regard their positioning of trans people and are unfortunately still being produced by some, such that these elements of the Code are still being breached. Although the extent of these ethical issues is nowhere near as serious, extensive or deadly as those of individuals who conducted the hideous experiments that killed or maimed so many people in the concentration camps of the second world war, it can be argued that they share their esprit. In what way Raymond’s call for trans people to be ‘morally mandated out of existence’ can be regarded as similar to or different from the violent and murderous erasures that took place in 1930s and 1940s
Germany may be an important question to ask. Does the difference only amount to the level of enforcement available to those making these assertions?

Indeed Raymond has been accused of acting beyond merely attempting to morally mandate trans people out of existence, by contributing to the NCHCT Report (National Center for Health Care Technology 1981) which resulted in the United States government denying transition-related health insurance to trans people during the 1980s, something that many regard as having cost numerous trans people their lives\(^\text{36}\). Whether these actions did or did not cause these deaths as has been claimed, it would appear that this constituted a not unreasonable interpretation of the likely, and foreseeable, outcome of these actions. While Raymond’s actions, which may be regarded by some, including Teo (2010 p300) as constituting a hate-crime, it is one particular instance that largely stands out on its own in this field. Occurring more often however in this field, epistemological violence remains a significant issue.

In addition to all these described above, Ansara’s & Hegarty’s (2013) study of scholarly articles relating to transgender children published between 1999 and 2008 can be regarded as a critique of the ethics of positioning transgender children as inherently problematic and of the abusive nature of these publications. These texts persistently misgendered research subjects, so much so that Ansara & Hegarty needed to correct these where possible in their own text so as not to reproduce this epistemological violence in their own work. With so much research about trans people exhibiting ethical problems this issue can be regarded as neither insignificant nor easily remedied through technical means. The problems appear to exist predominantly at a higher level of analysis, often with the

very conceptualisation of the studies and the way conclusions were presented. The issues of undeclared bias and epistemological violence are ultimately about the desire, on the part of the authors of such studies, to misuse research as a means to inflict harm on a group of people for whom they have developed an affective antipathy.

As a consequence of this, particular attention will be focussed, in this thesis, on the interpretation of data and the need to avoid interpretations that are likely to constitute epistemological violence by othering, problematising or presenting the data in any way that might constitute encouraging harm to the group represented by participants or any minority disadvantaged group. Thus it is important to go beyond the way the asymmetrical power relationship between participants and researcher is often presented as central to the ethics of research process. When a researcher draws a conclusion that interprets the data from participants in a way that is detrimental to their interests, he, she or they are potentially harming not just those who have taken part in the study but possibly all members of that group. For example Blanchard’s (1989) concept of ‘autogynephilia’ may not merely be regarded as harmful to those he studied in order to characterise such a ‘disorder’ but it is regarded as potentially harmful to all trans women (Tosh 2016 p115, Serano 2008 p492).

The question therefore is ultimately one of the ethical stance of the researcher, something that has been regarded as problematic in the material referred to here. If a researcher is determined to produce material that constitutes epistemological violence there appears to be little to prevent them from doing so. Although they justifiably risk critique and censure for doing so, this does not appear to have prevented any of these individuals from producing material that is ethically problematic and indeed for that material to be subsequently used as if it constitutes an
authoritative and unproblematic discourse and a reliable reference. Indeed Bailey appears to be the only one of this group to date, to have received any substantial penalty for ethical transgressions.

In one sense the issue here can be regarded as privileging the etic over the emic to the extent that the emic is almost entirely ignored. In the instances of the material cited here the view of those not participating in the culture of the group being studied. Indeed beyond this those involved in the production of this material can be regarded as actively hostile to the existence of the group being studied. Thus for them the emic is to be avoided at all costs. This is an issue that can be difficult to resolve for a researcher who is part of the group being studied and this situation needs to be viewed from a more nuanced perspective. The researcher needs to consider the description of the practices researched as different from those practices. Thus the researcher, in the process of researching, needs to regard themself as part of the research community rather than the community under study. The researcher being part of the community under study is an advantage in many ways but they still need to maintain an element of distance, and should be careful not to collapse the emic and etic together by maintaining a degree of otherness to that which is being described.

In the case of the present study, although the opportunity to obtain the consent of all participants regarding how their data was used in the final publication of the study was not possible for the reasons outlined in Section 3.1.2 below, the freedom to misrepresent the material is far from unlimited. Firstly, and most obviously, the author is, in one important respect at least, related to the group being studied, and that represents a check on what is published; publishing material that constitutes

epistemological violence about members of one’s own group is likely to be met with an unwelcome response from members of this group. If the author happened to be part of a different group, in particular one known to be hostile to trans people’s rights and existence, the pressure would be different and indeed there might even exist social pressure to produce material that was ethically problematic like those discussed above. It can also be argued that producing material that is likely to be regarded as undermining trans people’s human rights would also, in this instance, serve to undermine the author’s own rights to live free from harassment and discrimination.

This is not to suggest that the author will produce material that is unreasonably biased in favour of trans people, being explicit about personal bias from the outset is something that may be expected from a trans woman carrying out research about trans people. Given the apparently high proportion of scholarly material produced in this field that has ethical problems, producing a study that is free from serious ethical issues, in particular from epistemological violence, is one of the most important concerns from the researcher’s point of view. That ethically problematic material has been produced in the past constitutes an ethical issue for this study in and of itself. That it continues to be produced constitutes a particular concern for the author since, as Riddell straightforwardly noted in her review of The Transsexual Empire; ‘My living space is threatened by this book.’ (p158). Consequently it is in the author’s interests, on a number of different levels, to maintain the highest standard of ethical practice possible within the restrictions of resources available, especially when some academics that seek to undermine trans people’s rights regularly produce material that contravenes ethical considerations.
3.1.2 Operational ethical issues

Taking a perspective broadly informed by Social Activity Method, Whiteman (2012 p143) argues that ethical issues for researchers are not unconnected to the empirical field being researched. She also argues that it is not something that can be legislated for with strict and clearly enforceable legalistically-conceived rules, but constitutes a factor that needs to be regarded as embedded in the context of the research. This can be interpreted as meaning that, in all instances ethical issues need to be carefully considered individually and in relation to the specific empirical context and cannot be transferred ‘off-the-peg’ from other studies or, directly and without consideration of the empirical context from any given group of scholars’ or disciplinary ethical guidelines. In the case of this study the most important immediate ethical issue, given that all interview data was taken from young trans people aged between 18 and 27, was one of data security and preservation of anonymity. No-one had access to the data apart from the author of this study and all participants were promised this when giving their consent to take part. All audio files were kept on encrypted hard drives locked in secure storage. Where the participants wanted copies of the audio files these were made available them. Once transcription had taken place all audio files were erased, and the hard disks containing them have now been destroyed, so only transcripts now exist, these were anonymised by assigning pseudonyms to the extent that no participant can be identified from them.

All participants were informed that they could withdraw from taking part at any time and that they did not have to answer any questions they were asked if they did not wish to. In the event no-one declined to answer any questions and those who retained a copy of the audio file, did not request any changes to be made to what they had said. However the decision was made that participants would not be given the opportunity to see how their data had been used in the final draft of the thesis. This was for a
number of reasons. Firstly data is presented in a way that makes it difficult to understand the implications of individual contributions in isolation. Scholarly material analysed using Social Activity Method can be challenging and asking participants to read through a large quantity of data and interpretations to check their own contributions that, in most cases were distributed widely throughout the thesis would be difficult, time-consuming and unreasonable. In addition, given the nature of the analysis the withdrawal of data interpretation from one or two participants might render the study impossible to finish because of its relational nature, in many instances the data only makes sense when regarded relationally. So participants were asked that they do not withdraw their data from the study after collection. None have asked for this to happen.

In addition, there were practical problems with contacting participants and only two remained in contact with the author at the time of write-up, and in one of those instances the data provided by that participant was used much less than most other participants. This is a consequence of the length of time it has taken to compete data analysis and finish this thesis; most have relocated and moved on in their lives since data collection, something that happens commonly to people in this age range. Since participants in this study additionally all identify as transgender, difficulties in maintaining contact with people in situations where their identities may still be developing this also constitutes an additional difficulty. Ideally it would have been best for participants to review their data in full, but this would have taken a huge amount of their time and would have necessitated a great deal of explanation for this exercise to have been meaningful.

Protection of the participants was another issue that was taken very seriously, and information was prepared such as contact details of support groups, and sources of counselling in the event of any participant suffering undue stress or trauma as a consequence of the interview process. In only one instance, when the participant was describing a violent sexual assault,
was there any concern in this area, in this instance the interview was stopped and the participant took some time out to gather their thoughts. This participant was keen however, to continue a few minutes later and indeed insisted on doing so, and did not require any assistance even though it was offered. In all other cases no problems were expressed or detected. Indeed, rather surprisingly, most participants expressed that they had enjoyed the interview process. It was articulated by some that not only was it of benefit to them to be able to talk about their own lives to another (and older) trans person, but also to feel that they were contributing to research in this area, undertaken by a trans academic. This may be regarded as somewhat surprising, since one might expect that the interview process would be additionally stressful for participants. However when one considers minority stress theory (Meyer 1995) then, as a relatively small and misunderstood minority, young trans people could be regarded as living with an increased level of stress in their everyday lives, to the extent that being interviewed, especially by another trans person, would either constitute no additional stress or might even be argued to constitute a temporary reduction of stress.

3.1.3 Researcher Safety and Well-being

The safety and well-being of the researcher also merits attention as an ethical issue, in this instance on two levels, that of self-care, and that of personal safety during data collection.

In some instances data was collected as a result of meeting potential participants through personal contacts, but in most instances data collection was through notices in online social media, which gave an email address that was used subsequently to arrange interviews. The possibility of an interview participant turning out not to be who they say they are, or not being a trans person was considered and the motivation in that
instance also considered. The most likely motivations for such deception would be either criminal; robbery or assault, or to interfere with the research process, so precautions needed to be considered in either instance.

To protect against these scenarios was decided that data collection would take place in relatively busy areas so that assault or robbery would be difficult. A number of central London locations were selected for this and checked for background noise at different times of the day. Cafés near Victoria, London Bridge and Waterloo stations and in Bloomsbury and Islington were scouted out to check for suitability and safety. They needed to be reasonably busy but not so noisy as to make it difficult to audio record participants, as well as affording an adequate level of privacy (i.e., being able to have a conversation that would not be overheard). For example, one location had relatively private seats facing the front window, away from other tables, another had booths divided from each other by screens. Locations were chosen so that participants could feel safe and secure. However, there were three instances of interviews outside London, which entailed online searches for locations described as reasonably busy but not overly, so near mainline stations. Ultimately all these passed off without incident.

Deciding whether an individual is genuinely trans or not can sometimes be determined from elements of their appearance, not necessarily from first meeting them but from the subsequent time spent with them, it can also be determined from an examination of the data collected from them, unless a cisgender person has really known a trans person intimately and for a long time, it is unlikely that they will be able to pass as one at close quarters and in terms of what they say, for any length of time. In addition, for some, background checks were possible through social media and other contacts, indeed in some instances potential participants included references to these in initial communications in response to the call for
participants being advertised on social media. However it has to be remembered that there is a group of people who are opposed to human rights of trans people who have taken part in online studies of trans people in order to skew or discredit the results38. Making sure that this did not happen was also a consideration, however it seems to have become more of an issue in the last couple of years since data collection. Impersonation in order to discredit or wreck studies about trans people is an issue that will need to be looked at more seriously in future.

In contrast to these preparations, a different aspect of researcher self-care was not an issue that had been considered in advance of operationalising this research, yet it was one that was ultimately to become a much greater issue, although not until after data collection had been competed. It is one that Boynton (2017 p108) is careful to warn researchers about. This was the emotional effect of data analysis on the researcher of the research process. As an older trans person, during the main periods of data interpretation, looking at the entirety of data collected and analysing this is an issue that has had an effect. It was unexpected and not so problematic that it got in the way of the analysis. It largely consisted of what might be described as contradictory emotions.

The first of these was a feeling of a sense of loss at not having been able to come to an understanding of what being trans can mean from the ages that participants have been able to. Given that the researcher lived through times when it was impossible to identify as trans for social and cultural reasons and because the terminology was not available. Feeling as though a great deal has been missing from her life as a consequence of observing young trans people getting on with their lives, can be difficult to

38 https://www.mumsnet.com/Talk/womens_rights/2995738-Gender-ID-bill-Gender-Critical-To-Do-List
process. Difficult emotions experienced throughout this time, once suppressed have been brought back and needed to be addressed.

Two things however, mitigated these feelings to a certain extent. Firstly the research process itself has led the author to begin to arrive at a more nuanced self-understanding, which might not have happened otherwise. Secondly the knowledge that the author has taken a significant part in campaigning for the right of inclusion, against discrimination and for the legal, cultural and social recognition in their identified genders of these people, from which participants were now benefitting. Being permitted to live one's life authentically, freely and unrestricted by harassment, misrepresentation, bullying and interference is a human right for which the author has campaigned for a long time. Consolation came in the form of knowing that having been permitted to change the world significantly and for the better is a privilege few will ever experience.

It is significant that, from the time of the initial proposal, the main issue to be considered has been potential ethical problems that might affect participants in terms of their own well-being and data security rather than the effect on the researcher. In the event there do not appear to have been any problems for the participants, indeed the only feedback received from participants has been very positive. That the main issue in terms of harm reduction has turned out to be that which affected the researcher rather than the participants. Of course these are not the only issues and avoiding epistemological violence remains the most serious issue given that this is the main locus of ethical problems with many antecedent works. Epistemological violence remains an issue largely needing to be addressed during the writing-up stage of the thesis, particularly in relation to the conclusion. It is important to be clear about this issue and to be aware of it, as a researcher, and to foreground it since being constantly aware may ultimately be the only way it can be addressed.
3.2 Research Design

The design of this research can be described as a cross-sectional qualitative study, as data was obtained over a relatively short period of time, as opposed to longitudinally, and by returning to the same group at various intervals. Robson and McCartan (2016 p 141) argue that the selection and homogeneity of the group selected, is, in this kind of research, particularly important. The selection of informants was carried out according to Beemyn & Rankin (2011 p160). They identify an apparent cultural change that took place in the early 21st century which suggests that trans people born towards the end of the 20th century were much less likely to conceal their gender identities while young. Consequently participants for this study were selected with this in mind. This study is intended to focus on a population that, although not ‘new’ (Gill-Peterson 2019), is affected by a new cultural effect that is making it easier, in some instances at least, for trans people to understand themselves and come out at younger ages and hence have become more visible. This means that neither a longitudinal nor a trend study (Cohen, Manion and Morrisson 2011 p266) would obtain the required data, so a cross-sectional study is, from this perspective the preferred option.

3.3 Research methods

The way this study is designed is also affected by the ethical dimension to this study discussed in section 3.1 above. Data was obtained by means of in-depth face-to-face interviews with young trans people, mostly obtained in London and the South-East of England, with two interviews carried out in Denmark. In some instances participants were recruited though arbitrary personal contact, through trusted intermediaries in trans communities.
Obtaining contact with participants was very difficult, and required a considerable expenditure of time and resources to find individuals in the target population who were willing to be interviewed. The number of trans people in the UK is relatively small and this study focuses on a small subset of that number, making recruitment of participants a challenge.

The issue here was obtaining any reasonable number of participants, attempting to be specific about recruiting certain types of young trans person within this group would have made it a very difficult study to carry out, as it was it was even necessary to go to Copenhagen to interview two participants. Recruiting young trans men was relatively easy but recruiting young trans woman very difficult and slowed data collection down considerably. It is possible that, compared to trans men, trans women still find coming out at younger ages more difficult.

Initially the interviews were largely semi-structured, with the interviewer having a number of issues in mind to guide questioning but with the option to allow the conversation to develop in unplanned directions depending on the information provided by participants. Themes for questioning included identification, identity history, relationships with family and others, experience of epiphany and immediately afterwards, school, university, college or work environments, learning, internet use, socialising, sexuality, experiences of harassment, abuse, bullying, violence, exclusion and any other information they thought would be interesting to a sociologist. Examples of questions are in Appendix 1. As audio files were transcribed however some more questions were built-in in order to seek data on specific subjects relating to coding of prior data in case later participants did not address these areas when interviewed. For example, one area that emerged early in data collection was the history of each participant’s identification. To obtain as much data on this, data that was very useful for the Modes of Epiphany analysis in the next chapter, all subsequent
interviews had a question built-in on how the participant had identified in the past as well as how they identified at the time of the interview.

Interviews were all carried out face-to-face and recorded on an audio recorder of the kind used by journalists. In this instance a noise-cancelling audio recorder was used, since all the interviews were carried out in public places like cafés, where in some instances there was a significant amount of background noise. The data was transferred to a hard drive, deleted on the recorder and transcribed by the researcher, for security the recorder was also destroyed after data collection had finished. Transcribing was done directly from the audio files held on one of the two external hard disks with internet connection switched off, this was to guard against the possibility, however remote, of the material being compromised by a hacker. The audio files were transcribed by the researcher only, so no-one else had access to the data in the form of the audio files. The transcripts were subsequently analysed with the help of Nvivo software.

A total of 16 interviews were transcribed ranging in length from 45 minutes to two hours and 10 minutes with a modal average length of one hour and 10 minutes, producing around 18 hours and 40 minutes of audio files altogether. Coding of data was focussed on the ‘guiding thread’ of Social Activity Method, described in Section 3.3 below and focussed on the formation, maintenance and destabilisation of alliances and oppositions, looking at continuities and discontinuities evident in the data for example, which produced a huge number of codes, however this number was reduced upon returning to the data, to those now presented in the relational spaces in the data chapters 4 to 8.

Despite efforts to recruit from young trans people of more diverse backgrounds most participants were white and middle-class, although one was mixed-race and another non-white. Two identified as coming from working-class backgrounds and three declared disabilities. There was a
wide range of gender identities with just over a third of participants identifying as male, with the rest split roughly equally between identifying as female and non-binary. One participant had an intersex condition but also identified as non-binary transgender (not all non-binary people identify as trans). Obviously a greater diversity of backgrounds, particularly in race/class terms would have been ideal but at the time of data collection it proved difficult to make contact with such people despite considerable effort to do so. The interviews with participants constituted the main resource for data for analysis and were carried out over a four-year period from 2011 to 2015, and were spread out over this time because interviews needed to be transcribed in order for continuities and discontinuities and other items to be identified and questions about these built in to future interviews. Interviews continued until theoretical saturation was reached and nothing new was being reported in interviews.

The table in fig 3.1 below provides an overview of the participant interviews. Some example questions asked and the general areas focussed on are presented in Appendix 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Identification at time of data collection</th>
<th>Age (approx.)</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Length of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brett</td>
<td>Non-binary</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>1h 35m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Non-binary</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Technical/clerical</td>
<td>1h 20m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caroline</td>
<td>Feminine non-binary</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Student/software engineer</td>
<td>1h 30m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shane</td>
<td>Masculine non-binary</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Charity worker</td>
<td>1h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil</td>
<td>Masculine non-binary</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>2h 10m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samira</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>1h 30m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>1h 10m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sex worker</td>
<td>1h 20m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>50m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Classroom assistant</td>
<td>45m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>1h 15m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wesley</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>1h 10m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Charity Worker</td>
<td>1h 05m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jake</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>1h 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>55m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>1h 05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 3.1 Table of participants

### 3.4 Social Activity Method

This section explains in detail the sociological method employed in this study; Social Activity Method (SAM), responds to a critique of it and explains why it has been recruited in this study. Initially the basis of SAM in terms of epistemology and ontology will be explained.

#### 3.4.1 Epistemological and ontological position

As will be made clear in the following section, the method employed for this study, Social Activity Method (SAM), is based on an interpretivist as opposed to a positivist approach. Dowling (2013) characterises SAM as a method that constitutes ‘constructive descriptions’ of empirical settings, putting it firmly on the interpretivist side but departing from what he calls a “forensic” approach. Rather than attempting to ‘discover’ and ontological ‘truth’ SAM seeks to construct descriptions of different empirical settings by generating an organisational language. This stems from Dowling’s response to Bernstein’s approach, which he characterised as forensic. He explains how he recruited...

“...Jerome McGann’s term ‘deformance’ to catch at a fundamental aspect of my method: the point is not to dig into a text in order to uncover the true meaning that supposedly lies within it (forensics) but...
to engage with it in order to present the text in a new light, to make new meaning.” (2009 p74)

So, rather than ontologising the text as constituting the ‘world as it is’ Dowling’s regards the research process as necessarily producing a new reading of the empirical based on McGann’s (2000 p127) idea of ‘deformance’.

Thus the interpretivist approach, which rejects regarding the world as an ontological reality is further refined by Dowling as, in the case of SAM, based on not only an interpretivist epistemology but within that what is characterised as a constructively descriptive one as opposed to forensic. Indeed in rejecting a positivist epistemology Dowling cites some of the discontinuities in supposedly positivist sciences like physics, where quantum mechanics, classical mechanics and electromagnetic theory and general relativity are all fail to describe consistently the totality of the discipline of physics. This thesis is therefore based on an interpretivist epistemology with a descriptivist as opposed to a forensic manifestation of it. The analyses are intended to constitute constructive descriptions of the empirical settings with the aim of producing a ‘deformance’, that is new meanings from the texts analysed as opposed to a hidden ontological truth.

3.4.2 Introduction to SAM

Social Activity Method (SAM) was initially developed by Dowling (1998) as a method for sociological analysis of mathematics education. It has also been subsequently employed in a wide variety of empirical fields including Literary Studies (Chung 2007), pedagogy and school governance (Brown & Dowling 2009), ritual (Dudley-Smith 2016), fanfiction and fandoms (Whiteman 2007), research ethics (Whiteman 2012), education and inequality (Dowling & Burke 2012). These publications have included some
ground-breaking research. These have revealed new insights into the links between school communities and pedagogies, contributed, for example, to an understanding of the perpetually liminal state of Literary Studies as an academic discipline and produced a sociological characterisation of the development of social relations in an online fandom.

As a new sociological method/theory SAM needs to be explained carefully, so this section attempts to do the following:

1) Explain how SAM was developed
2) Present an outline of SAM as a method and how a SAM study is produced
3) Respond to a critique of SAM
4) Explain why SAM has been recruited for this thesis.

Initially the background to the development of SAM will be outlined and then its theoretical framework, sometimes described as an ‘internal language’ introduced. In terms of describing it as a method this will further be broken down into three sections; firstly a section elaborating a) SAM’s key concept of binary scales, b) how these are combined to form what are referred to as relational spaces, and c) a characterisation of the organisational language that emerges from this and can be used to generate descriptions and theorisations.

3.4.3 The Development of SAM

Dowling, a student of Bernstein, considered the antecedent sociology that was advocated by his teacher to be too far removed from the empirical (Dowling 2009, p69). Based on an explicitly constructivist epistemology and drawing on a range of influences including Durkheim, Luria (1974) and Geertz (1973 p 203) SAM was developed (Dowling 1998, 2009, 2013) to
produce constructive descriptions of social phenomena as opposed to what Dowling describes as ‘forensic’ (2009) positivist ‘answers’ to what it is researching.

Dowling characterises SAM as a *method* but it can also be regarded in part as constituting a theoretical framework. Indeed it started life as ‘Social Activity Theory’ (Dowling 1998, 2009 p277). SAM developed with a strong focus on the empirical and of producing theory from the empirical in contrast to Bernstein’s sociology, which was regarded as too distanced from this. So SAM can be regarded as a means of producing theory, through constructive description, from empirical settings and emergent from the analysis of raw data in a systematic and consistent manner.

That element of SAM that can be regarded as a theoretical framework characterises the sociocultural as constituting *strategic action directed at the formation, maintenance and destabilising of alliances and oppositions* (Dowling 2013). This theoretical framework, also described as an *internal language*, is then methodically applied to data analysis from empirical settings to produce constructive descriptions, as illustrated in fig 3.1 below. The process by which this happens is very similar in most studies that recruit SAM, and will be described in detail in the next section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructive Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Activity Method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empirical Setting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Fig 3.2 Social Activity Method*

### 3.4.4 Employment of SAM as the research method: Examples

This section starts with a basic construction in SAM. 1) How *Binary scales* are formed from an analysis of the data. 2) How these binary scales are
then combined to form *relational spaces*. 3) How these relational spaces produce an *organisational language* which can be deployed in a constructive description of the empirical situation. In the following, examples of what this means in practice are provided with reference to an analysis of the television programme ‘Transgender Children’ presented by Louis Theroux referred to in Chapter 2 section 5 on p67.

**Binary Scales**

A SAM analysis concentrates on identifying binary oppositions that emerge from the data focussing on alliances and oppositions. The first example of a binary scale used will be *localising or generalising*, which characterise two kinds of discourse that emerged from the data. The following statement exemplifies this binary;

> ‘Most British people prefer to eat fried or grilled fish but my favourite is sashimi.’

It can be regarded as comprising of two statements. In the first when this person states that “*Most British people prefer to eat fried or grilled fish...*” they are stating what they believe to be the general preferences of the majority of people in this country, this is characterised as a *generalising* statement. The second part “*...but my favourite is sashimi*” constitutes a localising statement in which no claims are being made beyond that individual; they are only referring to their own preferences for raw fish with soy sauce and wasabi and nothing beyond that. This illustrates the inclusive binary *localising – generalising* into which most utterances can be regarded as fitting.

The *localising – generalising* binary is constituted as two ends of a binary axis used in the relational space in fig 3.3 below.
The other axis is also made up of a binary scale *marking - non-marking*. This might be exemplified in the following statement;

‘There are fifteen girls in my class, one of them is Muslim, she wears a hijab.’

In this statement the fourteen girls are *unmarked*. They do not stand out in that situation; in contrast the girl wearing the hijab is *marked* as different. *Marking* discourses pick out a feature of an individual, which signifies that this person is somehow different from the norm. These kinds of discourse have been identified in the text to form the other axis of the relational space in fig 3.3 below. In the relational space this axis is characterised as ‘Delineation strategy’; how the speaker constructs a difference between those who are at variance from the norm and those who are not. The two example statements above are for illustration only, as will be demonstrated later, with reference to the relational space in fig 3.3 below, the binary axes of which are constituted from an analysis of the data.

Before moving on to the first example relational space it is important to explain why these axes are normally constituted as binaries with no intermediate points. With a binary scale that, for example, represents utterances from the data as either *localising* or *generalising* it is not possible to add any intermediate points. One cannot say any given unit of meaning is 40%, 50% or 60% generalising or 40%, 50% or 60% localising. Units of meaning do not come with a numerical scale that can be attached in the same way that, for example, a chemist might be able to arrive at an exact percentage of oxygen as against carbon dioxide in the atmosphere at any given location. Indeed attempting, for example, to fix a 50% intermediate point between localising and generalising is likely to constitute an arbitrary value-judgement, which could potentially be misleading or bias the analysis. What is important however, when
identifying these binaries as they emerge from the data, is to ensure that they are inclusive, which means that all appropriate data can be categorised as either one or the other.

These binary scales, as they emerge from an analysis of the data, are then combined to form relational spaces, the ‘external language’ of a SAM data analysis. This key process is described in the next section.

**Example Relational Spaces**

‘Signifying Modes’

As mentioned above this section attempts to exemplify relational spaces by referring to the data analysed in the transcript of the Theroux documentary (Barrow 2015) described in Section 5 of Chapter 2 with reference to the BBC television programme about transgender children. Data from this programme - in which Theroux interviewed young trans people, trans children and their families – can now be analysed using the two binary scales combined to create two relational spaces. The first of which is exemplified in fig 3.3 below.

This relational space in fig 3.3 below has been given the title ‘Signifying Modes’ as it produces, from the data, an organisational language with which to describe what is happening in this data. This relational space consists of the two binary scales forming the vertical axis of *Discourse; localising and generalising* and horizontal axis *Delineation strategy; marking and non-marking*, both of these scales have emerged from an analysis of the data.
The four different descriptors inside this relational space represent different strategies or modes of action, and it is important at this point to bear in mind that these do not describe individuals but modes of action. Individual participants can recruit more than one mode of action or strategy at the same time or at different times. To exemplify one such strategy, at the intersection of a discourse identified as *localising* and delineation strategy identified as *marking* is characterised as the mode of action *localising marking*. An example of a localising marking strategy from the Theroux documentary would be this;

‘For the first 13 years of her life Nikki had been Nick. Last year Nick had come home from school and found his (sic) mum watching a TV programme about trans kids...’ (*Theroux, narration*)

Here Theroux is marking out Nikki as different referring to the moment she came out as a trans girl, however he is not making any claims or observations beyond Nikki, in this instance, he is referring only to her situation having appeared to change her gender from boy to girl.

The signifying mode in the top right corner at the intersection of Discourse; *localising* and Delineation Strategy; *non-marking* is characterised as *localising non-marking*. This is exemplified by Nikki’s sister Danielle’s comment;
It’s been an experience; it was hard at first but then I really got used to it and then I just really learnt to like... love her. (Danielle)

This is a localising statement in that it refers only to Nikki, and not wider statements about trans people. However in this instance its discourse characterised as non-marking, Nikki is no longer objectified as transgender but as a girl, as Danielle simply uses the term ‘her’ for Nikki.

The intersection of Discourse; generalising and Delineation Strategy; non-marking in the bottom right corner of the relational space produces the Signifying Mode generalising non-marking. This exemplified by part of a conversation Theroux has with Nikki;

... I was thinking back to when I was 14 turning 15, and that was probably the hardest year of my life, it really was... Cos you’re thinking about ‘How do I fit in?’ ... You’re not a child but you’re not a grown-up and it’s very confusing and a confusing and lonely time sometimes... (Theroux)

In this example Theroux is moving from an assertion about himself and how he experienced life as a 14-year-old and developing that into a generalising and non-marking statement about what it feels like to be that age, for most teenagers. Here he is making a generalising statement and applying it to Nikki in a way that does not mark her out as different from other girls of her age.

In the bottom left corner of the relational space at the intersection of Discourse; generalising and Delineation strategy; marking is exemplified by Nikki’s father’s reasoning for getting medical intervention for Nikki as soon as possible;

Nikki would have become an adult, and this happens all the time right... where [trans] people become adults and they really still feel this way and they learn to transition when they are adults, life is a lot harder... (Nikki’s Father)
Nikki’s father is here making a *generalising marking* statement about trans people probably reflecting his research about trans people from the internet, in order to justify his decision to help her access medical interventions as soon as possible, although he is also not marking her out as any different from other young trans people he is marking her out as different because she is trans.

In the example of the Signifying Modes relational space above it is relatively easy to see how the strategies or modes of action (represented in *italics* in fig 3.3) relate to the vertical and horizontal binary scales. The descriptors inside the relational space are straightforward combinations of the intersecting elements of these, so for example in the corner of the relational space where *generalising* and *non-marking* intersect they produce the mode of action “*generalising non-marking*”. This is why this relational space has been selected as the first example.

So, the ‘Signifying Modes’ relational space was selected as the first example because the relationship between the terms used in the binary axes and the descriptors used in the relational space (such as ‘generalising non-marking’) is clear. This explanation now moves on to a different example of a relational space where the descriptors are not these simple, but rather clumsy, combinations of terms used in the axes.

‘*Cultural References for Change*’

It is usual practice in SAM to recruit new terms that describe the modes of action or strategies in a less clumsy manner than in the example in fig 3.3 above. As in the next example - also drawn from the material presented in Chapter 2 section 5 about the Theroux documentary and combined with some data from the participant interviews - these clumsy terms such as ‘*generalising non-marking*’ are abandoned. They are replaced by single
terms, more easily differentiated from each other which characterise the strategies or modes of action emerging from the intersection of the two scales.

So the next example, fig 3.4 the ‘Cultural Referents for Change’ relational space below, is once again formed from the combination of two binary scaled axes. However in this instance, rather than characterising the binary scales with decontextualised examples like the sashimi and hijab ones in section a) above, the binary scales will be formed by drawing on examples from the data. So in this example the vertical axis titled *Regard* is formed from a binary scale that emerges from the data; *continuous – discontinuous*. The way people perceive the way someone, or indeed they themselves, has changed is identified as either in a way that is perceived as smooth and steady (*continuous*) or proceeding in way perceived as sudden, uneven or broken (*discontinuous*).

The binary scale *continuous- discontinuous*, like all binary scales in SAM, is emergent from an analysis of the data. To exemplify this it is necessary to use descriptions from the data rather than the decontextualised examples of the two axes used in the first relational space in fig 3.3 above.

Camille’s mother expresses a *discontinuous* regard of her daughter’s transition when talking about an old photo of Camille before her transition;

...that’s the last time we captured S********. In honest opinion that was the last time we saw that, you know, spiky little hair and cute little clothes, and for me that was kind of saying goodbye, and I don’t, its not a bad thing in my mind, its... that was the face and we’re done. (*Camille’s Mother*)

Here this is characterised as a *discontinuous* view of Camille’s transition, she is describing it as appearing to be a relatively sudden change from boy to girl. This exemplifies the *discontinuous* end of this binary scale.
Possibly because of the needs of the format of the television programme there were no examples of a *continuous* regard on transition but there are in the data from interview participants on which we can draw, for example this one from Samira:

> It took me a couple of years, it was seeing, all, you know, Carmen Carrera’s posts writing about trans power and all that and I was… I could really connect with what you’re saying, the thoughts, the feelings and I was like… I always knew deep, deep down, but it’s accepting it in yourself...

Here Samira describes how she regards herself as gradually coming to understand herself as trans over a period of time in response to reading online material.

So the above quotation from the data exemplifies the vertical *continuous* – *discontinuous* axis. The horizontal axis of the relational space, which has been characterised as Orientation to the Present. *Orientation to the Present* is comprised of either an anaphoric or a cataphoric orientation. These are terms borrowed from linguistics, which describe orientation in terms of time. So *cataphoric* describes to someone referring to something in the future while *anaphoric* characterises when someone refers to something in the past. Since referring to something in either the past or the future is always done in the present, the characterisation of this axis regards each statement insofar as it is oriented to the moment it is made.

An example of a *cataphoric* utterance from the TV documentary is Nikki describing her treatment at the hospital with Dr Diane Ehrensaft;

> Every time I come here we’re making like a step forward… I guess I’m just really excited about what the future like holds and… you know… I just like can’t wait...

Here Nikki is focusing quite clearly on the future and is obviously in a state of enthusiasm for what she wants for the future.
An example of an anaphoric material from the text is the following exchange between Camille’s parents;

Mother: I don’t know, it’s been such a... quick journey in the last one year that we that we’ve been going through this that doesn’t feel like there’s a lot of exploration left now its... big leaps and bounds forward.

Father: I don’t think there’s any more exploring I think this is Camille and this is her coming out party.

Here both parents are referencing the past; the ‘quick journey’ and no more ‘exploring’. Her first day wearing a dress to school seemed to mark a culmination of a year of transitioning, something both parents were looking back on.

So, as with all relational spaces in SAM both binary axes emerge from an analysis of the data and are constituted from examples like these. In this instance however the descriptors in the relational space (in italics in fig 3.4), instead of being constructed from a combination of the terms in the axes – eg ‘generalising non-marking’ – or ‘cataphoric continuous’ in the same way as the previous relational space in fig 3.3 less clumsy descriptors are given which describe the mode of action or strategy these combinations reference. So a Continuous Regard and a Cataphoric Orientation to the Present combine to form a cultural referent for change characterised as ‘Evolving’ for example.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation to the Present</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regard</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discontinuous</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Fig 3.4 Cultural Referents for Change*
Evolving describes a cultural referent for change that situates someone as gradually changing bit-by-bit over a long period of time. The change is regarded as continuous rather than discontinuous and there is a forward-looking orientation to their discourse. In the top right corner of the relational space, also with a continuous regard but this time with an anaphoric orientation, the descriptor is characterised as purifying, throwing off that which has been externally imposed, to become what one ‘always was’ before culture and society intervened.

Rebirthing, in the bottom left of the relational space, is a combination of a discontinuous perception of change and a cataphoric orientation to the present. The individual is literally regarded as dying and having been reborn anew. Finally, in the bottom right, also with a discontinuous regard but this time with an anaphoric orientation, the space is characterised as metamorphosing. Here the discontinuous perception is combined with an anaphoric orientation and the individual’s past is reinterpreted to account for the present, in effect; ‘X was always going to be a butterfly even though they looked like a caterpillar.’ What is important to bear in mind here is that these terms describe how people recruit cultural resources to represent the way they perceive change, not the actual change taking place. Each of these concepts, Evolution, Purification, Rebirth and Metamorphosis describe culturally-constituted elements that are recruited by the individual. So the concept of rebirth, for example, seems to be recruited by parents especially, to describe the way their child has apparently changed.

The next step, once a relational space like this is constituted, is to go back to the data and test it; do the four (or in some instances three) terms produced by this analysis work when reapplied to the data? Examples of actions characterised by these descriptors should be found in the data if the relational space is to be regarded as a valid and productive representation of the strategies or modes of action employed by
individuals in the empirical settings. An illustration of this in relation to the relational space in fig 3.4 and these new terms can be recruited into a description and discussion of the data and subsequent theorisations produced is outlined in the next section.

Organisational Language

In a sense these four new terms in the relational space generated from the data can be regarded, in many instances, as ideal types along the lines of those produced by Weber (1964) except that they are ideal types produced in relation to each other. Consequently they can be recruited into theoretical analysis and discussion as such.

To start in the top left corner of the relational space a continuous developmental perception and a cataphoric orientation to the present is characterised as evolving. Here a continuous regard is combined with a cataphoric orientation. Instead of regarding change as caterpillar-butterfly like this mode constitutes a rationalisation of the change as a development that is more gradual and suggests that one perceives ones past experiences as contributing to one’s current status, and possibly future status also. When Research participant Brett describes their transition thus...

I’m not sure if a lifetime will be enough, I’m not sure if at 80, I will be able to say anything more specific about my gender. (Brett Sept 2012)

they are describing evolving in terms of their gender identity to the extent that they cannot currently conceive of this evolution having any end.

The top right corner is characterised as purifying. Here the past is rejected as a cultural imposition that has been cast off in favour of a present in which one’s true identity can now be realised, free from past impurities.
Here the orientation is to the past, beyond a time regarded as ‘the Badlands’ a time when everything was wrong, where one was forced to be untrue to oneself to an ‘original’ time before these social impositions. Camille’s parents’ understanding of Camille represent an example of this; her past life is regarded as inauthentic, yet there is a continuity with the past, but now she is ‘the real Camille’.

I think that’s where we’re at now, she’s always been a girl and we just didn’t realise it until now.

The continuity produces the essence of who Camille is, which is now there to see, the ‘real’ individual here constituting an essence of the individual in their pure state, at least from the point of view of gender.

The bottom right-hand corner, metamorphosing, is illustrated by Nikki’s sister’s way of interpreting Nikki’s development is an example of this; she now regards her as always having been a girl and her memories of Nikki are transformed into what she now regards as memories of having an older sister.

…it’s just Nick is gone and I’m OK with that now. And Nikki is like, I don’t know I just feel like she was Nikki for her whole life...

This mode of understanding is characterised as metamorphosing because it unconsciously draws on the way a caterpillar changes into a butterfly and our consequent cultural understanding that they are the same being but manifested in a different way. This metaphor works because the cultural knowledge that metamorphosis means an inevitable discontinuity from one manifestation to another, of the same creature, is available to us. So regarding Nikki as the butterfly enables the recontextualisation of her past life as a girl.

The bottom left corner of the relational space is characterised as rebirthing. Here Nikki’s mother’s understanding of Nikki represents an
example of her way of understanding Nikki’s transition. She regards Nikki as ‘dying’ and being, in a sense, resurrected. She regards Nick as having died and metaphorically been replaced by Nikki.

...it was, it was bittersweet for me... but I know I’m doing the right thing, in fact we just got her new birth certificate two days ago, and the first thing she pointed out was her gender... and she was very happy. [...] I don’t have my son any more... It’s hard... its hard sometimes (cries)

She expresses sadness at the loss of Nick, and although she is, on one level, of course able to rationalise her as the same person, on a different level Nikki is being reborn as a new person.

So the four descriptors in the relational space work when reapplied to the data, and consequently can be recruited into a constructive description of the data, as constituting different modes of recruiting cultural references to rationalise the ways people appear to change. These terms can then be used in the subsequent constructive description and opening out of the data.

So SAM is designed to take inclusive binary oppositions and put them together in 2x2 relational spaces – although 2x2x2 (in effect three dimensional) relational spaces are also possible - in effect SAM uses binaries to break down binaries. The terms produced by these relational spaces, for example, in fig 3.4 *evolving, purifying, rebirthing* and *metamorphosing*, are characterised by Dowling (2013) as an “organisational language” and are recruited to produce a constructive description and possible theoretical discussion.

In many ways, SAM can be regarded as a consistent and systematic means of generating an organisational language, which can then be used to open-up the empirical setting. What is also useful about this is that the relational
spaces and the organisational language produced can be intelligible between different SAM studies, settings and authors meaning that the organisational language produced in different relational spaces by different SAM practitioners can be recruited into different research. A cannon of relational spaces - or schemas - has thus been built up in SAM, which can be used to analyse different empirical fields where appropriate. For example the *Cultural References for Change* schema in fig 3.4 above is one such relational space that may, in future, be recruited as a theoretical framework for studying other examples of perceived changes in status. Dowling’s (2013) *Modes of Recontextualisation* schema is an example of one such schema that has been recruited as part of this thesis in Chapter 7.

### 3.4.5 Responding to a critique of SAM

Cable (2015) critiques Dowling’s (1998, 2013) use of SAM in his analysis of mathematics education. This critique is, however, rather piecemeal and seems to be largely restricted critiquing Dowling’s use of SAM in two particular instances; the Domains of Action Schema (2009 p206) and his concept of the Myth of Participation (1998 p7) in relation to school mathematics. While he criticises Dowling he does not refer to any other SAM scholarship such as Dowling 2009, Chung 2009, Dudley-Smith (2016), Kennedy (2013) or Whiteman (2007).

The main issue for Cable seems to be an epistemological disagreement with SAM. He takes issue with Dowling’s avowedly constructivist epistemology while himself appearing to use a mix of both constructivist and positivist epistemologies to do so. In addition it appears that his other main disagreement appears to be rooted in an opposing view to that of Dowling on whether mathematics stems from the everyday or from the specialist domain of mathematics scholars. Again, like the disagreement
over epistemology it appears that this constitutes a difference of approach rather than one of a critique of SAM per se.

One of the few areas where Cable actually critiques SAM as a method is when he takes issue with Dowling’s use of binary scales, suggesting that the binary scale strong institutionalisation – weak institutionalisation in respect of content should be reconceptualised as a continuum with intermediate points arguing that the binary scale obscures the fine detail - how these should be calibrated in respect of the concept of institutionalisation he does not exemplify however. As explained earlier in this chapter a binary scaled axis can be regarded as a mode of analysis that avoids undue researcher bias, while inserting intermediate points is likely to present the opportunity for value-judgements and unconscious bias to skew the analysis; how can one assign an element of institutionalisation the characteristic of halfway between weak and strong? His consequent charge that SAM obscures fine detail is not evidenced, but I hope countered by the material presented in this thesis, which develops constructive descriptions of the empirical field in much greater detail than I suspect he would imagine, through the production of an organisational language that enables nuance to be characterised and the opening-up of the empirical field. The level of detail of a SAM analysis can be increased or decreased depending on its level of analysis, which is why Dowling (2013) characterised SAM as ‘fractal’

This leads us to the following section, which accounts for the reasons why SAM was selected for this study.

39 In SAM, Institutionalisation is characterised as regularity of practice. The extent to which a practice is repeated in the same way each time.
3.3.6 SAM in this Thesis

There are a number of reasons that SAM was chosen as part of the theoretical framework and method for this thesis.

The desire to approach the sociology of young trans people from a new perspective given the widespread misunderstandings (Lester 2017b) about trans people in general and young trans people and trans children in particular is one of the reasons for recruiting SAM. In both academia (eg Littman 2018, Dreger 2015, Greer 1999, Jeffreys 1997, Haussman 1995) and the media (eg Hooper 2015, Shadyac 1994), these groups are widely misunderstood and misrepresented. So using SAM aims to produce new understandings and a new language with which to describe the emergence of this group is a worthwhile endeavour. One of the features of SAM is the way it generates a new organisational language with which to describe the actions of young trans people, trans children and those around them. The issue of the kind of language is also important.

It is this focus not merely on producing new language and descriptions that is important but its focus on the kind of language produced. SAM can be used to produce a language of description that is substantive; Dowling’s/Dudley-Smiths (forthcoming) Mythologising Modes schema uses noun phrases; The Myth of Certainty, the Myth of Participation, the Myth of Reference and the Myth of Emancipation, and a few others. However myths in the Mythologising Modes schema may be substantives but are largely referencing actions, the act of mythologising. So SAM is largely concerned with strategies and modes of action. This means SAM is producing, from a sociological perspective, a constructive description of what people are doing. This is particularly important when researching trans people generally and young trans people in particular. The way trans people have often been presented in research and elsewhere as passive victims needs to be challenged, in particular because the research
produced in this thesis shows that this group of young people is far from passive. Young trans people are active agents in the construction and organisation of their own lives, yet so much research and other published material positions them as passive victims. Unlike other trans people who may have already established themselves in their identified genders, young trans people actually have to act to establish themselves and assert their gender identities, so coming to understand the strategies and modes of action they employ in so doing is important. SAM, with its focus on action, is, in the opinion of the author, the most appropriate method for doing this. In many instances research on trans people has either silenced them through pathologisation or situated them as passive victims. A research method that focuses predominantly on the active, on producing an organisational language largely consisting of, or referencing, verbs represents an opportunity to focus on this element.

With few exceptions (eg Stone 1992, Garfinkel 1965) the positioning of trans people as passive victims has been the case until relatively recently, and research of this kind is still being published (eg Littman 2018) and in some instances is even gratuitously abusive to individual trans people (eg Laidlaw 2018) by attempting to deny their agency. SAM’s focus on strategies and modes of action make it ideal for this purpose.

SAM has also been chosen because it is a specifically sociological method. This is a sociological study so using a specifically sociological method is an important consideration. One of the features of SAM is that, as well as being particularly systematic it also forces the researcher to remain close to the data during both analysis and writing-up. This is not to say that other methods are not rigorous in this way and that people do not remain close to the data, however, when using SAM doing anything other than that can be very difficult, relational spaces do not usually work unless they directly come from an analysis of the data. In the experience of the author, using SAM has resulted in material that has remained both rooted in the data
while also producing innovative material. Indeed the way SAM tends to produce new perspectives on different fields may be one explanation behind the reaction of Cable (2015) to many of Dowling’s conclusions about the sociology of mathematics education may be attributed to the radically different approach that SAM takes.

3.5 Limitations

The principal limitations of this study come down to three things, diversity of participants, historical situatedness and resources.

Data was collected between January 2011 and May 2015 and almost all participants were white and middle-class. Making contact with and interviewing young trans people from ethnic minorities proved difficult during this time period, although it may not necessarily be the same if data collection were to take place now in 2018. With hindsight it might have been worth making a greater effort to make contact with young ethnic minority trans people by going through older people from the same communities, something that would be attempted should the study be repeated, although it is difficult to know whether this strategy would have made any difference.

In terms of resources, the researcher, as a PhD candidate, was excluded from applying for most funding, and consequently time was a big issue, as was attempting to claim research time due contractually with her employer. This resulted in data collection taking place over a period of more than four years, and slowed down the transcription of data as well as its analysis. In future, the issue of time will be factored into studies of this kind and funding applied for to enable it to be carried out in a timely fashion. However, although some of the data collected is seven years old at the time of submission, it does not appear to be significantly different from
the data that was collected more recently. However the situation with regards trans people’s emergence, visibility and coherence as a group can be regarded as having been in a state of flux over the last few years, and consequently conducting a similar study in the near future might produce different data.

The limitations in terms of time are also important to mention from the point of view of the snapshot nature of data collection. As made clear in the introduction, the resources were not available to engage in a longitudinal study that might reveal greater nuances in terms of identification and social engagement of participants over time. This is both a strength and a weakness since there would appear to be an element of cultural change going on which might mean that the responses of participants might change, not necessarily because of greater experience and in the natural process of development and maturity, but as a result of social and cultural change. So it is acknowledged that more data of a more detailed and valuable nature might have been obtained if participants were interviewed again some time subsequent to data collection here or if other methods of data collection that would enable data to be collected over time were used. What is important to recognise here however is that this is a sociological study which aims to construct a description of social relations and cultural processes rather than investigate individual behaviour.

As was outlined in the literature review, the situation for young trans people seems to have undergone a significant change in the very early part of the 21st century to the extent that there is a significant difference between trans people aged over about 35 years and those aged under 30. Whether this constitutes a single once-and-for-all change of this kind, or may be reflected in further changes in the future, is unknown, so all studies of this kind may need to be regarded as having limited relevance beyond certain time-frames.
What is significant however is the way this study can claim to be more relevant to the present and the future, than many studies conducted before around 2010, although this strength can also be regarded as a potential limitation if something like what Time magazine characterised as the ‘Transgender Tipping Point’ on its 28 May 2014 cover occurs again in the near future. For example, there may be a political backlash against trans people’s human rights or against support for trans children in school, or attitudes may change to become more tolerant and accepting and consequently larger numbers of young trans people, in particular from different backgrounds becoming visible. In 1900 the proportion of left-handed people, constituted 2% of the UK population. However by the start of the Second World War this had increased to around 10% because of greater tolerance of a group members of which had previously been the root of the word ‘sinister’ (McManus 2009). Social change had reduced the stigmatisation of those who were left-handed to the extent that they could ‘come out’ as left-handed. If Time Magazine’s ‘Tipping Point’ in 2014 can be regarded as coming a few years after the start of a similar change in attitudes, then it could be another 30 years or so before we discover the fullest extent to which numbers of trans people are likely to increase. If numbers increase significantly, as they did for left-handed people up to 1939, the concept of cis-mythologisation, for example could look very different by 2035, 2040 or 2045. In which case much of this thesis may need to be treated as constituting historical evidence rather than contemporary sociology.

The next five chapters present and analyse data obtained from the participants listed in fig 3.1 on page 103 of Section 2 of this chapter.
Chapter 4. Epiphanies and Learning

This chapter examines two different aspects of young trans people’s journeys from self-discovery through the process of learning about themselves as a result of their different experiences and the variety of situations in which they find themselves. Initially the way they come to the realisation they are transgender, which I have characterised as epiphany, will be elaborated, then the ways they engage in learning about what it means to be trans will be explored. So to start with two different elements of trans people’s journeys will be characterised with a SAM analysis constituted in two different relational spaces.

4.1 Modes of Epiphany

One of the few common experiences most trans people have is an epiphany as a trans person. In this context ‘epiphany’ can be defined as that time when one comes to realise that one is not the gender assigned at birth. The only trans people who may not experience epiphany are those in two groups, the first of which is those who come to identify as a gender other than their birth gender at such a young age that they cannot be regarded as having identified any other way, in any meaningful sense. This is probably a very small, group, although increasing parental awareness of transgender issues means that it is likely to grow; Jazz Jennings (Jennings 2017) constitutes an example of people in this group. The other group consists of people who die before they come to experience epiphany as transgender. Numbers in this group are difficult to quantify but the case of Patricia Davies, who came out as transgender at the age of 90,

40 Difficult to evidence, but this trans woman coming out aged 90 is indicative; http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/second-world-war-veteran-patricia-davies-leicestershire-transition-woman-aged-90-years-old-a7658736.html
41 http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/world-war-2-veteran-comes-10119089
suggests that this group exists, even though it may be hidden and may, in time, cease to exist.

Epiphany can be characterised as that time when one ceases to think of oneself as cisgender, and starts to consider oneself to be transgender or non-binary or to identify as a gender other than the one assigned at birth. One should not however regard epiphany as necessarily a single, instant process. Nor should it be regarded as a universal process, experienced in the same way by all transgender people. This chapter initially then, intends to explore the nature of epiphany for trans people, dismantling it to understand how it needs to be regarded as a number of different processes, engaged with in a variety of different ways by different trans people in different circumstances. This chapter explores these processes and also the subsequent and related processes of young trans people learning about themselves as trans people to enable them to begin to understand their own position, as they negotiate and navigate their various paths through the identification process.

Hitherto the ways the different identification processes for trans people occur have not been understood, yet such an important process in the lives of an increasing number of people is clearly significant, and needs to be explored beyond a relatively simplistic notion of epiphany. After examining this, the related process these people engage in that enables them to move from being in a position of relative ignorance to becoming relative experts in their own lives will also be examined. In most instances both epiphany and the subsequent learning process have involved online activity, but not in all cases.

From the evidence in this study the process of epiphany can be regarded as one of the most significant moments in the lives of participants. Although the spark or catalyst for epiphany is most often not the result of online engagement, the Internet was in most instances subsequently employed to
a significant extent during and just after this period. As has previously been maintained (Kennedy 2014) that epiphany and coming to understand oneself, in most instances requires what is described as a ‘lexic key’; an item of vocabulary such as ‘transgender’ or ‘trans’ which enables one to access the online material, discussions and communities which would otherwise remain unavailable to the individual. Participants in this study report experiencing this epiphany in different ways and at different times in their lives, ranging from around 12 years old to their mid twenties. In most instances this epiphany was precipitated by an offline experience, the timing and nature of which appears to be largely arbitrary, but was most often the result of seeing something trans-related in mainstream media. Yet with more trans people and especially more trans celebrities, becoming more visible, the likelihood of this arbitrary experience occurring in an online environment is expected to become much greater than it would have been only a decade ago. Obviously with more young people spending more time online, the prospect of this happening through social media has increased commensurably. However regardless of the initial catalyst for epiphany it would appear from the data that, subsequent to this, most young people use the internet and social media, in the time immediately after epiphany, to learn about what is means to be transgender and to further refine their own self-definitions to help with constructing their identities, making new friends with whom they can share experiences and plotting a course through the next part of their lives.

From the data collected it has become clear that what may be regarded by some as either a simple or a quick process should probably be regarded as much more complex and a collection of different processes. Initially these processes are analysed according to two binary variables; relations, which are characterised as either pedagogic or exchange (Dowling 2009 p275), and by orientation to the present, which is characterised as either anaphoric or cataphoric. This produces the relational space in fig 4.1 below; Modes of Epiphany.
The anaphoric/cataphoric binary scale is drawn from participants’ data showing that, during the process of epiphany, they were either referring back to past experiences which had suggested to them that they might be transgender, or different from the cisnormative in some way, or that they did not have that experience and were looking entirely to the future as a result of their epiphany. The experience of Shane was anaphoric in its orientation;

I went to a single-sex school, which wasn’t fun… from about 11, secondary school basically, and…it was noticeable that I wasn’t the same as everyone else, everyone else was a bit different to me, I couldn’t relate to them in the same way that they all could seem to relate to each other… (Shane, Jan 2011)

In contrast Steve’s experience was cataphoric in that he had little idea he was trans before he met another trans person;

Well I had no idea what it was until I was friends with this one trans woman and I was like ‘OK…’ and she would talk to me about her childhood and that kind of thing and I strongly identified but the opposite way… (Steve, Jan 2011)

The cataphoric nature of Steve’s epiphany contrasts with Shane’s experience of feeling different for a long time previously, and not fitting in with the girls in his single-sex high school, but also not knowing what the problem was. This forms the first scale.

The other scale, relations, in this case pedagogic and exchange. These refer to the different relations between the author and the audience of a text. A pedagogic text is one over which the author retains, or seeks to retain authority (Dowling 2009 p 275) whereas an exchange action is one where the authority is located more specifically with the audience.
An example of a pedagogic relationship is Phil’s experience of a chance encounter with a word he thought might have meaning for him;

I remember when I found out about the word ‘transgender’, and it was totally by chance it just appeared in a newspaper, [...] I found this article and they were saying, ‘these children weren't transgender.’ [...] The context of it was like... suggestive of something so I Just Googled it... and then I found out what it meant and then I Googled it again for like ‘young transgender’ or something and found Mermaids and joined that forum when I was 13. (Phil, Jan 2011)

His relationship with the authors of the material he read offline and searched online as he experienced his epiphany was entirely pedagogic, they were, through printed and online material, telling him something he needed to know, and over which the author retained authority.

In contrast Jake’s experience was through coming through this process being helped by a group of other trans men;

...being around these phenomenal, like incredible trans men, and it just being like... this rings a lot truer than anything I’ve ever experienced... and kind of exploring that and talking about that with them and with them being very funny and kind of sitting there going...‘Well Jake let’s...’ and very open to talk about it... (Jake, May 2014)

Here he was engaged in a conversation with members of this group of trans men and uses words like ‘explore’, ‘open’ and ‘talking with’. He was in the position of influencing the conversation and judging for himself what was right for him, drawing on their experiences. Ultimately the interaction was about helping him come to a decision about himself although the information he acquired was provided by others. This represents an exchange action and completes the horizontal scale of the relational space in fig 4.1 below.
Starting in the top left corner, where the orientation is anaphoric and relations pedagogic, this is characterised as affirming, in this mode epiphany represents an upholding of what the individual has already been considering, so for example they may have already felt different in the past in some way from those around them but not known exactly why, other than not fully identifying within their assigned gender and not being able to rationalise this or make this explicit. The experience of epiphany in this mode also represents them finding out, either that there is a word for people like them, or that there are others like them and their feelings of not fitting in or of feeling different can be regarded as in some way validated by this process.

An example of this mode of epiphany is Harry’s experience. Acting on his feelings of alienation from his birth assigned gender, he started to search the internet;

...when I turned 14, over the summer in between your nine and year 10, I went on the Internet and just typed in things like ‘I don't like being a girl’, ‘I don't like...’ Things about not being a girl, and those searches led me to people’s blogs who are transgender... (Harry, May 2015)

His previous experience of not feeling right about his gender constitutes an anaphoric orientation while he was accessing material online that is non-interactive and seeks to convey people’s own experiences of identifying as...
trans men or trans boys, the authority over which remains with the authors of that material.

Moving round the relational space in a clockwise direction to the top right, *overcoming resistance* also represents an anaphoric orientation, as those experiencing this kind of epiphany have already some idea, from their past experiences, that they are trans, but are, in some way resisting it. Jake, describing further his experience referred to above, describes how his epiphany consisted of him overcoming his own resistance to it, which might be characterised as influenced by his own past experience of discrimination resulting from prior experience in a different context.

> I was kind of really struggling with it, really fighting with it, it was, I mean a massive internal fight, going ‘Oh fuck I’ve been a lesbian, you know that’s hard enough, do I have to...to...be weirder...?’ You know, and that’s kind of tricky in itself... that kind of... for me that real fight, of like I know this feels so right but I don’t want to be... But once you learn something it’s almost as if you’re walking for the first time. (*Jake, May 2014*)

His resistance to identifying as a trans man was evidently based on his earlier experience of coming out as a lesbian in school in his small, provincial hometown in the UK. This was such a stressful experience that he stopped attending school for three months as a result of homophobic bullying, bullying which, he reports, was not at all addressed by his school. After he left school he was also physically assaulted in his job, so consequently it is not surprising that he would have profound reservations about identifying in a way which he describes in his own words as being ‘weirder’ than that. However this was something about which he had some idea prior to this epiphany, in a similar way to Harry.

In the bottom right corner of the relational space, *constructing* mode is characterised as exchange relations combined with a cataphoric
orientation. Brett’s experience represents an example of this mode. They\textsuperscript{42} experienced epiphany in a group which was not specifically for trans people but which included some trans people. As such their epiphany involved a significant element of constructed learning, in Brett’s case they did this by making connections with others online and discussing these people’s and their own identity with those who they met on that site;

I mean, one of the spaces I’ve met sort of alternative people, trans people, was a wedding forum, like an internet discussion forum about weddings... That’s really weird but there were so many people there and I started talking with people in sort of an LGBT fashion thread or something like that and, and another forum was just general discussion forum... and then, you just kind of make connections with people who seem similar to you even if its not a specific identity thing... (Brett, Sept 2012)

Brett’s interactions on a website about weddings resulted in them constructing and making connections relating to building up an idea of their own trans identity in which there were individuals in that particular forum who were also trans. Here a gradual construction of their identity began as part of interactions between these individuals online, given the nature of the website, the common issue between them being marriage and weddings.

Finally the bottom left-hand section of the relational space, \textit{introducing}, is exemplified by Fiona’s experience. Fiona reported having no prior indication of any kind about her gender identity but was introduced to others like her by a friend who took her to a venue frequented by lots of other trans women.

Yes, I kind of took one step and then I kind of took ten steps, yes I sort of put one foot into the trans scene and very quickly I was 10 steps into it. I didn’t really have second thoughts about it. (Fiona, Jan 2011)

\textsuperscript{42} Some non-binary people often use the pronouns ‘they’, ‘their’, ‘them’ and even ‘themselves’ please see the glossary for further details.
Her rapid epiphany indicates that she came to identify very quickly as a trans woman to the extent that she reports finding it difficult to return to the all-male gay venues that she had previously frequented, as she no longer identified as a man. In her case she reported very vividly identifying one specific moment when she came to identify as transgender. Her orientation was clearly towards the future as she became part of a new social group of these trans women in similar circumstances very quickly, transitioning to living as a woman. The relations in this instance are pedagogic since someone else introduced her to the concept of transgender people and it was something about which she had no idea prior to this. Indeed she clearly reported that before she came to identify as a trans woman she identified as a gay man.

What needs to be understood at this point is how these different modes of Epiphany should not necessarily be regarded as independent of each other, indeed in many cases reported here it appears that more than one mode is manifest in the experiences of some of the participants. For example Brett’s experience of constructing mode has similarities with Fiona’s experience in introducing mode.

One of the first things which needs to be considered with regard to these different modes of epiphany is how much more complex and diverse the process of coming to identify as transgender would appear than one might have assumed. Indeed, it has been a regular complaint by trans people, since the 1980s, in particular those who are transitioning physiologically, that they are expected by gatekeepers to conform to a small number of ideal types, if only for the duration of gatekeeping interviews (Stone 1991). Indeed in some areas of academic study of trans people, diversity of experience within the group appears often to have been overlooked or erased (Spade 2003). Yet if this much variation in experience is evident from only one aspect of trans people’s lives then perhaps academic
models, whether they be sociological, psychological, feminist, medical, anthropological or philosophical, need to start taking greater account this evident diversity, particularly from the crucial perspective of different life experiences relating to cultural processes affecting the way trans people come to understand that they are trans. There has been a tendency to regard trans people’s experiences of life as homogenous (eg Raymond 1979, Blanchard 1989), for a number of reasons including administrative ones (Spade 2011 p138). However this can result in the tendency to erase the different subjectivities and experiences within the group ‘transgender’.

Already the experiences of transgender people vary widely according to intersecting variables such as class, race, age, cultural background and other factors. If we start to understand that one of the principal life experiences that most trans people experience in common is also quite varied, one can see that the homogenising effect of external gazes may have serious consequences in terms of the erasure and marginalisation of individuals and clusters of people within this group. In contrast when trans activist and scholar Leslie Feinberg introduced and popularised the term ‘transgender’ (Feinberg 1992), his intentions were neither to homogenise nor erase differences or undermine diversity but to promote solidarity between different groups of trans people. What might be taken from this, and other elements of research and data forming part of this thesis, is an understanding of the complexity of experience and subjectivities within the group ‘transgender’.

Thus far I have examined data relating to the way different participants have experienced epiphany. This has produced an organisational language with which to discuss and analyse these experiences. What is evident is that there are different ways that trans people come to identify as trans, in terms of their experience of epiphany, but what happens after this process is also significant and varied. None of the participants simply left it at that, all participants acted on the experience of epiphany; there were many
different responses and different ways of engaging with their newly
constituted or newly discovered identities, and they all subsequently
expressed a desire to move their lives forward. All participants needed to
go further and find out more, engage more with groups of trans people or
with those around them, obtain support and develop their newly-
understood gender statuses.

The next section constructs, from the data, a picture of how different trans
people moved beyond their initial experience of epiphany and, as a result,
started to learn more about what it means to be transgender.

4.2 Self learning

This analysis develops a new schema, one characterised as self learning
and is summarised in the relational space in fig. 4.2 below. Here there are
two axes, the first of which is characterised as discourse on the vertical
scale. This characterises the mode of engagement in the learning as either
localising or generalising. The horizontal characterises the social strategy
as either interactive or non-interactive. In the vertical scale the localising
mode is characterised as discourse referring predominantly to the
individual’s own circumstances and the generalising one is refers to
engaging largely beyond one’s own immediate circumstances to a wider
understanding of trans people’s situations.

The localising discourse is exemplified by the way Melissa describes her
response, after epiphany;

INT: So did you go in the chat room...
M: Yeah.
INT: How did that help out?
M: Yeah, it helped out; Felt comfortable. [...] there’s rooms where people talk to you if you’re having issues... (*Melissa, Jan 2011*)

It is characterised as an example of localising discourse because Melissa is discussing her feelings online and obtaining support in that way from an online forum. She is focussed on dealing with her own feelings as opposed to anything beyond that, at that stage.

The generalising discourse is exemplified by the way that Wesley started to research different medical pathways;

...obviously the pathway is more kind of binary oriented, but I’ve researched it and researched it and researched it. (*Wesley, April 2013*)

Significantly the way Wesley seems to be approaching learning about his identification is through the taxonomic. Wesley’s gender dysphoria, coupled with social non-acceptance from family appears to be causing him some strain, to the extent that he needs to validate his identification with reference to external or established criteria or expertise. This will be examined in greater detail in chapter 9. Here Wesley is engaging with a more generalising discourse, looking at more general material, which would enable him to make a decision about his future, so he has looked at ‘the pathway’ by which he means the surgical pathway, in spite of not actually having come to any definite conclusions about what he wants, if anything at all, in this sense.

The horizontal binary scale is characterised as social strategies, which are defined as either *interactive* or *non-interactive*. An interactive strategy is one where there is engagement with others, for example Steve;

I decided I needed to speak to other people so I went on this forum, which I just ranted constantly at for, like, three months. (*Steve, Jan 2011*)
Steve was interacting on one of the forums set up for young trans people to interact with each other, he has clearly decided that speaking to others is important. Indeed his engagement in online forums was so intense that he needed to retake his second year at university because he had spent so much time and energy on these interactions. In contrast Harry’s learning strategy was almost entirely non-interactive;

Definitely online and reading people’s blogs, mainly reading people's blogs because I didn’t know any trans people at the time. I didn’t go to any youth groups, but found out about gendered intelligence quite quickly, but I think I was scared to go to the groups, so I didn’t... (*Harry June 2015*)

Harry reports not needing the kind of online interaction that Steve describes engaging in, his learning was mostly restricted to watching the large number of online videos that young trans men have posted online, of the kind explored by Raun (2016), for him this was sufficient at that stage.

This characterisation of these two variables enables us to construct the *Modes of Self Learning* schema in fig 4.2 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse</th>
<th>Interactive</th>
<th>Non-interactive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Localising</td>
<td>Supporting</td>
<td>Modelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalising</td>
<td>Responding</td>
<td>Informing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Fig 4.2 Modes of Self Learning*

In terms of the four strategies produced by these two axes, in the top left corner *supporting* constitutes a localising discourse in combination with an interactive learning mode. Here support is obtained, usually from others in a similar position or at a similar stage in their journeys. Phil’s experience was an example of this;
I remember joining it [Mermaids Children’s Forum] and one of my oldest friends, who I'm still very close friends with, I met via that, er... and I talked to him a lot on MSN, and I... I don't remember what we talked about, I can't remember that, cos it was a long time ago... (Phil, Jan 2011)

Phil joined a forum and made one particularly good friend, someone in a similar position to him, with whom he then interacted on MSN online chat, where they engaged in mutual support. This constituted his main initial support, from someone in a similar position and at a similar stage in his journey.

Moving clockwise round the relational space *modelling* is a mode exemplified by Harry, described in the quotation from him above; watching online videos by other trans boys or young trans men. His engagement with existential learning was entirely non-interactive, something enabled by online video sites. It can also be characterised as predominantly a localising discourse in that the YouTubers predominantly (although not entirely) spoke about their own personal experiences (Raun 2016 p126). These are described by Raun as sometimes including an element of interactivity, in which however Harry did not join, simply looking and listening was enough for him.

*Informing*, in the bottom-right corner of the relational space is again non-interactive but here is characterised as constituting a *generalising* discourse. Harry's engagement with online videos of other trans men and boys were non-interactive but localising, in that they tended to focus much more on the personal as opposed to wider issues. *Informing* on the other hand, is characterised as involving finding out from static, non-interactive information sites, such as the GIRES\(^43\) website or from the NHS website, or

\(^{43}\) www.Gires.com
various blogs, Caroline describes how they explored these kind of sites in great detail,

Er so, there’s a lot on the internet, its got things on all levels, whether you are just coming to terms and want, sort of... basic information or want sort of... more advanced philosophy sort of things. So I do spend a lot of my time reading lots of bits and pieces. *(Caroline, Jan 2012)*

*Informing* is distinguished from *modelling* in the sense that it tends to include wider issues, including trans politics and activism, in comparison with *modelling* which tends to be more specific to the individual broadcaster’s subjectivity, although not always so. This is not to suggest that the video format cannot also be an *informing* mode of existential learning or that blog posts are not necessarily engaged in modelling, the mode of learning is important here, as opposed to the type of media. The material that Caroline and Phil cited, such as blogs like Binary Subverter44, Questioning Transphobia45, Sarah Brown’s Blog46, and books like Whipping Girl (Serano 2007) contrast with the Youtube videos described by Harry. Whilst the former are aimed at generating a more general level debate about trans and non-binary people, the latter tend towards a more localised understanding that shares individual experiences and which do not usually attempt to make significant generalisations beyond the individual’s own circumstances and experience.

It is significant that Harry and Phil seemed to take very different approaches to learning in this respect. While Harry reported relying entirely on modelling, as his means of coming to understand about himself, Phil employed a much wider range of learning strategies but in particular seemed to recruit the *informing* mode most often, something that Caroline, Wesley, Miles and Hannah did also. It seems that this latter group

44 https://binarysubverter.wordpress.com  
46 http://www.sarahlizzy.com/blog/
took a more general, possibly even theoretical view of trans people, whereas Harry was more interested in how to transition safely personally. Indeed until he joined a trans youth group much later, he had not actually interacted with any other trans people either online or offline. Raun (2016 p19) characterises the nature of this kind of vlogging in highly personal terms, in some cases reporting how vloggers usually regard their videos as a ‘mirror’, a kind of tool with which to construct their new identities, as well as functioning as a kind of personal diary. This is not to suggest that all their content is entirely localised in this way, there are some elements of more general discussion; for example Raun reports how one video blogger – Diamond, talks about other issues, in this case particularly racism, in more general terms and about the different responses to white and black trans women’s vlogs. However the content of these blogs is characterised as predominantly personal and localised. In contrast Questioning Transphobia is described as featuring predominantly generalised content about trans politics, about, for example issues such as trans pathologisation and sterilisation in Sweden, which were current at the time of interview.

By contrasting the learning strategies recruited by Phil and Harry, they seem to have very different life experiences in terms of how they transitioned and came to identify. Harry reports experiencing no significant doubts about his transitioning whereas Phil expressed very significant levels of doubt to the extent that he chose to study a degree in philosophy, partly to enable him to justify himself to himself. In contrast Harry reported little doubt and transitioned much more rapidly than Phil. However that is not the only difference; Harry identifies as binary, he is a man, whereas Phil identifies as non-binary but presents himself in public as a binary male. Phil therefore lives in ‘stealth’ (where only those closest to him know he is transgender) whereas, at the time of interviewing, Harry was openly transgender to all who knew him. In addition, while Phil identifies as a gay man, Harry described his sexuality as ‘pansexual’, and at the time of
interview he was in a relationship with a young woman. The difference between these two participants in terms of historical timescale is also worth noting; while the ages at which they experienced epiphany were not dissimilar Phil was 12 and Harry was 14, Phil experienced epiphany at least 6 years before Harry did crucially, and at a time when there was less awareness of trans people amongst the general population.

While Harry reports having his gender identity reaffirmed by his peers in school, Phil experienced the opposite; when he attempted to present as non-binary he was invariably gendered as a girl by other pupils. Phil has had to compromise in terms of his identity, presenting as male, while identifying as non-binary, Harry has not had to do this. Yet while their paths, experiences, identities, challenges and levels of doubt were different, both have engaged in responding, as a learning strategy, in different ways.

In the bottom right corner, a generalising discourse in interactive mode is characterised as responding. This mode of existential learning is about interacting with one’s environment and the world beyond oneself. While this might not be regarded by some as constituting a learning strategy per se, it is regarded, for the purposes of this thesis, as applied learning. In a sense, almost every participant can be regarded as engaging in an element of activism, in that they needed to change the world around them, on various levels, from the attitudes of their immediate families to promoting wider social acceptance on a general level. This is where activism happens, where trans people take some of the things they have learnt and, as they experience the problems caused by cis-mythologisation and transphobia, they push back and start to change it, including by educating others. It is a learning strategy that applies what is learnt and uses it to change the world. In some ways simply existing as a visible trans person is to be engaging in responding, as Jake reported,
I work at this bar and they have a queer night and none of them had ever met a trans person, and I was like ‘Oh my God!’ so I was on the crew and I was the first trans person they’d had on this crew and like that was a few months ago and they came up to me and they go ‘You know, You’re really nice!’ and I was like, ‘Yeah I am’ and they went ‘No but we’ve never met a trans person before and we’re all really proud of you and we’ve really, really questioned our own privilege in being cis, and it’s really forced us to question that…’ (Jake, May 2014)

In addition to this Jake became more widely involved in the campaign to prevent a trans asylum-seeker from Guatemala from being deported47, as well as working as part of a queer theatre group.

Participants in this study did not always recruit these four modes of existential learning in isolation, they combined different modes and different media. One of the elements of this schema however, that stands out in particular, is responding. From the data presented by participants it can be regarded as a current feature of their lives as trans people that bureaucratic or procedural systems, designed for cisgender people, often fail to accommodate trans people. There are plenty of examples of where trans people, in the course of mundane daily interactions with systems and individuals have needed to make small changes as they interact. Many small changes are introduced through reactive engagement with social, cultural and bureaucratic systems. An example of this would be Shane’s response to administrative unwillingness to put his new name on his degree certificate;

The only people I had trouble with was the student office when I was changing my name on my records, and they kept telling me my deed poll wasn’t legal and I was saying, ‘It’s a deed poll, it’s legal and it’s signed by one of your lecturers, it’s her signature witnessing it. What more do you need, call her and check.’ (Shane Jan 2011)

47 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/02/05/fernanda-milan-transgender-denmark-asylum_n_2622255.html
In a sense this might be characterised as a kind of ‘debugging’, deliberately alluding to debugging in the domain of computer programming. Here it is a case of rectifying a bureaucratic process on a local level as it becomes apparent. It is reactive and locally focused, but it is productive, in that the likelihood is that, in Shane’s university, the system will function more smoothly for other trans students in the future. It is important to regard this as a kind of activism, as it represents probably the type of activism most engaged in by trans people.

In a different way Phil’s extended argument with an individual who had, through reading transphobic material presented as ‘feminism’, acquired the misapprehension that trans people are the enemies of cisgender feminists, represents a slightly different example of this.

...the Radical Feminist blog he was reading, and He was saying ‘Germaine Greer... my girlfriend said read Germaine Greer.’ And I was, ‘Mmmmmwell she's got some good things to say but a bit transphobic.’ And he's like ‘Oh but aren't Trans people inherently anti Radical Feminist?’ And I took like an hour explaining to him why that isn't the case. (Phil Jan 2011)

Although he is not altering any particular bureaucratic system, he is changing people’s opinions by challenging deliberate misrepresentations distributed by those who want to harm trans people. Again it is important to recognise this responding as a form of activism, because it contributes to wider cultural change. It should also be recognised that, as Jake reports, the act of simply living ones daily life and being known as transgender can also represent a form of activism in itself. Visible trans people can make it easier for other trans people to subsequently come out and be themselves, and can even precipitate an epiphany. Steve acknowledged this when, as a result of transitioning and needing to retake a year of his degree course at university, he found that acceptance amongst students in his subsequent year cohort was much higher than he expected because there was already a young trans woman in that group.
Weirdly enough there’s a trans girl in my year group who came out before they met me so they’re all OK with it... so it was very convenient for me. (Steve, Jan 2011)

An example of more proactive local engagement was when Steve and this trans woman student at their university then worked together to create an information leaflet for trans students and make it available for them through their students union. Caroline also engaged in this when they organised a few events for Trans Awareness Week at their university, Jake’s engagement with a local queer theatre group which is trans inclusive also represents an example of this kind of proactive local activism.

Jake’s, and others’ engagement with activism for the relatively high-profile international campaign to save a Guatemalan trans refugee, which he mentions above, is an example of more general activism, and came in response to the government’s initial decision to return her to Guatemala, where she would have likely faced death at the hands of the police. He took part in an international campaign to obtain refugee status for her. Another example of this was Caroline getting involved in trans activism in London responding to the Daily Telegraph for publishing a transphobic article.

More proactive, general campaigning tends to be the preserve of organised groups with particular aims in mind; for example some campaign for better representation of trans people in the media, mostly on a national level, others campaign for legal rights for trans people. There is also a tendency on occasion however, for trans people to get involved in ad hoc activism of this type. An example of this would be like the campaign in Denmark, referred to above, one to have trans woman moved from a male to a

48 For example; www.tmw.org
female prison⁴⁹. Although an online petition website was used, the organisation, including demonstrations, press releases, social media campaigns and making representations to the relevant government minister, were put together on an ad hoc basis.

What is significant from this analysis, is how almost every participant so far has engaged in some kind of local activism, mostly of the kind characterised in the example above, as debugging. Many have participated in other types of activism as well, up to and including general level campaigning. Even the one participant who was living in ‘stealth’ (ie with most people around him not knowing he is trans) engaged in localised forms of activism. And even though he was still unsure about whether he identified as genderqueer or as a trans man Wesley was engaged in, as yet unsuccessful, attempts to get his mother to accept him. If we accept that coming out to parents, and trying to convince them to accept you as trans constitutes activism, then most trans people can be considered activists, although this type of ‘activism’, attempting to persuade one’s parents to accept one’s new identity is often the one, which meets the most resistance and presents the biggest challenge.

Given that trans people have emerged as a more clearly identified social group in recent years it is probably not surprising that such a level of activism is revealed through the data, even from participants who would not describe themselves as activists. Although some laws that protect trans people have been enacted, for example the Equality Act (2010) in the UK, that does not mean that all administrative systems and cultural processes have also subsequently been changed. Consequently it is not unreasonable to expect that trans people will continue to encounter local instances where their needs and rights are erased, overlooked or excluded at that level. That this is being reported by participants suggests that there is still

some way to go before trans people achieve the levels of acceptance and inclusion they should be able to expect, and that erasure of trans people can be regarded as still, to an extent at least, constituting an ongoing cultural process. However it also suggests that trans people feel more confident and able to engage in this kind of activism despite sometimes feeling exhausted by it, as illustrated by Jake,

I: Do you find you’re always having to explain what trans is to people...?
M: Constantly, It’s a constant...and it just kills you, you know? And you’re just like... ‘OK Google it!’
N: Yes
M: Then we’ll talk...just fucking Google it...! (Jake, May 2014)

It is, of course, significant that trans people still have to do this and this data suggests that the apparent cultural acceptance or tolerance of trans people, whilst greater than only a few years ago, still lacks depth and depth of understanding of the implications of inclusion of trans people on a practical level. That individual trans people are still effectively called upon to ‘represent’ trans people as a group can also result in stresses and strains on them in everyday situations, and Jake’s impatience is evidence of this as is Phil’s decision to live in stealth.

There are a number of significant issues for analysis which need to be elaborated arising from an examination of this data. The next chapter and the subsequent one present a further analysis of this data employing the organisational language introduced in the relational spaces above. In this chapter the different approaches and strategies of social interaction will be analysed and the implications or the notion of ‘authenticity’ discussed.
Chapter 5. ‘Authenticity’ in question.

This chapter begins with an examination of the way participants organise their social lives as a consequence of coming out and experiencing epiphanies as trans people. It raises the issue of how we regard people as ‘authentic’ and what constitutes authenticity, in a wider sense. Elaborating the ideas in this instance will require reference an organisational language (Dowling 2009 p13) that will emerge from an analysis of the data.

The notion of authenticity is relatively rarely referred to in scholarly literature however it is touched upon by Strauss (1959), Goffman (1959) and by Butler (2004) who asserts that there is no doer behind the deed, that, in effect people are the roles they play and what we might constitute as their identities are in effect different roles being played based on their various social statuses. The notion of authenticity may be regarded as related to this, although this relationship may not necessarily be a straightforward as one might expect. This reflects Goffman’s theory of self-presentation that uses a stage/drama metaphor to describe the way he analyses social interaction. His constitution of a dramaturgical analysis of interaction posited that everyone is an actor playing multiple culturally-established roles. He took the metaphor further however and described a stage, where public performances were situated in front of an audience, and a backstage area, behind the scenes, which constituted the private. The public-private is significant for understanding the multiple social interaction strategies of participants in this study.

Strauss’s social psychological approach foregrounds the importance of identity in social interaction, and, in particular he focuses on the significance of multiple identities, including those which affect interactions in ways he characterises as much less scripted. He also highlights the significance of naming when it comes to identity. Here his description of
the naming process, in terms of inanimate objects, is important, as he argues that the way something is named is revealing as much and possibly more about the classifier than the classified;

If you do not agree with your neighbor’s classification, this may only signify that you have a somewhat or wholly different basis for drawing symbolic circles around things.

The way in which things are classed together reveals graphically as well as symbolically, the perspectives of the classifier. (p22)

The issue here however is not with the act of naming, or classifying inanimate objects however, but with naming and classifying sentient beings. Unlike a solid object or an abstract concept, a human being has an opinion on how they define themselves. So, to use a metaphor relating to colour; a disagreement over whether, say, a given colour should be regarded as ‘turquoise’ or ‘ultramarine’ can generally be regarded as of interest only to those doing the classifying. However the way human beings are classified is of interest to the individual or individuals subject to that classification. In the academic arena, in particular this can be regarded as an ethical issue, and the description or grouping of an individual in a way that is different from the way they regard themselves becomes much less straightforward. However the way he suggests that the process of naming can be regarded as revealing of those doing the naming may be significant and data relating to this may be regarded as of value to the sociologist.

One the most important assertions made by Strauss was of the importance of identity for engaging in social interaction. This includes multiple identities, identities not constituted in direct relation to the situation at hand and intersecting identities. He illustrates this by suggesting (1959 p74) that there were 25 different possibilities for status-based interactions between people with different gender and professional identities in a hospital; male/female and physician/non-physician, presenting patients, nurses and doctors with multiple different, possibilities for interactions,
only some of which can be described as straightforwardly pre-scripted in this context.

In addition Strauss also refers to the ways in which identities are transformed or changed through various processes. However here these transformations are ones that tend to be both foreseen and which carry a recognised script for the moments of transformation and subsequently; from unmarried to married, from unqualified to qualified for example. These transformations cannot be regarded in the same way as transitions that are usually both unscripted and unforeseen, such as coming out as transgender. However his observation that the way identity evolves, while only one way of regarding how people are viewed as changing, (as described in Chapter 3, Section 3.4.4) is useful in that he also suggests that the idea of identity development as a straight-line process might be regarded as a myth, and a myth that may have considerable social impact.

To return to an analysis of the data, the ways that participants Brett and Phil construct their social interaction are very different and constitute important points of departure for further elaboration. Both identify as non-binary people but both have organised their lives in very different ways with regard to social interaction. The ways they have organised their lives additionally bring to the fore questions of authenticity; and what we mean by this term.

Brett socialises only within their specific group of friends, a group of people they describe using the generic term ‘queer’.

I have this bubble I’m in, I do spend quite a lot of time alone, by myself but when I do socialise I socialise with people who are the same as me who have similar identities and, I forget, to be honest, I forget how people... how people... I come across occasionally how, I guess ‘Oh that’s how people think...?’ And it’s absurd, it’s weird for me to come across them but then I do have problems because, I don’t know how to... how to be normal, how to even appear normal and then at some
specific, for a job interview, I know how you do, how you do a job interview and then you present yourself as something specific but then outside of that kind of specific thing, I don’t have a fucking clue. (Brett, Sept 2012)

They have specifically chosen to socialise only with people who accept and understand their identity, and who understand about non-binary people. Instead of changing the way they present to the world, they restrict their interaction only to a specific group, a group of people who accept their identification. In this instance the numbers of people in groups that fit these criteria, are very small, so their options for socialisation with similar people are from this perspective very restricted.

In contrast Phil’s main social interaction strategy has resulted in him adopting a position of what is often described within trans communities as ‘stealth’\(^50\), meaning that, apart from those very close to him, such as his family and his partner, no-one he encounters in the course of day-to-day social interaction knows that he is transgender.

...when I tried to assert a genderqueer identity when I was about 17 it was, it was like... people would just gender me female, it wasn't like they recognised that identity, so that's what I mean when I say there's no... that its not socially possible. It is maybe in some very niche queer spaces but they aren't where I would want to spend my entire life living in because I find those spaces actually quite irritating for a whole bunch of reasons...

...people don't know about me but that's the safety that I have in that, and that's in part, because I have massive passing privilege and... I'm incredibly privileged in some ways being able to access that... (Phil, Jan 2011)

Despite identifying as masculine non-binary Phil presents as male in everyday life, and reports that he considers himself to be regarded as male by those he encounters in the quotidian. For him his stealth is multilevel, because he is not merely presenting, and apparently being understood as,

\(^{50}\) When a trans person is not known by those around them to be trans. See Glossary.
a man despite being assigned female at birth, but also that he identifies as
non-binary but presents as binary gendered.

What is evident here are two different modes of social interaction which
are differentiated by levels of personal adaptation to group norms and
extent to which the individual selects the group to fit with their identity.
For the purpose of this analysis this variable is characterised as group selectivity. Group selectivity can then be regarded as either high group selectivity or low group selectivity and constitutes the vertical scale of the relational space in fig 5.1 below. In the case of Brett, they are very highly selective of who they interact with; they exclude the possibility of socialising with almost everyone else. This is characterised, in the relational space below, as constituting high group selectivity. At the same time Brett reports that they do not need to adapt their own presentation or gender identity to any significant extent to fit in with their group’s expectations. This variable constitutes the horizontal binary scale of this relational space and is characterised as adaptation to group, which can be regarded as either high or low. By socialising in the space at the intersection of low adaptation to group and high group selectivity they do not need to adapt their own gender identity or gender presentation, instead they have been very selective about the people with whom they socialise. This has been characterised, in the lower left corner of the relational space in fig 5.1, below, as compartmentalising.

In contrast Phil has adapted his gender identity and to an extent his presentation in order to be able to socialise comfortably with a much wider range of people. He presents as cisgender male, something his double mastectomy has made possible for him. He is engaging in a very high level of adaptation to group while his group selectivity is low; he does not appear to restrict those with whom he interacts socially to a significant extent (or at least not beyond what might be expected for someone of his
class, race and age would normally do). This is characterised here as 

*masking*, in the top right corner of the relational space

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Selection</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Adaptation to Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Accentuating</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Compartmentalising</td>
<td>Harmonising</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Fig 5.1 Social Interaction Strategies*

The top left corner, characterised by *low group selectivity* and *low adaptation to group*, is characterised as *accentuating* and is exemplified by Samira’s experience. In school, she openly but tacitly expressed her gender identity;

> ...the head of year and the deputy head of school they were very happy for me expressing my gender identity, they were very for that so I can’t knock staff members for, you know, you can wear the make-up, you can do your hair like that, I can’t knock that... *(Samira, May 2015)*

However here she stood out as gender non-conforming, and this seems to have affected the way she subsequently approaches social interaction. Since leaving school Samira interacts socially with a wide range of different groups, as does Phil, but openly expresses her gender identity as a trans woman and as a consequence regularly encounters negative comments and experiences, to which she has developed a variety of defensive responses;

> ...people do give me abuse and I do give them abuse back, it depends on the predicament, I’m just like ‘Oh shut the fuck up...!’ My favourite one is ‘I’m more of a man than you’ll ever be and I’m more of a woman than you’ll ever get.’

> ‘Why are you wearing eyeliner?’ and I was like ‘Why do you smell of BO?’
...it all depends on how it comes across and if they’re nasty. I’ve had some vile, vile things said to me. You know I’ve had things asked that come across as offensive so I, you know, ‘What you’re asking is transphobic.’ And they say ‘Oh my God I’m so sorry I didn’t mean to offend you...’ I say ‘No, no, no, you haven’t offended me but you’ve got to be careful who you say that to.’ (Samira, May 2015)

She describes how this has helped her build up a thick skin and become less sensitive about problems caused by intolerance and the ignorance about trans people on the part of people she meets;

You do build up this defence thing quickly, coming back with something to say do you know what I mean but... I dunno... it’s exhausting but I get angry and it’s fucking frustrating, and I’m a very pissy person, know what I mean? But you build up a thick skin. Some of the things that are said to me now, if they were said to me 5 years ago, I would be devastated. Now, ‘Oh shut the fuck up, I don’t care...!’ ” (Samira, May 2015)

Her mode of social interaction is characterised as *accentuating* because she does not hide her identity as a trans person, nor does she specifically restrict the people with whom she interacts, which is almost certainly why she reports more examples of people misgendering her or saying hurtful things. Her social interaction mode is consequently a combination of *low adaptation to group and low group selectivity*.

The bottom right corner of the relational space is constituted as *harmonising*. This interaction mode is characterised by both *high adaptation to group* as well as *high group selectivity*. An example of this is Fiona’s mode of social interaction, which is to associate with trans women in the same position as her, doing sex work;

The ones who are trans are basically in the same position as me; they all have trouble with the NHS or they might have actually succeeded on the NHS, most of them are working girls, they’re kind of similar to me really... (Fiona, Jan 2011)
Here her inclusion in this group is contingent on being like all the others, while at the same time group selectivity is very high, it is a very specific group. This is characterised as different from ‘compartmentalising’ in that group members need to adapt to the group as well as the group being selective, in Brett’s case the group is formed around those who identify differently, but accept different genders and sexualities, whereas Fiona’s group is constituted as a group of people whose experiences and lives are similar, people who have the same outlook and/or are doing the same job and who, consequently have an affinity in this respect, and who have formed a friendship group from finding themselves in the same situation. In effect Brett’s compartmentalising strategy is an affinity group, based on people who are accepting, and may indeed celebrate it and which appears to include a wide diversity of individuals. Fiona’s harmonising group is a group of people who have very similar experiences, as opposed to beliefs, and consequently from a gender perspective can be characterised as much more homogenous.

These modes of social interaction often appear to be recruited in multiple different ways by different people. For example although Phil’s main social interaction strategy is masking, he also, occasionally, interacts with a small group of accepting friends, in much the same way as Brett does;

I definitely seek to interact with trans people for specific reasons, or people who are sympathetic like... I have some friends who I’ve had for a long time, the friend of mine I’m seeing tonight she’s like... she’s been my friend for a long time and I knew her via [name of group] so she knows me she knows my history and we’ve talked about it a lot and we... she’s friends with lots of my other trans friends from that website and she’s really good on it. (Phil, Jan 2011)

In this instance Phil’s quotidian social interaction strategy is characterised as employing a masking strategy, but he also has a small group of friends with whom he interacts in a way that is similar to Brett’s compartmentalising strategy. So it is important to remember that these
constitute related ideal types of strategy rather than necessarily fixed modes of organising social interaction for all (trans) people. Indeed it is likely that these strategies will be combined in multiple different ways including through online social networking environments, where multiple different interaction strategies may be used by the same people, and for different reasons. There are already examples of Phil using a compartmentalising strategy while maintaining, for everyday interaction, masking. Indeed the development of online social networking has made it possible to maintain different modes of interaction simultaneously if need be or if desired.

In terms of the two interaction strategies represented by the accentuating-harmonising diagonal it is argued that by engaging in an accentuating strategy it may be possible for these to create a more accepting atmosphere. To an extent Hannah’s need to come out whilst in further education college may have helped generate this kind of accepting atmosphere.

...but that [accidental misgendering] only lasted 3 or 4 months. I don’t get misgendered at all now or even wrong named no one kicked up a fuss, no one caused, no one ... I was expecting someone to confront me and no-one did I didn’t have any problems at all. (Hannah, May 2014)

In a sense here, Hannah’s transition, as a very public affair from the perspective of her fellow students, can be regarded as constituting her as authentic at least from one perspective. So these different interaction strategies can be regarded as being recruited by, or imposed on, the same people in different social environments both online and offline. What may also worth investigating is the way different strategies are employed at different times in people’s lives, and in a sense the issue for most young trans people is that they can be, to a significant extent, compelled to employ certain types of socialisation strategy while they are transitioning,
which they might not otherwise have used, in particular the *accentuating* strategy seems to be unavoidable, since coming out in a school, college or work environment probably invariably involves this mode of interaction by default, indeed coming out in any situation, even to one’s family can be regarded as having to adopt an *accentuating* strategy. Of course sometimes external factors restricting discrimination and other anti-social behaviour towards trans people are often at play in an effort to enforce tolerance, which may explain why Hannah had few problems when she transitioned mid-course in a further education college. This also constitutes a good argument for inclusion policies in institutions, policies that oppose discrimination against minority groups such as trans people. The act of coming out, in relation to social interaction strategies is something that will be returned to later in the chapter.

So one of the issues arising here may be regarding whether Phil’s or Brett’s mode of interaction can be regarded as most ‘authentic’ and here there are a variety of perspectives to look at this. Phil, by masking his transgender status was able to interact with others in a way that meant he was not regarded as ‘the trans person’, something that might skew others’ views of him. This has allowed him to engage with others as if he were a cisgender male. Brett on the other hand was socialising only in spaces where they were accepted and could be completely open about their developing and fluid gender identity and sexuality. Their social circle did however represent a very high level of group selection suggesting they felt it difficult to be themself outside this group. The way one regards ‘authenticity’ is probably crucial here and it suggests that, once he had come to a kind of equilibrium in gender terms, Phil was able to bracket or set that element of his life aside for the purposes of social interaction. Brett on the other hand reports still being engaged in the process of establishing their gender identity, one that according to them, may never end. Consequently it is possible to argue that Brett needs to socialise in spaces that enable them to explore their identity more fully because they
have not established a social equilibrium in their life, and, in contrast Phil does not need this, at least not to the same extent. What is interesting here is that, while Phil is not ‘out’ in the course of most of his social life he is out to his partner and he still retains a small group of friends who are separate from his everyday life, who are aware of him as a trans person, accepting of him and with whom he is able to discuss issues relating to his gender identity.

In Phil’s case he maintains ‘stealth’ so that most people around him do not know he is trans; he is regarded and accepted as a cisgender man. This enables him to socialise within any group and not be regarded as different or as ‘representing’ trans people. It enables him to conceal one element of his life and engage in social contact which foregrounds other elements of his identity. He explains his reasoning for this;

I guess like... to be seen as what you are and I think it comes back to the issue of being out and not being out and its like... what does it mean to be seen as what you are? And it’s... If I come out to a random person... and... they know my history, then I don’t feel like I’m visible for them for myself, I feel like I’m visible as... all of their assumptions about trans people. (Phil, Jan 2011)

Phil’s argument here can be regarded as an argument for what might be termed ‘masking authenticity’. Because trans people are still relatively rare and a lot of people don’t know, or don’t know they know, one, then he regards it as likely that he would be in the position of ‘representing’ trans people or being regarded as a kind of curiosity, someone who is subject to endless questions about what identifying as trans means, or about specific issues that are current relating to trans people. The way Jake experienced this is illustrative. Initially he was happy to be ‘the trans person’ in a particular situation and described how he was appreciated by those he worked with, in terms of educating them about what it meant to be trans, including what he described as their own ‘cis privilege’. However reports how he soon became more disenchanted with this accentuating strategy as
he started to feel pressurised by having to answer constant questions, and his response changed. Indeed one of the few times during his transition when he did not need to explain was so remarkable that he described it in quite vivid terms;

I went to see an old family friend, and we were just hanging around and chatting, whatever and they had two kids, one was 13, the other one was 15, and they all had their pronouns sorted, the name sorted, no problem and then… ‘Oh can I use your computer to check my email?’ Or something like that, so I logged in and I went to Google, and the first thing that had been Googled was ‘How to respect my transgender friend…’ Question mark… and I went to the parents and I said, ‘That’s so sweet you did this’, and they said, ‘We didn’t do that...’ and it was one of the kids that had done it, and I didn’t ask any further, it was one of these kids… and at 13 and 15 they didn’t slip up once, not once! (Jake May 2014)

This contrasts with Brett’s mode of organising their social life. Avoiding social interaction anywhere except in specific spaces in which most of the people consider themselves to be ‘queer’ means that they can control these kinds of trans-specific interactions, engaging in them in ways that are meaningful to them and on their own terms. Obviously they need to engage outside these groups with others for work and study, but they tend to regard this as simple economic necessity as opposed to social interaction.

So Brett’s main mode of social interaction can be regarded as very different to Phil’s. Instead of the individual adapting to fit into wider society here the individual is selecting the group that fits in with their identity as a non-binary and polysexual person. Both these modes of interaction can be regarded as authentic, although in different ways. In Brett’s case, compartmentalising enables them to be more authentic in expressing their gender identity to those around them; they do not need constantly to explain themself to others and do not need to alter their actions to fit in with the normative. However the spaces in which they can do this appear
to be quite restricted. In contrast Phil’s mode of social interaction, *masking*, means that he has to conceal both his actual gender identity; that of a masculine non-binary person and his birth assigned gender. However this means that he can interact socially on the same basis as most other people. The risk of identifying as openly transgender, that he will be regarded through a specific gaze, as described above, can be regarded as distracting significantly from other elements of his life, his personality and his interests. Interestingly one factor that is common to both these strategies however is how both Brett’s and Phil’s social interaction strategies mean that they can avoid having to explain themselves, on a basic level, to those around them. The difference between the two is that Brett, if they wish, can talk openly and at any time, about their gender identification, and other issues relating to their identification as trans.

In attempting to understand why these two have engaged in such different social interaction strategies it may be worth considering the stage at which they are on their journeys. Despite being older than Phil, Brett can be regarded as at a much earlier stage in their journey, having only experienced epiphany a relatively short time before data collection, whereas Phil had been aware that he was trans for more than a decade before data collection, during most of which time he had been openly transgender. Here it is useful to refer to the way Caroline deals with responding to similar questions about their gender.

There are sort of short answers, which don’t quite represent me and long answers... where the whole explanation takes a while, that requires quite a lot of background knowledge, but for everyday purposes the ‘Female Spectrum.. I’m happy with that... *(Caroline Jan 2012)*

This recognition that different types of explanation are required in different circumstances is important, and depending on the time available and the audience she is adapting the depth and extent of her explanation.
In some cases she appears to be focusing only on the need to get through the immediate interaction as opposed to explaining her gender identity fully and in detail, something that can be difficult when trying to avoid the ‘wrong body’ narrative, which she rejects;

That’s [the wrong body narrative] such a cliché that is. It should be left in the 50s. I think we could explain things better than that, that’s the sort of thing you would say to a child. (Caroline Jan 2012)

From this it would appear that one of Caroline’s main social interaction strategies can be characterised as accentuating. This can be regarded as revealing one of the tensions regarding trans people’s identification and expression. Some notions of authenticity may require high levels of openness and honesty about oneself and the way one identifies, yet the ability to explain this in the quotidian is restricted, at least by audience and by time. So does the act of limiting one’s explanation of identity to what may be elucidated in one or two sentences to people who have never encountered trans people beyond the pages of tabloid newspapers constitute a denial of authenticity? And what about avoiding being known as a trans person to all but one’s closest friends and family?

The Masking approach recruited by Phil is in direct contrast with the compartmentalising approach recruited by Brett. Brett reports interacting socially almost exclusively in what Phil describes as ‘niche queer spaces’ that Phil reports wishing to avoid. Brett is able to be completely open about the way they identify, identifying as a gender-fluid, non-binary, pansexual person in these spaces because everyone in these social environments has different ‘queer’ identities and/or is familiar with such non-normative identities and subscribes to a culture that accepts different identifications in this context. In this instance the adaptation to group is low but group selection high. At least with respect to gender and sexuality Brett does not regard themself as needing to be anything other than completely honest and open about themself in this respect, when
socialising in this group in spite of their changing identification. This strategy has been characterised as ‘compartmentalising’ because, in most instances at least, it is unlikely that the majority of one’s (social) life could be lived in this kind of social environment. Brett still describes their work environment, which does not appear to require a significant amount of social interaction, and studying part-time for an MA, which does, and they report how interaction in this context contrasted with the niche queer space in which they normally socialise. In particular they describe a Gender Studies module in which their gender identity was erased by the lecturer who seemed to regard ‘Gender Studies’ as effectively ‘Cisgender Women’s Studies’;

...you know I’m all for that I’m all for feminism and women’s rights and everything but she didn’t have... I mean it was very binary, also the feminism was also ‘For Women’, which is not what feminism is about at all. [...] there was no actual space and then I brought something up and then everyone looked at me as if... and then they start talking about something else. [...] Also, kind of talking about say... well... about hate-crime towards transgender people and about gender policing and so on, what you are supposed to look like... and then... It goes on and someone said in the tutorials like there’s nothing like that any more, men are free to work in dresses and no-one’s going to beat them up and I’m like, ‘That’s not a question of your opinion, and it’s not true.’ And, you know we are doing sociology and if someone says in a tutorial that hate-crime doesn’t exist, the lecturer needs to say, ‘Well yeah it does, I wish you were, speaking the truth but you’re not.’ And yeah, and then because it comes close to me it’s not and abstract issue [...] I haven’t had any harassment myself but when I came out as trans I did it in the tutorial where the lecturer was... a feminist lecturer... I did it in that tutorial because I got gendered so much that, she was saying ‘We women...’ and this sort of thing because everyone was women there, there were no guys in the tutorials, so no visible men... (Brett, Sept 2012)

In this instance Brett’s usual socialisation strategy has been supplanted by an accentuating mode where they are standing out, albeit reluctantly, as a consequence of the situation they are in, on this course, not being fully inclusive of transgender people and non-binary people. In that sense they have become what Phil wanted to avoid; being the representative of trans
people in a situation where they are the only (visible) trans person. In this instance it might have been difficult for any trans person to remain silent, even if they had been using masking mode.

What is also evident, from Brett’s transcript above is the social interaction strategy that the Gender Studies lecturer appears to be attempting to adopt; that of harmonising. It appears that she wants the group to be one that features both high adaptation to group and high group selection, by assuming that all those taking the course are women with a binary feminist perspective, and in doing so, creating an atmosphere, in both the DS- and the DS+ which is exclusionary of those who are transgender or non-binary (or indeed cisgender men). It is evident from the data provided by Brett that this not only makes it difficult to discuss trans issues and issues regarding people who identify outside the gender binary, but it also appears to result in unchallenged misconceptions. Thus the harmonising strategy would appear to have the greatest potential to become exclusionary.

The masking interaction strategy however is not usually an option for those in the process of coming out at work, school or in higher education, and in many other situations also. This perhaps explains why only one participant was recruiting this as their main interaction strategy. Obviously it is not a strategy without its risks, one is constantly in the position of potentially being unmasked, and potentially consequently regarded, however unfairly, as a fraud by those in one’s social circle.

Here it can be argued that the moment of coming out, in any situation, whether in school, at work or in the family, the only interaction strategy available is accentuating. Yet individuals attempt to lessen the effects of this by recruiting alliances with similars on a general level, as Caroline did, for example, ‘I sort of sat them down with a load of information and a prepared speech...’ (Caroline Jan 2012) and in so doing was able to
characterise themself as identifying in a similar way to a wider group that, by virtue of constituting an identifiable group can be regarded as having at least an element of legitimacy. Caroline also reported how, when they came out to their sister, their sibling was able to soften the accentuation on Caroline with reference to a popular television programme, ‘I feel Glee had prepared me for this!’

In a completely different way, the moment of coming out, and possibly of epiphany also, for Nikki, in the BBC television documentary discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, this accentuating was also softened. Nikki’s mother was watching a television programme about young trans people when Nikki arrived home, and Nikki stayed to watch it with her,

I was really debating, and out of a mother’s intuition I was really debating whether to allow her to watch this...because I guess I knew deep down inside what was going to happen next. Within 15 minutes you were like ‘that’s me!’ (Nikki’s Mother Theroux Transcript 2015)

Here there is evidence that Nikki’s mother had her suspicions that Nikki might come to identify as trans and it would appear that this situation was her attempt to find out and if necessary help Nikki. So we can regard Nikki’s mother as having set up a situation where although Nikki was going to need to recruit the accentuating strategy, she would also be in the situation of having also set up a virtual alliance of similar people on the television, once again the accentuation was softened by virtue of the presence, on the screen, of people like her.

So it is arguable that attempting to establish different levels of ‘authenticity’ in these instances is inappropriate; authenticity is not necessarily a quality that can be ascribed, quantified or applied in a comparative way. Authenticity in terms of individuals constitutes a value judgement, and in these terms Brett, Phil and the other participants can be regarded as similarly authentic but in different ways. The nature of the
differences between the ways that Brett and Phil interact socially, can, at least partly be ascribed to their different needs with regard to the processes of identification. The term ‘authenticity’ can be regarded as a problematic one to apply to trans people since authenticity is not a value-free term, indeed anti-trans activists have recently sought to deny trans people’s authenticity on the basis of the least known items about them, their chromosomes. These two contrasting examples have been included in order to exemplify how authenticity can be regarded as a loaded term, often constituting a value-judgement imposed externally on the individual or group to which it refers. It can also be considered a contributing element to cis-mythologisation, in that judging authenticity from entirely cisgender perspectives may constitute a delegitimising process; imposing onto every trans person standards of authenticity that can be difficult to meet given the different circumstances in which trans people find themselves. These do not always take into account the kind of social and cultural barriers to gender transition that affect different trans people in multiple diverse ways. This issue will be examined in greater detail in the concluding section of this thesis.

However Phil’s extended search for an identity that he could feel comfortable with as well as in practical terms engage in quotidian social interaction might be regarded as centred on concerns of ‘authenticity’. After attempting to identify as genderqueer, he transitioned and began presenting as male in everyday life and identified as cisgender male to all but his closest relatives and friends, although he still identified as non-binary. His journey to the point where he reports being able to assert a stable gender identity also included a great deal of research and reading academic material in the field of gender studies. In addition he changed his degree course partly as a result of his need to understand the moral and

ethical elements of his transition and justify himself, as he reported having been influenced at some point by radical feminism and trans feminist responses to this. This resulted in quite high levels of doubt for some time, something that only resolved itself when he took account of the practical elements of trying to live as a masculine non-binary person who presents as a man. This constitutes an example of the pragmatic justification strategies discussed in Chapter 8,

I didn't want to have surgery because then I'm fake, counterfeit, not real [...] you know it was, it was internally driven transphobia and I don’t think I've got over that I don't think many people have, I think it’s... I think it’s... probably no one gets over it... (Phil, Jan 2011)

Here this very complex process of arriving at what is for him a stable identity was intimately connected with the notion of authenticity. This included elements of gender theory, philosophy, feminism and other sources involving study of different cultural and academic material relating to gender. Indeed it would appear that Phil’s doubts were manifested as a consequence of a more philosophical engagement with the concept of identifying as transgender as opposed to whether it felt right for him. To this end it is evident that he felt more threatened by discursive delegitimation than by anything else, and although he wanted to avoid entering into any kind of argument he also wanted to be prepared for them;

I don't want to have "scientifically" female said about me and I don't want to speak to these people and I have no, I have no... I don't want to engage with them, I don’t ever want to have the engagement with that group of people and I would have to and it... So for me it's like a safety thing (Phil Jan 2011)

For Phil, it appears that one of the most threatening things for him is discursive delegitimisation, having to argue his own legitimate right to exist. To this end he not only prepared himself with watertight arguments with which to defend himself in the event of someone attempting to do
this, but he also recruited the *masking* social interaction strategy in order
to avoid it. One of the most significant things to infer from this is that he is
referring to a cultural process that delegitimises trans people. By recruiting
the *masking* strategy he has reduced the possibility of that happening and
of him being confronted by someone attempting to delegitimise him
discursively.

Brett’s position would appear to be different. Here they socialise in a
restricted environment of people who recognise and accept each other’s
diverse sexualities and gender identities. For them, the world outside is
quite simply a strange place that they do not fully understand,

> I forget, to be honest, I forget how people... how people... I come
> across occasionally how, I guess...
> “Oh that’s how people think...?” ...and it’s absurd, it’s weird for me to
> come across them but then I do have problems because, I don’t know
> how to... how to be normal, how to even appear normal (Brett Sept
> 2012)

For them, the difference is between the way others perceive the world and
their own subjective view of it. The ‘normal’ view is, for them, just another
way of seeing the world, and no more or no less authentic. By substituting
a ‘new normal’ in a small community of ‘queer’ people, they can be
regarded as participating in an alternative cultural milieu, created
specifically for the purpose of enabling the social interaction of those who
do not fit into wider normative environments because of their sexualities
and gender identities. For Brett, what these people believe seems to be
regarded as largely a matter of indifference. Yet when they experience
problems with the erasure or exclusion of trans people, in the way the
Gender Studies lecturer behaves, as described from the earlier long
quotation, then this is not regarded as any kind of delegitimisation from
their perspective but a problem on the part of the lecturer.
So unlike Phil, Brett appears more prepared to blame any kind of discursive delegitimation on other people’s failings as opposed to a direct threat to delegitimise their life per se. Phil regards his authenticity as something that he needs to defend, while Brett regards others as being in the wrong in the event of anyone saying anything that could be regarded as discursively delegitimising trans people. One of the issues that seems to be raised by this is the way any consideration of the notion of authenticity is affected by the prevailing culture of cis-mythologisation and the effects of transphobia experienced by participants. This is also linked to the different justification strategies discussed in Chapter 8.

So the different ways that trans people recruit different social interaction strategies can be regarded as constituting, at least in part, strategies guided by a desire or a need for authenticity. On an scholarly level we can also see how (de)authentication is deployed for and against trans people, in political efforts to secure or deny trans people human rights, as was elaborated in the ethics section of the Methodology chapter and in the Literature Review.

A good example of a well argued justification strategy aimed at legitimising trans people’s identities as authentic, would be Salamon’s (2010 p5) phenomenological work. It is a well-argued conceptualisation of (trans)gender as a complex interaction between the individual felt sense of self, proprioception and the social/cultural. Recruiting from a wide variety of positions it constitutes a social/psychological/philosophical rationale to explain trans people’s experiences and how they might come to identify. Not only does this allow for a wide range of ways that trans people could be regarded as coming to exist, but it does so in a way that can be regarded as also explaining how cisgender people come to identify in the way they do. This implies that however one comes to identify as a trans person and under whatever influences, it would not be appropriate to assign any level or authenticity or lack thereof, to a particular individual. Brett’s, Phil’s,
Samira’s, Caroline’s and Fiona’s social interaction strategies can be regarded as no more or less authentic than any other. So, when we consider the attribute ‘authenticity’ it is perhaps inappropriate to consider the way one’s social interaction strategies contribute to this.

Salamon arrives at an elegant and credible theorisation to explain transgender identities, which is commensurable with Butler’s (2004) view of gender identification. However the problem with this, is that, like many others, Salamon’s explanation cannot account for the way authenticity is constituted culturally and the way social and the cultural pressures make authenticity problematic for certain people. The way Phil explained how he could live most authentically was by concealing his gender history. However, since this involves concealment, does this result in a lack of authenticity? If one of his friends somehow discovered that he was a trans man, would this make them regard him as less authentic, or would the fact that he had concealed this part of his life from them make them regard him as less authentic? The problem here is the way the notion of authenticity is regarded. Salamon’s arguments cannot, in themselves, be regarded as constituting an authentication of trans identities because of the way the concept of ‘authenticity’ is constituted.

Grazian (2012), in contrast, characterises authenticity as socially constructed, referring to it as something that is performed, indeed he observes the contradictory nature of the notion; ‘Given its socially constructed and thus elusive nature, authenticity itself can never be authentic, but must always be performed, staged, fabricated, crafted or otherwise imagined’ (p192) and ‘During interpersonal encounters, we usually associate authenticity with sincerity and self-transparency. In other words we assume that people are who they are, and that they actually believe what they claim to be true’ (p196). These two observations are of relevance to trans people in that the socially constructed notion of authenticity would appear, in relation to quotidian social interaction, to be
constituted as related to the perception of honesty and candour about who one is. Its socially constructed nature implies that, in terms of social interaction, authenticity needs to be regarded as subject to a number of variables, including the perceptions and beliefs of those making the judgement of authenticity, its prevailing cultural mythologisations as well as the presentation of the individual in question.

So, what may be commonly considered to constitute authenticity may be something that is difficult to achieve, in traditional terms, as a trans person. When Grazian illustrates how authenticity is achieved in media, politics and commercial settings he regards it is a chimera dependent on the construction of largely dishonest imagery in the minds of the public. Imagery achieved by bringing to bear considerable resources onto what can only be described as sophisticated but cynical and dishonest marketing operations, the kind of resources to which most individuals could never have access. Does this mean that the appearance of authenticity needs to be regarded as constructed to the extent that it is the result of the recruitment of material resources to the extent that authenticity can be regarded as a kind of privilege? Phil has described himself as having ‘passing privilege’, yet this is linked to a number of material resources, his ability to afford a double mastectomy, which permits his performative or tacit expression of gender, and his ability to relocate which permits him explicitly to present as a man to those around him also. Yet it would also be arguable that Hannah experienced no problems with fellow students and college personnel despite appearing to change from a man to a woman mid-way through the course. Perhaps her honesty was respected as an authenticator in that context, in a way that Salamon’s construction of a complex, but very well-constituted argument about body image and proprioception would not have done.

There are issues here that are raised by the different social interaction strategies employed by participants. Is Phil, predominantly employing the
masking strategy, more likely to be viewed as authentic because he can pass as his identified gender in most situations, so his presentation most closely approximates the way he identifies? It could be argued that Brett’s compartmentalising strategy is more likely to be regarded as more authentic because they are being open about themself in a social situation where that is permitted, this raises the question of the effect of environmental factors, how does this affect the perception of authenticity? There is also a strong case for arguing that Samira’s and Hannah’s accentuating strategies may be regarded as the most authentic. Samira restricts neither her social interaction nor hides her trans status from everyone she meets. Hannah’s transformation, in front of the eyes of fellow students can also be regarded as constituting a high level of honesty, a key to the perception of authenticity.

So to an extent we may be able to regard authenticity as deriving from the modes of authority action (Dowling 2009 p53) that participants bring to bear on their personal presentation and in the way they interact socially. For example Masking can be regarded as drawing on both traditional and bureaucratic modes of authority action while in contrast compartmentalising can be regarded as drawing on a liberal one. Accentuating can also be regarded as drawing on a charismatic authority strategy. However, as has been argued, the constructed nature of authenticity means that trans people are likely to find asserting their identities more problematic because of the way authenticity is characterised. Grazan’s list of what traits are associated with authenticity is as follows; ‘credibility, originality, sincerity, naturalness, genuineness, innateness, purity or realess’ (p191) suggesting that is represents a kind of essentialised, value-free and objective quality, which contrasts sharply with the descriptions of how the illusion of authenticity is created. So while this means that authenticity constitutes a concept that is not set in stone, it can also be regarded as something that draws on wider culture, including the historic or traditional.
The way trans rights activist Janet Mock’s (2015) autobiography is titled ‘Redefining Realness...’ can be regarded as an attempt at altering the cultural view of what constitutes authenticity to account for trans people. Stone’s (1991) essay represents a more scholarly means of doing this. Adjusting public perceptions of what constitutes authenticity to include trans people reflects an understanding of how this notion is both constructed and possible to change. Regarding authenticity as a quality that is both unstable and fluid while being widely perceived as fixed and essentialised may be the most productive characterisation. How it affects and is used by different agents in their own social interactions will consequently need to be regarded as both varied and dynamic, dependent on different settings, the different requirements of individuals and groups and something that is variable over time dependent on cultural change. The issue of authenticity is important and will be returned to in the concluding chapter.
Chapter 6. Pathways

One of the first things apparent from the data presented in Chapters 4 and 5 above is how different and varied the experiences of trans people can be going through this period of epiphany and learning. In moving from epiphany to different social interaction strategies, via existential learning, participants take many different routes. The variety of experiences amongst this group of participants suggests that from these perspectives their subjective experiences vary quite significantly.

This is important because, to date, much of the research and scholarship relating to trans people appears to present what might be characterised as a ‘homogenising’ perspective. The gazes of some elements of psychology for example, as analysed by Tosh (2016) and those of radical feminist theoretical approaches (eg. Raymond 1979, Jeffreys 2014), often situate trans people as constituting a single uniform group partly due to the way they ascribe ‘causes’ to physiological or neurological factors (eg Nawata et al 2010, Hahn et al 2015, Ku et al 2013, Cantor 2011). The homogenising effect of these gazes in terms of the way trans people are perceived, and indeed sometimes perceive themselves is difficult to determine but the different experiences of trans people can easily be glossed over by the desire to construct general theoretical claims.

The following sections examine the different pathways that participants have taken from epiphany and existential learning as trans people, to how they have subsequently organised their lives, especially from the perspective of social interaction, in response to social pressures, cultural influences and other factors. In the following sections a selection of participants has been grouped together in pairs or threes in order to facilitate the comparison of and/or contrast between their different experiences. These reinforce the dangers in taking a homogenising view of
trans people’s experiences, when it is evident from just three schemas that such a diversity of experience is apparent.

6.1 Comparative analysis

6.1.1 John and Shane: Independence and certainty.

Initially it is productive to look at John’s experience, since in some respects he appears to be typical of a variety of participants, at least in terms of the modes of existential learning schema. In terms of epiphany John’s mode of self-discovery is characterised as affirming mode. John was very clear, after experiencing epiphany, that physiological gender reassignment was what he wanted, he appeared to be in no doubt about this and reported very quickly thinking about his future, indeed his attitude, and indeed the way his epiphany affected him is made clear in the following quotation from his data;

I think once I knew what the problem was people saw this sudden change in me, much more enthusiastic in life, I knew that I wanted hormones and surgery and so I went out and I got it, because no one else is going to get it for me. (John, May 2015)

His decisive but also very independent attitude resonated with the data from a number of other participants also. Steve, Shane, Samira and Fiona expressed similar decisiveness and independence. For example, even though he filled it in the day before, Steve went so far as to date his Deed Poll for his official name change on the 4th July, as a symbolic reference to US Independence Day, since he expressed the feeling that having a new name, different from the one his parents assigned him at birth, signified becoming an independent person in his own right. For participants like John, since he was amongst the youngest of the participants, he may have regarded epiphany as also constituting part of a more general move towards independence from parents. Independence was important for
Steve because his parents were not supportive of his gender transition, and even more so for Shane since his mother in particular was very much opposed to his transition. In their cases it represented a necessity, as it was for Fiona, who had already been rejected and disowned by her parents. This was not the case for John however; his parents were very supportive. John did not need to express independence but did so anyway, something that may have been a consequence of his sudden decisiveness brought about by his experience of epiphany. For John, the realisation that he was trans also marked a turning point in his life more widely through becoming more focussed and proactive. Once he discovered what he needed, he became very determined and went out and got it directly and purposefully, displaying a kind of resoluteness he had never shown before;

I think for a while I cannot... It just felt like I was on autopilot just kind of drifting along not really sure what or why I was doing... I think people would probably say that though I was there I was not always completely there I was just slightly disengaged in life, but not quite knowing what the problem was... (John, May 2015)

Indeed it may be not insignificant that all these participants who exhibited and/or expressed feelings of independence were also the four who expressed the fewest doubts about identifying as trans people. Indeed John, Fiona, Samira and Shane expressed no doubts whatsoever about identifying as trans. Although they were unsure, up to a point, about what form their transitions might take and when, in terms of their desire to transition to their identified genders, they reported experiencing no doubts about transitioning per se whatsoever. This contrasts with Wesley, Jake and Phil, whose doubts were quite extreme at some points, something that will be discussed later in this chapter.

John’s prime mode of engaging with learning was through informing mode. He knew he needed specific information and proceeded to obtain it, largely from online sources. He did not, however, initially seek any support from online sources preferring not to trust them, instead he eventually obtained
support offline from friends and peers, including by later attending sessions organised by a support group for young trans people. The one area in which John is not at all typical however, was in his engagement with responding. John did not engage in any significant way in any kind of responding, as in activism, to problems faced, at various levels, by trans people, something most of the others did.

Shane comes from quite a similar background to that of John. Like John his mode of epiphany is characterised as predominantly affirming and like John his initial mode of learning was informing. However unlike John, Shane received little support or acceptance from his parents, and appears to have experienced quite a lot of open hostility from his mother. Indeed his epiphany was delayed by his parents monitoring his internet access while he was living at home, to the extent that he needed to wait until he was a student at university before he could start an online search free from the worry of what his parents might see. Here independence, in the form of leaving home to go to university, precipitated his epiphany rather than occurring as a consequence of it. His initial search resulted in him accessing a website about sexuality which subsequently referred him to a gender identity website. This in itself suggests that he misunderstood his gender identity for non-normative sexuality, something, which is significant in terms of understanding the relative cultural prominence of both. This is addressed in greater detail in the next chapter. So in contrast to John, Shane’s independence resulted from parental rejection.

Shane did, however, engage in two different types of responding. Initially, getting his name changed on his degree certificate, which entailed blazing a trail for this through university bureaucracy, and at a later stage he engaged in a wider activist project supporting young trans men to obtain clothing. As a consequence of engaging with online support the friendships he made from these interactions helped him start a clothing bank for young trans men who needed to obtain men’s clothes.
Shane was also more involved in trans communities online, and also had offline trans friends, whereas John appears to have been involved only minimally with any other trans people either online or offline. Both these two participants’ experiences are interesting to compare in that they both experienced epiphany as affirming and they both used informing as their main initial learning strategy, so the ways they initially experienced epiphany and immediately afterwards were, at least in these respects, very similar, with Shane doing this at the age of 18 while John’s was at 16. However, this is where their paths differed and these differences probably arose from the very different levels of local support they had.

So the way they organised their social interaction constituted the principal difference between John and Shane. John’s mode of interaction was almost exclusively masking whereas Shane used a much wider range of strategies including compartmentalising, masking and harmonising. The difference in levels of support locally may have precipitated Shane’s need to be more involved with other trans people for that support, and which resulted in him forming friendships with those trans people, and subsequently becoming involved in some responding activities, something John, in contrast, reported no desire to engage with.

Comparing these two participants the conclusion might be drawn that, in their cases both the level of engagement with other trans people in trans communities and in responding activities may be dependent, inversely, on levels of local or family support and acceptance, and levels of doubt experienced.
6.1.2 Fiona and Samira: Competing Identities

Samira and Fiona have been chosen for analysis together because they are the only two participants from working-class backgrounds, and so comparing their paths through *epiphany* and *existential learning* may be productive. In fact it would appear that, in many important respects their experiences are very different, yet they resonate in one important respect with the analysis of Shane and John above; both participants appeared to experience very low levels of doubt, not unlike these two men. Neither questioned their need to transition, although because they both needed to make some decisions about their future lives, and consequently experienced some minor doubts regarding the exact way those transitions would should proceed.

In a similar way to another of the other female-identifying participants, Hannah it could be argued that for trans people assigned male at birth, there is a difference in terms of available competing gender-based identities. Such as identities like ‘butch lesbian’ and ‘tomboy’; the nature of patriarchal and cis-mythologising culture has meant that becoming aware one is a trans woman is likely to be more a more clear-cut experience from this perspective, since there are fewer alternative possibilities. Yet it is also arguable that coming out as a trans woman or feminine non-binary person for those assigned male at birth will be perceived as more risky. Competing identities for trans women and trans girls might include for example ‘effeminate gay man’, or even ‘crossdresser’. Yet it is arguable that these may both be regarded as constituting identities of lower, or not much higher status than that of trans(-sexual/-gender) woman or trans girl, and consequently can also be regarded as less likely to represent a competing identity.

The experiences of these two young women in question were, however, very different in many respects, including in terms of levels of family
support and acceptance and experience of epiphany and learning.

Epiphany, as experienced by Fiona is characterised as *introducing*. She was quite literally *introduced* by a friend to other trans women and experienced epiphany in an instant. In contrast Samira gradually became aware that she was trans, as she had experienced enjoying expressing femininity from relatively early in her secondary school career. Being attracted to both men and women she did briefly need to take account of the possibility that she might be a bisexual man, but this did not last long;

> From a very, very young age, my interests and that were different, I didn’t like being with the boys I liked being with the girls, I preferred... and a lot of people pointed out and said ‘You’re gay’ and for me... that brought quite a bit of anxiety in me and I was questioning my sexuality, so for a very long time I thought I was a gay or bisexual man, but when it actually came down to the crunch it was... I like men but I’m not a man, I don’t feel like a man I don’t like all these manly things, the thought of cutting my hair short and conforming to all manhood, that’s rough! (*Samira, May 2015*)

So Samira’s epiphany appeared to have occurred over a much longer period of time compared to Fiona’s and is characterised by *affirming* mode as opposed to *introducing* mode. Also unlike Fiona, for Samira there was no clear, specific date of epiphany. Additionally her experience can be regarded as very different from Fiona’s in that her family did not disown her; indeed she describes being well-supported by her family, including her grandmother;

> I explained it [being a trans woman] to my grandmother; the thought of being an old man that makes me physically sick, I couldn’t do that, I couldn’t be a father, I could be a mum, be an auntie, you know... I couldn’t be a dad, you know, male role model, fuck that man, to me that’s misery, misery... (*Samira, May 2015*)

Her grandmother, like most of her relatives, appeared to be very understanding and Samira reports obtaining a great deal of her support from this older relative and her extended family.
In terms of her main source of learning about herself from online sources however, Samira’s main mode of learning was *modelling*; indeed she was the only trans woman in the study to have predominantly engaged with this mode. Two trans men, Steve and Harry report both obtaining much of their knowledge about identifying trans from blogs or video posts on Youtube, with Harry being the only participant to report using this mode almost exclusively. Samira cited Carmen Carrera’s blog\(^{52}\) in particular, as helping her, although it seems that this was more intimately connected with the actual process of epiphany than the others,

> It took me a couple of years, it was seeing, all, you know, Carmen Carrera’s posts writing about trans power and all that and I was... I could really connect with what you’re saying, the thoughts, the feelings and I was like... I always knew deep, deep down but it’s accepting it in yourself... you know what I mean...? ([Samira, May 2015](http://carmencarreraofficial.tumblr.com))

In her case it was these blog posts that performed an integral function as part of her coming to the conclusion that she identified as a trans woman. It appeared to be something about which she needed to take some time to decide. What is significant here is that, in her case it is evident that the experience of epiphany and learning about identifying as a trans person, seems to have been more mutually dependent. In Samira’s case it seems that identification and existential learning were concurrent and cannot be separated, in other cases it was not so intertwined; other participants, such as Shane and Harry, experienced epiphanies as trans people and only then learned about what that meant in more detail.

So it is evident that, in some instances, *existential learning* and *epiphany* are co-produced. However in most cases participants’ epiphanies are reported as occurring as a result of a relatively small amount of knowledge obtained in an apparently arbitrary way, but usually incomplete or inaccurate knowledge. The process of epiphany is generally one that is

\(^{52}\) [http://carmencarreraofficial.tumblr.com](http://carmencarreraofficial.tumblr.com)
followed by a period of research during which time existential learning occurs in a way that is relevant to the individual’s circumstances. So here we can identify two different modes of existential learning, concurrent and consequent. Concurrent learning can be regarded as learning about transgender people more generally while in the process of identifying as transgender. Consequent learning on the other hand can be characterised as occurring predominantly after epiphany has been experienced. This period would also appear to be a time when one’s identification can also be affected and possibly altered as a consequence of this learning process.

In terms of social interaction strategies, while Fiona’s predominant social interaction strategy would be described as harmonising, she socialised in a group of very similar trans women who were engaged in sex work, a group, a member of which she could probably not have been unless she were also engaged in the sex work scene. Samira’s was mostly accentuating mode, she appeared to socialise in a diverse range of environments, and also within her extended family, both of which tended to make this the only social interaction strategy available to her, at least at that time.

To return to the issue of competing identities however, it is evident that, in these two instances, there were competing identities involved. Indeed prior to her, very quick, epiphany as a trans woman Fiona initially identified as an effeminate gay man, or at least, in explicit terms as a ‘gay man’, possibly as a result of not having access to adequate information about trans people. What is also interesting here is how this epiphany also affected her sexuality; after coming to the realisation that she identified as trans she came to identify as a bisexual woman. In contrast Samira already identified as bisexual before she came to identify as a trans woman, and her feminine nature was evident since she was at school. Significantly she was also regarded at least in one instance by someone else, as an effeminate gay man, rather than a trans woman, specifically in the instance she describes in Chapter 7, when a boyfriend did just that. So despite
Beemyn & Rankin (2011 p162) suggesting that mostly older trans people tended to be affected by competing identities, and that those competing identities tended to be more prominent amongst trans men, here we have two examples of competing identities that have affected two young trans women.

**6.1.3 Jake, David and Hannah: Overcoming Resistance - Activism**

The reason for selecting to elaborate on the paths of these three participants together through the epiphany and existential learning processes is that they have all ultimately engaged in significant ways with activism about trans issues; the responding element in the existential learning schema.

Jake was initially involved in local level activism but subsequently engaged in campaigning at a national and international level. Additionally at a time when he was openly trans he was happy for a while to be regarded as a kind of role model locally to educate cisgender people about transgender issues. In effect he was educating others simply by being himself, and reported being regarded as in that way having taught people a great deal about trans people’s issues. He subsequently got involved in an international trans human rights campaign.

David became involved with an LGBT group that visited schools to raise young people’s awareness of LGBT issues, again representing responding mode in addition to an element of more localised activism at his Efterskole\(^{53}\). There he felt the need to fully explain why he had been allocated a single room in student residences, something which entailed coming out to the entire school. Here he recruited the accentuating social

---

\(^{53}\) Danish; Literally ‘continuation school’ a residential school for students after the age of 18
interaction strategy by choice. His Efterskole was entirely residential and almost all students lived in shared dormitories, however his mother had obtained him a place there in one of the few single rooms. As a consequence he felt the need to explain to the other students the reason why he was in a room on his own, ‘not to mystify myself’ as he described it. Here he could have continued to employ the *masking* strategy but chose to be open about identifying as transgender, rationalising that otherwise he might have been regarded with envy or worse for being one of the few students in a single room. He decided that he would do this by coming out to the entire school at the same time, in front of everyone. This seemed to have worked as a coming-out strategy, and he reported no discriminatory incidents from the students, something, which was different from his experience during compulsory schooling. His action in coming out to everyone there also removed the risk of what Goffman (1963 p14) characterised as ‘discrediting’. At least he reported subsequently being able to live without fear of being exposed, deliberately or accidentally, by others.

Hannah’s *responding* entailed becoming involved in activism to alter the way trans people are portrayed in national media in the UK, although this was the only type of activism that she engaged in. Most participants in some way engaged in local level activism whereas Hannah was probably not, for the most part, in a position to do this, choosing to become involved in activism at a later stage after she had become more self-confident after transitioning. She reported experiencing a very considerable level of difference between before and after epiphany and coming out, in terms of her confidence and ability to socialise with others, to the extent that, after completing her course at a further education institution she chose to limit her job prospects by restricting the jobs she was prepared to take to exclude those involving working unsocial hours, because the new friendship groups she had developed had become more important to her. Her social interaction strategies proceeded from initially
compartmentalising (she was only out to others in online environments) to accentuating, when she came out and transitioned during her FE college course, to compartmentalising again when she became part of a group of trans people who meet together after attending a self-help group for young trans, gender non-conforming and non-binary people.

Hannah’s epiphany can be regarded as overcoming resistance and this is also something she had in common with Jake and David. In Jake’s case this epiphany was combined with an element of affirming, and in David's case with constructing. Whether there is any connection between the ways these participants experienced epiphany in overcoming resistance mode and became involved with responding as activists is not clear and may be difficult to establish. However these three participants were the only ones whose experience of epiphany could be regarded as including predominantly overcoming resistance.

What is also evident from these three participants is how they all seemed to engage in different social interaction strategies at different times. Jake described significant elements of compartmentalising, and an element of harmonising and occasionally masking and accentuating. David’s tended to be accentuating to the extent that he vividly described one instance when this did not happen.

6.1.4 Harry and Steve: Independence and (Non-)Acceptance

Harry and Steve were two of the participants who, apart from John, seemed to have fewest problems experiencing epiphany, transitioning and coming out. Both included modelling as one of their main modes of learning, with Harry describing it specifically as his only mode of learning. In particular Harry seemed to experience few problems in experiencing self-discovery, following his initial discovery of the term ‘transgender’ after
searching online with the text string ‘I don’t want to be a girl’ and was widely accepted amongst his peers at school (despite attending an all-girls school) and within his family environment, with the possible exception of some of his extended family. It probably helped that he was regarded by strangers as a boy before he came out to any of his friends or family, which consequently resulted in his main modes of social interaction comprising a mixture of compartmentalising and masking, something discussed in greater depth in the next chapter.

In the same way that Harry seems to have taken transition in his stride, Steve also seems to have had relatively few problems, although he does describe how he needed to retake the second year of his undergraduate degree course, suggesting that this was probably because he had spent so much time engaging with online learning and interaction about identifying as trans. Although modelling was one of his main modes of learning, he also engaged with online material through informing and subsequently supporting and participating significantly in interactive online spaces. While he has had less support from his family than Harry, and as such considers himself to be more independent, it appears that both these participants have successfully readjusted both personally and socially to their new identities.

While Harry's initial experience of epiphany can be almost exclusively characterised as affirming, Steve's largely represented introducing with, to a lesser extent, an element of affirming. Harry’s experience of existential learning also involved an element of responding which largely meant bringing about an element of acceptance at his secondary school, while Steve engaged in a specific piece of activism with another trans student at his university in the form of advising his students union about trans people so that they were better prepared for others in the future. This difference may be put down to their different circumstances and coming out at different times in their lives; Steve at university, Harry at school. Harry
needed to be much more pro-active in his situation because of his different circumstances. It can be argued that school is different from university in the sense that schools have to take into consideration to a much greater extent their referent communities of parents with the result, in this instance at least, that school students have less autonomy than university students. What is also interesting is how Steve placed considerable importance on ‘independence’ as part of his coming out transition whereas Harry reported being much more embedded within his community, in particular with his peers, to the extent that needing to strive for any significant element of independence in order to transition did not appear to be an issue for him. Steve’s lack of acceptance at home may also have had an influence on this, in the opposite direction. It is significant that, while Steve’s epiphany and coming out while he was at university required him to engage with an online community for support, Harry had the open support of schoolfriends around him, despite attending an all-girls’ school. This may have been a consequence of the time difference between them both coming out, Harry was one of the last to be interviewed, in May 2015, whereas Steve was one of the first, in January 2011. It is possible that cultural acceptance of trans people had progressed in between this, relatively short time.

The next section draws on a specific selection of published autobiographical material of young and older trans people in order to supplement this data.

6.2 Modes of Identity Allocation

One of the most significant issues arising from the data is the extent to which participants have either been subject to, or expressed different identities as part of their journeys. For example Phil describes how he was
allocated the identity ‘tomboy’ when he was a child and subsequently discovered that others then interpreted this identity differently from the way he perceived it. For him it meant, ‘identifying as a boy, despite liking girl things’. When he was introduced to another ‘tomboy’ however, he found that it, in her case it meant ‘a girl, who identified as a girl, who likes boy things’. For the purpose of analysis this will be constituted as an imposed identity. In contrast Hannah describes how, when at school, she came out as an (effeminate) gay male (despite identifying as a girl) in order to give herself space to express herself in a less boyish, macho way. This will be constituted as a declared identity. This presents us with one binary scale for analysis; identification; imposed or declared.

The other binary scale for analysis is exemplified by the experiences of James and Hannah. James reported originally being assumed to be a butch lesbian, but found this to be problematic, describing himself as being ‘disengaged’ from life. This mode of identification is characterised as non-generative, it does not enable the individual to engage in social interaction in a sustainable or self-realising way. In contrast most participants described their lives as improving considerably once they had started to identify with the gender they considered themselves to be. For example Hannah reported changing from being a miserable, isolated and suicidal person who spent months hiding in her bedroom, to becoming a much more confident and gregarious person after she transitioned and came out as a girl. This mode of identification is characterised as generative. Generative identification mode, forming the opposite end of the non-generative – generative scale, enables the individual to engage productively with social interaction and proceed with their life. This presents us with a relational space in fig 6.1 below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Identification</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generative</td>
<td>Permitting</td>
<td>Enabling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-generative</td>
<td>Misrepresenting</td>
<td>Confusing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig 6.1 Modes of Identity Allocation**

In the top left section an imposed identification in generative mode would best be illustrated by the way the identity ‘tomboy’ is allocated to girls, under the age of around 12, who do not behave in a stereotypical feminine manner. Allocating this label onto them constitutes permission that allows their behaviour to be less restricted in the context of being a girl who has not yet reached puberty.

Moving to the top right section of the relational space enabling is constituted as a mode that allows the individual to engage with society on their own terms. For participants this is the ability to identify in the genders they need to. For most it is the only mode that is conducive to productive and confident social interaction. This differs from permitting in that it is self-declared, it is not simply granting permission to behave in a certain way for a temporary period, so it is much more productive and liberating than conforming to an imposed identity, however liberating that may seem in the short term.

In the bottom right corner, confusing is the mode that is declared by the individual but usually as a result of identifying in a way that is mistaken. Trans men described in Beemyn and Rankin (2011) often described claiming alternative identities from ‘tomboy’ to ‘butch lesbian’ despite finding that none of these fit them appropriately. This became more evident in the 1990s when the identity of ‘trans man’ became more widely available, and people who previously identified as butch lesbians changed to identifying as men in quite large numbers (Halberstam 1998). This
confusion about identities revealed the previous erasure of trans male identities.

In the bottom left section of the mode of identity allocation relational space is characterised as misrepresenting when an inappropriate and non-generative identity is imposed on the individual. This is usually one associated with the trans person’s birth assigned identity, and in Phil’s case, as described above, it is represented by the way he was described as a ‘tomboy’ by others, despite the apparent disconnect between what his interpretation of the term meant and that of others. So while ‘tomboy’ can be regarded as a generative imposed identity for some people, it represented a non-generative one in Phil’s case. The mode of misrepresenting referring in this instance to the way a label is misapplied rather than describing the vocabulary recruited for that purpose. This is important because the identities of ‘tomboy and ‘butch’ can be regarded as liberating and enabling for some. However when allocated inappropriately these, apparently liberating identities can have a non-generative effect.

What the different modes of identity allocation schema reveals is that identities are claimed and imposed in different ways and for different purposes. The imposed modes of identification refer to identities that are externally allocated but it is significant that these can be either generative or non-generative. Thus some participants who were allocated the identity ‘tomboy’ when they were young were experiencing a generative allocation mode, which permitted their behaviour as gender-non-conforming. In effect it gave permission, in restricted circumstances, for them to behave in the way they wanted. Yet it was not just those assigned female at birth who benefitted from this; Samira was allowed to express her gender non-conformity at school;

... some of the teachers kicked up a fuss with me, one of them was like ‘You wear too much make-up’ she said ‘You wear more make-up than the girls!’ [...] ‘Yeah but it’s applied well, you see all these girls and
they’ve got orange faces and at least my foundation matches, yeah?’

Granted I got a bit of winged eyeliner but that was just me expressing myself and granted that was only a couple of teachers, the majority of them were cool… (Samira May 2015)

Although staff held back from referring to her as a girl and using female pronouns she was permitted to use some DS-signifiers of her gender, which can be regarded as constituting permitting support for her, at least tacitly. What is significant here is that this permitting did not extend as far as acknowledging her identity tacitly, she was not referred to as a girl nor was she referred to using female pronouns. This appeared to be going too far for the school;

I do remember my head of year at the time Mr ********* he used to give little nicknames to all of his favourite students and he used to call me [female name], ‘cos my previous name was [similar male name] so he said, alright [female name] but that was between me and him and it was the leaving assembly and he came up to me and he goes, ‘I want to list all of my favourite students by their nicknames, and obviously you’re my [female name]’

And I gone ‘Yeah’

And he goes ‘But I dunno whether I should say that in the assembly, I dunno what I should say, so maybe I’ll just leave it for now…’ (Samira May 2013)

So for her, the Permitting mode of identification allowed her to express herself tacitly but effectively she had to be regarded as an effeminate (gay) boy rather than as a girl. However, it is problematic to regard this as constituting an authorising identity mode since she was not identified explicitly. Why the school found it difficult to cross that threshold and identify her explicitly as a girl is an interesting question that will be examined more fully in the conclusion of this thesis. However it is also clear from the way Samira reports on how her epiphany as a trans woman took her two years, that confusing mode is the most appropriate way of characterising her experience, something that was, for her, ultimately not generative. In this instance then the application of permitting mode in the tacit may be regarded as contributing to her experiencing confusing mode
in the explicit because it took her a long time subsequently to come to identify as a trans woman.

While Samira’s identity was *authorised* tacitly by her school, in the transcript of the Louis Theroux television programme about trans children analysed in Chapter 2, Camille’s identity, her identity was *enabled* explicitly by her own insistence that was finally recognised by her mother and father.

I don’t think there’s any more exploring I think this is Camille and this is her coming out party. (*Camille’s Father*)

This is significant because this constitutes *enabling* in a way that Samira’s is not. Samira’s freedom to wear makeup to school and behave in a more feminine way constituted permitting not enabling. Samira was, in effect publicly not recognised as a girl, but as a feminine boy, which is different from the way Camille identified. This may suggest that there are limitations to the way Butler characterises the concept of performativity when it comes to the ways identities are constituted tacitly and explicitly.

*Enabling* constitutes the mode of identity allocation that appeared to be regarded as the ultimate goal by all interview participants. This is unsurprising since it constitutes an identity that is both generative and declared by the individuals concerned themselves. This goes further than *permitting*, although these modes are both characterised as *generative*, because it is initiated by the individual whose identity it concerns. While *permitting* can be regarded as a mode which allows the stretching of gender categories, from a trans person’s perspective it can be regarded as either a step to acceptance in one’s identified gender or an attempt to prevent that crossing of the discursive line from one gender to another, it can also be regarded as producing a *confusing* identification mode.

*Enabling*, in contrast is illustrated by Hannah’s experience of transitioning
while attending a course at a further education college;

I was worried that they were going to have problems and they’ve been fine really. I didn’t really have any issues but they had a few problems adapting, changing pronouns etc., but you’re going to have that with anyone. (Hannah May 2014)

What is significant about Hannah’s coming out is that she also came out to all her friends on Facebook at the same time;

I think that’s what’s so good about doing it on Facebook because I can just sort of do it all, everyone. Except I paid for a promoted post, it was like £4 so everybody saw it, it went into everybody’s feed and it… ‘This is what I’m going to be!’ (Hannah May 2014)

This clearly constitutes a discursive mode of identity allocation; she is enabling herself to be regarded as a woman by coming out first, to most people, in the DS+ (through Facebook) as well as the DS- and contrasts with Samira’s experience in school, for the very reason that it was constituted predominantly in the DS+ rather than the DS-.

As Beemyn and Rankin (2011) have described, the confusing mode of identification seems to have been prevalent among older trans men in particular, a group not represented in empirical data as part of this study. This is based on a combination of the epistemological unavailability, for most trans men, of trans male identities before the 1990s and the number of other alternative identities that were available. These were often declared by the individual concerned but appeared to be unsatisfactory, to the extent that many came out as trans men at around that time when trans male identities became a cultural possibility and became available to them. However, it would appear from the data, that this does not mean that younger trans people did not experience this mode of identity allocation. Jake, John, Brett, David, and Fiona all experienced confusing mode and were all under the age of 28. Jake, John and David all experienced confusing mode as butch lesbians, even though, at least in the
case of John, he was not actually attracted to women. Brett was confused as they identified as a heterosexual woman, while Fiona initially identified as a gay man before coming out as a bisexual woman. So it is evident that, although this mode may have been more common prior to the 1990s it has not disappeared despite the greater visibility of trans people.

Misrepresenting mode was experienced by a number of participants; a non-generative mode imposed externally. For example Hannah described her grandmother as refusing to refer to her with female pronouns, and Wesley’s mother refused to accept him as a boy, as did Shane’s mother and sister. Both this mode and confusing mode are characterised as non-generative because they do not permit the individual to develop, make sense of the world or interact with it in the way they need to. In the case of misrepresenting mode this constitutes an external imposition of an identity that, because it is non-generative, can be regarded as holding the individual back in terms of their personal and social development. This contrasts with confusing, where it is self-applied, in a sense it could be regarded as ‘self-misrepresenting’. In both cases these identities would appear to be allocated explicitly as opposed to the tacitly or implicitly, for example Hannah’s report of how her parents tried to misrepresent her identity;

INT: They didn’t try to persuade you not to be trans or anything like that?

H: I do distinctly remember... ‘Well maybe you’re a crossdresser, well maybe you’re just this or you’re just this...’ (Hannah May 2014)

In the Theroux programme transcript analysed in Chapter 2 Crystal/Cole’s father seems to be misrepresenting her identity, significantly given that her mother reports that she has told a psychologist that she is a girl;

I look at it a little bit different and maybe a little more conservative and approach things as, you know, Cole or any of my kids are going to
have certain things that they want to do and you know I have limitations on that. (Crystal/Cole’s father)

Here it seems that Crystal/Cole’s father is misrepresenting her identification as a girl with the desire of children sometimes to do things that they cannot (such as staying up late to watch TV, for example). What may be the motivation for both of these instances of misrepresenting is the difficulty some people have of crossing the line between one gender and another. Rather than changing the descriptor from ‘boy’ to ‘girl’ for example, they would rather modify the descriptor somehow; ‘feminine boy’ for example. It is also possible that there is an attempt by parents in particular, to avoid any outcome that might potentially involve surgery. This is an issue that will be addressed further in the concluding chapter, Chapter 9 of this thesis.

The different modes of identification can also be regarded as affecting trans people at different stages in their identification process. For some the main mode, prior to epiphany, may appear to be confusing, as they recruit other identities that become available. This may be preceded by permitting, especially in the case of trans men who were originally identified as tomboys, although there is evidence (Beemyn & Ranking p162) that trans men are now coming out younger in significantly higher numbers, which suggests that the move from permitting to enabling is occurring without the intervening state of confusing.

6.3 Issues and Implications

The most obvious conclusion to draw from the analysis of data presented in this chapter is that there is a great deal of diversity in the way the process of epiphany is experienced. This is interesting since the sample cannot be regarded as particularly diverse when looked at from other perspectives, with participants being mostly white and middle-class,
reflecting on how most data was drawn from young people who live in the South-East of England and in the Copenhagen area of Denmark. However there are further issues that this data has revealed which merit additional analysis.

Also the issue of whether there is any connection, on a more general level, between earlier experience of overcoming resistance and later engagement in more general forms of activism is a question that is not within the scope of this thesis, however a further, wider study, perhaps of the backgrounds to people who have become engaged in and consider themselves to be activists might be able to elaborate on any possible link.

The issue of doubt and certainty is strongly evident from the data; some participants described at some stage experiencing very high levels of uncertainty and doubt at about their transitions, while most described expressing little or no doubt whatsoever. Most participants expressed high levels of certainty with only a few expressing high levels of doubt. What is significant is how, on this issue, it appears that, amongst these participants, these two positions tended to exist in polar opposites with nothing in between. The doubts expressed by Phil tended to be expressed on a general level, and related to justifying himself in the face of discursive delegitimation by groups or individuals opposed to the existence of trans people; his doubt was of a more philosophical or theoretical nature. He had clearly been engaging with texts produced by groups opposed to trans people and wanted to be sure he was doing the right thing. Wesley’s and Jake’s doubts had been more localised; Wesley was unsure of whether to take the surgical route, but reported still feeling that his joy at transitioning to living as a man at university might have been due to short-term novelty, although he reported uncertainty as to whether this would be likely to continue in the long-term. Jake’s doubts, in contrast, centred largely on his earlier experience of social exclusion and bullying as a consequence of coming out as a lesbian at school.
These issues are significant, in particular because they show that there is a significant group of participants who experience no doubt about who they are. For them epiphany is a release from an existence they report as alienating, stressful, confusing and unhappy. Evidence of doubts is mostly related to general level self-justification and practical issues of physiological transition as well as problems with their perception of potential social exclusion. This is an important distinction to make; Wesley did not express the kind of general level doubts about identifying as trans that Phil did, but clearly reported doubts about the extent of surgery he wanted. Phil, on the other hand reported high levels of doubt, on a general level, about gender, yet, once he had made his decision to transition medically he went ahead without hesitation.

So the most important conclusion to draw from this examination of the epiphanies, learning experiences and subsequent modes of interacting socially is how much variation there is, and how difficult it is to make any kinds of generalisations about these participants and how they identify, come out and organise their lives. If each trans person chose only one mode or strategy identified in the three relational spaces here, there would be a potential 64 different possible routes. In most cases however participants recruited a combination of different strategies or modes from each space, and these combinations were recruited in different ways and to different extents, which varied considerably over time.

This is significant with regard to many of the approaches to theorising about trans people that attempt to totalise and homogenise trans people’s motivations, problems, experiences and desires. For example, Blanchard’s (1989) concept of ‘autogynephilia’, derided by Moser (2009, 2010), attempts to position trans women as experiencing sexual attraction to themselves as women. In similar vein is Raymond’s (1979) totalising theoretical notion of a trans women as artificially produced by a patriarchal
psychiatric profession, creating identikit ‘Stepford Wives’ in order to ‘infiltrate’ women’s spaces. These kinds of generalisations would appear to be completely insufficient to account for the wide variety of experiences amongst participants in this study alone.

The next section attempts to understand the pressures that young trans people come to experience, as a result of cis-mythologisation, which result in their epiphanies.

6.4 Cis-mythologisation

This section argues that the modes of epiphany described here have all occurred as a consequence of cultural processes of subjugation, which produce the need for young trans people to experience epiphanies. Analysing the modes of epiphany characterised in the relational space in fig 4.1 produces a characterisation of the processes that result in these types of epiphany. By examining the ways participants have experienced epiphanies, we can begin to build up a picture of the nature of this cultural erasure.

As noted before, Stryker (2008) describes how the decades between 1970 and 1990 were particularly difficult for trans people in European-based cultures, but how this started to change when a new wave of trans activism emerged during the 1990s. Regarding the process of epiphany as something that occurs as a result of an individual response to wider cultural processes is productive here. These cultural processes make it necessary for trans people to experience an understanding of their genders as a kind of revelation. In effect established cultural mythologisations of gender can be regarded as an externally imposed, essentialised cultural process, constituting an obstruction to identifying as transgender. If, in an ideal cultural environment, trans people’s identities were not erased,
genders were not assigned at birth, or perhaps only provisionally so, transgender people would not need to experience epiphany, at least not in the same ways they do in the analysis in chapter 4, because the assumptions made as part of this process, a process I earlier characterised cis-mythologisation, would no longer be made.

What is evident from the modes of epiphany outlined in fig 4.1 is that they can be regarded as individual responses to the variety of environments in which trans people grow up; these can either accept, erase or delegitimise trans people. So the *Introducing* mode of epiphany can be regarded as occurring as a consequence of growing up in an environment where the cultural erasure of trans people is predominant; trans people are excluded from the general cultural milieu so the possibility of coming to identify as trans is much more restricted. For example, in the case of Fiona, she did not consider the possibility that she might identify as a woman until she was introduced, in person, to other trans women.

In contrast, *Desubjugating* and *affirming* modes can be regarded as most likely to constitute a response to *delegitimisation*. A trans person growing up in this cultural milieu will experience a bricolage of counter-narratives that attempt to situate trans people as pathological, not legitimate, genuine, authentic, ‘normal’ or rational. The anaphoric nature of these epiphanies suggests that these participants’ prior rebellions against their assigned genders are likely to have somehow been delegitimised or repressed in some way; for example by being regarded in ways that signified, for themselves and others around them, identities other than differently gendered ones;

> I had some sort of vague contact with trans women before; someone who was perceived as trans in the little village I grew up in, but the sort of, stuff that was said was, you know, pretty negative, you know, pretty derogatory... *(Caroline, Jan 2011)*
Constructing mode is somewhat different and can be argued to represent a response to a combination of both erasure and delegitimisation. A cataphoric orientation representing a consequence of erasure while exchange relations suggesting a specific need to make sense of one’s own identity in relation to those of others. Here erasure and delegitimisation combine against the possibility of identifying as a gender other than that assigned at birth and, in this instance, non-binary genders also. In the case of Brett this is either because non-binary gender identification is both excluded and delegitimised at the most basic level; that of language, or because dysphoric feelings can be, and often are, misinterpreted as signifiers of other things, such as homosexuality. Here both the erasure of trans identities and their delegitimisation combine to make identification a more gradual process of attempting to understand something that is also a social taboo for Brett.

I guess I didn’t question it until around my 20s or something but I didn’t identify as a woman or a girl per se I just didn’t think much about it, and I had a friend who, before I identified as trans myself who was transgender, and she was very... very, like clear about it, how she felt very much like a woman and then I didn’t relate to that because I didn’t relate to feeling strongly like a man, and only later I kind of realised that I don’t need to feel like that, I could still be trans and that. (Brett, Sept 2012)

This analysis begs the question, in that case, how has there been an apparent significant increase in numbers of trans people becoming more visible as trans people? While there appear to be no studies that can definitively tell us how many trans people there are (Nicolazzo 2017 p21), it is evident that increasing numbers of people are coming forward to ask for gender confirmation surgery54, and there is anecdotal evidence that many

more than that are living their lives as a gender other than that assigned at birth, which includes a significant increase in the number of under-18s\textsuperscript{55}.

One interpretation of this evidence would suggest that trans people’s epiphanies occur as a response to a cultural environment that makes coming out problematic, through erasure, delegitimisation or both of these. These ideas will feed into the way the concept of cis-mythologisation is constituted in the conclusion of this thesis.

6.5 Emergence

Erasure, a mode of obstruction that was predominant up to the mid 20\textsuperscript{th} century remains effective today in some environments. In the past trans people were advised, after transitioning, to relocate to a different part of the country, change their names and reconstruct a backstory for their earlier lives. Of course ‘stealth’ remains an option today but is probably recruited by a declining proportion of trans people (Garfinkel 1967, Shapiro 2004, Lester 2017).

But while complete erasure may be less in evidence now\textsuperscript{56}, delegitimisation is becoming more evident (eg. Jeffreys 2014). Those opposed to trans people appear to have recruited delegitimisation as the most productive strategy, from their perspective, particularly at the general level, through their involvement in the mass media. Evidence from Shane exemplifies how this subsequently affects the local;

\textsuperscript{56} Eg; time.com/135480/transgender-tipping-point/
She moved house last September so I went round to help her move all her stuff and the old people came into the new property... just to pick up their post, and I'm standing there like this (points to bearded face) with a beard like this (points again) and she was just saying 'Oh this is my daughter'. I'd never met these people in my entire life... *(Shane, Jan 2011)*

Here, Shane’s mother is attempting to delegitimise her son’s gender identity by recruiting what she appears to perceive is a general non-acceptance of trans people amongst the wider public, from people who are, in this context, effectively arbitrarily selected members of the public. Here, the move from a perceived general cultural mythologisation is mobilised into the local, in what he reports as constituting an act of opposition to her son’s identification as a trans man. What is significant here is that she has made the assumption that these strangers will share her oppositional view of trans people. It suggests that she regards the general response amongst the wider population to trans people to be negative, something that is significant whether she is correct in that assumption or otherwise.

How this assumed general level of opposition appears to affect the local is also exemplified by Wesley’s mother drawing on the narrative of ‘trans regret’ reported by some journalists and media platforms as an opposition strategy;

...my mum, who is not equipped with any information says, ‘Oh loads of people regret it.’ And I think the regret rate is probably the lowest of anything [...] I think she says it because it’s... particularly when things are, you know sensationalised by the media. *(Wesley, April 2013)*

Material produced by journalists such as Jenni Murray who, in 2016 published a long article in the Times arguing that trans women are not ‘real women’, represents an example of a strategy of delegitimisation based on
misrepresentation of trans women\(^57\) in particular. Other journalists have, increasingly regularly, attempted to misrepresent trans children and those campaigning on their behalf \(^58\), by employing narratives in the conditional that are unsupported by any data;

If I were a teenager today, well-meaning liberal teachers and social workers would probably tell me that I was trapped in the wrong body. They might refer me to a psychiatrist who would prescribe fistfuls of hormones and other drugs. And terrifyingly, I might easily be recommended for gender re-assignment surgery... just because I didn’t like the pink straitjacket imposed on girls. (**Bindel, J. Daily Mail 24 October 2016**)

Attempts to delegitimise trans people by such narratives appear to be one of the strategies of oppression currently\(^59\) most in evidence (Brubaker 2016), although these have a history dating back well into the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s (eg Raymond 1979, Blanchard 1989, Greer 1999). What is significant about these narratives is that whilst previously they tended to be less well-known outside specific conservative psychology and ‘feminist’ groups, they have more recently become more widely publicised in mainstream mass media\(^60\). This suggests that those who campaign against trans people’s rights have perceived the need to import into the general domain material previously only deployed in specialist domains. In effect they have drawn on arguments already available and popularised them. The move from presenting this material in specialist domains to distributing it to a much wider audience can be regarded as an indication of the wider emergence of trans people in the public consciousness.

\(^{57}\) https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2017/03/05/bbc-womans-hour-host-dame-jenni-murray-says-trans-women-arent-real-women/
\(^{58}\) http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2016/12/14/daily-mail-columnist-says-powerful-transgender-lobby-is-threatening-normal-children/
\(^{59}\) https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/07/opinion/sunday/what-makes-a-woman.html?_r=0
\(^{60}\) https://www.theguardian.com/books/video/2016/apr/12/germaine-greer-on-difference-between-trans-women-and-real-women-video
http://www.advocate.com/transgender/2016/10/26/milo-yiannopoulos-takes-transphobia-tour
So the introduction of delegitimisation strategies in place of strategies of erasure has moved those opposed to trans people’s existence from relying on a predominantly passive erasure to actively pursuing delegitimisation on a general level with the evident intention of influencing the local. The consequences of this can be surmised as potentially greater numbers of trans people coming to the realisation that they are trans, but subsequently being more likely to face hostile environments.61

However there are fundamental differences between erasure and delegitimisation. Erasure is argued to have grown out of what Stryker (2006 p9) characterised as shift in underlying cultural processes developing around the time of Renaissance which can be regarded as constituting a change in episteme from the dominance of the spiritual or psychic to the dominance of the material. To this extent erasure can be regarded as not intentionally targeted at trans people in particular, despite having negative consequences for them. So whilst the erasure of trans people can be regarded as a largely passive and unintended cultural process, delegitimisation should be regarded as purposely, and actively constructed, distributed and maintained with the aim of specifically affecting trans people’s lives to their detriment. So the former can be regarded as having arisen as the side-effect of cultural processes not specifically directed at trans people while the latter can be regarded as the result of deliberately fashioned and targeted actions (O’Shea 2016).

Conversely, it is therefore possible to argue that those apparently attempting to delegitimise trans people may in no small measure, be contributing to the process of emergence since their strategy is more likely to have the side-effect of increasing trans visibility, facilitating explicit

discussion and understanding of trans people and consequently enabling some epiphanies as well as supportive cohesive group formation.

Regarding what might appear to be individual instances of epiphany and learning from a sociological perspective alongside the way they subsequently recruit different socialisation strategies presents us with the opportunity to understand one element of the complex phenomenon that is trans emergence. This suggests that these epiphanies may have become more common as a consequence of the move from the tacit to the explicit in terms of both discourses of emergence and narratives of delegitimisation, which may also themselves have contributed towards that emergence. What may be more significant than previously assumed however, is the agency of trans people themselves in achieving trans emergence at all levels through facilitating new discursive (and consequently cultural) possibilities (Hines 2007 p25).
Chapter 7. Recontextualisation and Mythologisation of Gender

Recruiting Dowling’s (2013) Modes of Recontextualisation\(^{62}\) schema this chapter constructs a gaze, which distinguishes between the highly discursively saturated (DS+) and the weakly discursively saturated (DS-)\(^{63}\) with reference to gender, and examines the way these interact in terms of how gender is produced, and how trans people come out and explain their gender transitions to others. Drawing on Dowling’s (2013) recontextualising modes schema, gender as a practice is characterised here as differentiated as having both DS- and DS+ elements, which will be examined and the role of language explored, leading to an analysis of the ways gender is mythologised, using Dudley-Smith’s (2017, based on Dowling 1998) Mythologising Modes schema.

7.1 Gender in the DS- and the DS+

In order to construct a representation of the processes by which trans people come to identify, this chapter characterises gender as a practice as comprising two different elements. The first is the weakly discursively saturated (DS-) element, which can be characterised as gender performativity; the mannerisms, preferences, appearances etc. that produce gender, as Butler (1990) would describe these; ‘the forcible citation of a norm’. Here gender is regarded as citational, as Butler argues, but still constitutes a DS- practice.

\(^{62}\) Recontextualisation is defined here as the way one practice regards another. (Dowling 2009 p276)

\(^{63}\) ‘Discursive Saturation (DS) refers to the extent to which strategies are deployed that establish or tend to establish discursively available principles. Practices exhibiting such strategies are described as high discursive saturation (DS+); practices exhibiting predominantly tacit principles of regularity are low discursive saturation (DS-)’ (Dowling 2009 p270)
The second is the highly discursively saturated (DS+) element of gender, talking about gender. Everything from naming genders using specifically gendered language; such as ‘man’, ‘boy’, ‘woman’, ‘girl’ to discussions or prescriptions about appropriate behaviour for each gender, whether in the form of simple observations or in the form of edicts or laws about how people of each gender must behave, the practice of gendering is characterised as discussing gender in some way.

*The DS+* is characterised here separately from *the DS-* for a number of reasons, the main one is that, if we regard gender as a cultural process, it is overwhelmingly a DS- practice, especially in the quotidian, but not entirely so, which is significant. From Steve’s interview we can see how he seems to regard gender in the DS- as constituting a different process from gender in the DS+;

> I guess I... the idea of identifying suggests that there’s some kind of active role in it, as if I go around thinking ‘man, man, man’ all the time, whereas really it’s just sort of, there and it’s just a sort of innate part of me and I don’t strongly think either way really. [...] I don’t go round strongly thinking ‘I am male.’ This is... its has just sort of become a natural part of it... *(Steve Jan 2011)*

Here, as is usually the case for a trans person, he has had, at least in the past, to spend quite a significant period of time engaging with the DS+ and DS- aspects of gender, part of the process of transitioning to a new gender, which, it is argued below, constitutes the process of gender identification. The quotidian, DS- performative element of what is recognised as his gender, is different from the DS+ practice of talking about it. Of course this is not to say that cisgender people do not also engage with this DS+ practice. There are plenty of examples of gender in the DS+ from instructional texts enforcing certain types of gendered behaviour to advice for people of the two binary genders and observations of how individuals of groups behave in gendered terms.
So although gender is primarily a DS-practice; in that its principles are overwhelmingly tacitly held and communicated, it is also argued that talking about gender constitutes a significant referent element of this practice. Indeed the DS+ element can effectively be regarded as the recontextualising the DS-elements of gender practice into the DS+; assigning or attributing genders, describing gender practice, talking about gender in any way, whether advising, proscribing, directing, theorising, campaigning, objectifying or any other DS+ engagement with the practice of gender. Examples of the DS+ would include such elements as the descriptors for both binary genders; ‘man’ and ‘woman’. Descriptors of how both genders are expected to behave, while far from comprehensive, are expressed in language. Many aspects of feminism, from Bates’ (2014) project to make sexism and harassment of women recognised as systemic rather than individual, to Crenshaw’s (1991) work on identifying intersecting oppressions, in particular as they affect black women, would be examples of gender in the DS+. Indeed Bates’ work to de-normalise everyday sexist behaviour such that it can be talked about as a cultural issue affecting most women involved moving sexual harassment and normalised sexist behaviour from the DS- to the DS+ through the hashtag ‘#everydaysexism’. Crenshaw’s characterisation of intersectionality relied heavily on characterising an issue largely experienced in the DS- into the DS+. This rationalising needed to occur in order for it to become something that could be identified as an issue, talked about and acted upon. Indeed both of these are aimed at working towards liberation of women through recontextualising the DS- with a DS+ recontextualising strategy.

It is also evident in texts produced by religious groups for example, which dictate - usually women’s - behaviour (although sometimes men’s) for example. In the more quotidian, expressions from ‘boys don’t cry.’, and ‘You’re not going out wearing that!’ to ‘Sir’ or ‘Madam’ when being served in a shop or a café, are also constituted here as the DS+ element of gender. What is significant here is that the more quotidian the actions become the
more culturally-dependent they can be regarded. For example in Japanese the title ‘San’ does not distinguish between genders in the same way that ‘Sir’ or ‘Madam’ do, with the result that this element of the quotidian does not refer to gender in the DS+, whereas it does in English and other European languages.

By way of examples of the DS+ expression of gender, there are numerous sources of advice on behaviour differentiated by gender on the internet, for example, for women on a website about dating;

Dressing skimpy or throwing yourself at a man is really a bad idea and should be avoided.64

Or from a website aimed at men;

Just because a lot of modern women act like men in the workplace, or out of necessity to survive in our modern culture, it doesn’t mean they actually want to be men. The majority of women still want a man to be able to take the lead and be the more dominant one when he first meets her, takes her out on a date, takes her into the bedroom and gets her into a relationship.65

So, gender is talked about in many different circumstances and many different ways. What needs to be noted is that in terms of the DS+, the explicit rules, conventions and expectations for men and women will vary according to cultural environment, and these will, in turn, affect, and be affected by the DS-referent practice of gender. The next section examines recontextualisation strategies in terms of how they affect participants in this study.

64 https://hubpages.com/relationships/How-women-should-behave-when-dating
7.2 Recontextualisation

Regarding the practice of gender as constituting two elements differentiated by discursive saturation helps us understand the ways that trans people have to recontextualise cultural processes on both local and general levels in order to make sense of their lives. By regarding gender as constituting these two elements the DS+ can be regarded as constituting a rationalised recontextualisation of the DS-.

The analysis in this chapter draws specifically on Dowling’s (2013) Recontextualising Modes Schema (p329) to construct a regard on how trans people’s genders are conceived by trans people themselves and others around them. Dowling’s schema constructs two axes; the nature of the practices being recontextualised, which are characterised as either weakly discursively saturated (DS-) or strongly discursively saturated (DS+) and the recontextualisation strategy, again characterised as either DS- or DS+ in fig 7.1 below

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recontextualising Strategy</th>
<th>Recontextualised Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DS-</td>
<td>Improvising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS+</td>
<td>Rationalising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS-</td>
<td>De-principling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS+</td>
<td>Re-principling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Fig 7.1 Modes of Recontextualisation (Dowling 2013 p329)*

Data from participants will be analysed using this schema to construct a description of the ways their gender practice is recontextualised. Starting in the top left corner of the relational space *Improvising*; a DS- recontextualisation of a DS- practice is reflected in participant Phil’s interpretation of his gender identity as a child;

But like I mean like lots of little girls like to dress up as princesses
right...? I liked to play dressing up as a prince, that was what I did, I had a sparkly waistcoat and liked to wear it and spend ages doing my hair being a prince *(Phil Jan 2011)*

Here, although he did not identify with his assigned gender from a young age; he did not have the language with which adequately to express this, so in his make-believe world he was a prince, or at least he mythologised his own idea of a prince. His recontextualisation of what a prince is like may not have been like Prince Charles, and probably owed more to fictional Disney mythologisations of princes than actual living princes, however this constituted a DS-recontextualisation, changing his appearance to reflect what he was feeling inside. Subsequently he came to identify as a tomboy, which involved constituting a *rationalisation*, yet later he reports how he *improvised* his identification as an effeminate male, as he came to identify, and indeed present as, as a young adult.

However it is not merely young children who need to recontextualise in the DS-, for some non-binary people the lack of strongly institutionalised language with which to express their genders can be problematic. Brett, who identifies as a non-binary person, in particular demonstrates how it is difficult to express their gender in language;

...and I recognise the fact that most people can’t relate to...say...and I can’t really explain the... way I feel about my gender to anyone properly because it varies a lot and because it’s not clearly as a man, so it’s not really as I can expect someone else to know because I don’t know myself... *(Brett Sept 2012)*

Their self-understanding defies rationalising, at least in terms of the language currently available to them to do so, so consequently expressing a gender in DS+ terms becomes more difficult. Yet there is little evidence of them improvising, instead attempts appear to be made to express through language, their identity, however difficult and complex a process that might be. In the absence of clear, well-sedimented or established language
that describes non-binary genders, the recontextualisation of the practice of gender, from their point of view into the DS+ can be problematic. This is a problem also identified by Caroline,

I’m sure individuals can define it for themselves in a different way, you’re never quite sure what someone else is thinking at one point, and whether that is you or residual of just what you used to think was you, what someone taught you was actually you, so you’re not sure whether you are defining yourself correctly or whether you are pigeon-holing yourself too much, so when you start clinging to labels you lose your freedom to move within things... (Caroline Jan 2012)

Here Caroline identifies some of the problems of recontextualising themself in the DS+ when the resources of language make that difficult. The desire not to become trapped in descriptors that might only represent approximations of one’s identification, is perhaps understandable. This is significant because although some specialist language signifiers may exist to describe non-binary genders these can lack both general agreement on their meanings and more general awareness of them beyond specific groups. This can present problems associated with floating signifiers both in terms of arriving at agreed meanings in the DS+ and in terms of spreading their use beyond the local. From this perspective it is not surprising that Caroline wants to avoid signifiers that may not represent their identity, and may change over time and mean very different things to different people.

What is also a potential problem is that one may start using a particular type of lexicon to describe oneself at a time when one might not yet be certain about one’s identity; one may still be attempting to define oneself in relation to the available linguistic resources. In other words the terms available may restrict the possibilities of identification. Rationalising recontextualisation may be difficult in some instances because of the restrictions that language may place on the expression of emergent identities.
What is also an issue for non-binary people is expression in the DS-, Victoria, who also identifies as non-binary as well as having an intersex condition, explains the problem of DS- gender expression when it has no culturally established mode of expression on that level,

I also feel like there’s a big push among non-binary people to be more masculine, especially if they’re read as female, as though being more masculine will make you neutral. Because masculinity is such a default because femininity is automatically considered to be gendered; ‘Oh that’s feminine’. And lots of non-binary people end up being, you know really masculine and I don’t want to be masculine. You know I wear jeans and t-shirts, I wear make-up because I like wearing make-up and I wear it to work because it’s work and nail polish sometimes because I like it... (Victoria April 2013)

Here Victoria identifies the problems of adopting different DS- gender presentations, which are, for most people, regarded as signifying binary genders. Here they also characterise what they regard as an imbalance in power relations between the two sedimented binary genders and how they regard this as impacting on non-binary gender expression in the DS-.

They argue that because ‘man’ is regarded as the default gender, ‘woman’ is therefore regarded as culturally specifically gendered in contrast to the default gender (which is regarded as therefore less gendered), it appears that some therefore regard a DS- gender expression that aligns more closely with what is regarded as the default gender expression as constituting a more gender neutral expression. This debate regarding ‘default’ gender therefore up to a point constitutes a DS+ recontextualisation of DS- gender practice; a rationalisation, but it can also be regarded as referencing an improvisation since there are few highly institutionalised specifically performatively expression in the DS- of non-binary genders.

Yet the lack of availability of language is also a factor for binary trans people’s understanding of themselves, Shane observed how he thought
about his identification when he was a child before he had unmonitored internet access;

Yeah I thought I was the only one in the world... *(Shane Jan 2011)*

This constitutes a rationalisation often reflected in responses from participants in Kennedy (2010), and reflected in Kennedy’s (2014) analysis, which describes the consequences of the way trans children can become isolated because of the lack of access to a ‘lexic key’ which would enable them to engage in linguistic terms with other trans people and rationalise their genders in the knowledge that others like them also exist and consequently have access to the rationalisations of other trans people about themselves. Rationalising, recontextualising the DS- with the DS+, does not necessarily imply accuracy of the resulting interpretation, it is perfectly possible for people to rationalise the same DS- practice differently, as Phil’s description of being mythologised as a tomboy on p233 below demonstrates.

*Rationalising*, in the bottom left corner of the relational space is possibly one of the most important modes of recontextualisation in this context; rationalisation seems to constitute the most common mode of recontextualising, experienced by the majority of participants. Here a DS-practice is recontextualised by a DS+ recontextualising strategy; that which is not expressed in language is put into language, or at least an attempt is made to do that. This is crucial and derives from the main differentiation between the DS+ and the DS- made at the start of this chapter. In terms of characterising gender as constituting both the DS- and the DS+ Caroline describes the difficulties of rationalising when explaining themself to others;
Can you define yourself in a way that fits within their notions but also makes them question and begin to think that there might be more outside what they already know...? (Caroline Jan 2012)

Their attempts to describe themself with any degree of accuracy appear to become problematic when they need to explain themself to the majority of people they encounter in the quotidian, as most of those around them do not have the more specialist background knowledge in terms of gendering to understand. This results in their resorting to descriptions that do not represent them specifically but are approximated for the purposes of explaining to others they encounter in everyday interaction. Caroline has rationalised and improvised their identity to themself but needs to find a way of expressing that identity in the DS+ as a means of explaining quickly and/or efficiently to others who are not familiar with the discourse of (trans)gender identification as part of gendering.

Moving round the relational space anti-clockwise to the bottom right, a DS+ activity recontextualised by a DS+ recontextualising strategy is constituted as re-principling, a DS+ recontextualisation of a DS- practice. Hannah’s parents, after she came out as a transsexual woman, were reported initially to be keen to re-principle her from her description of herself as a transsexual woman to something different;

I do distinctly remember... ‘Well maybe you’re a crossdresser, well maybe you’re just this or you’re just this...’ (Hannah May 2014)

Phil also found this kind of re-principling from his mother when he initially came out to her;

I came out to my mum, ‘I think I’m a boy.’ I can’t remember what I said to her because the vivid memory was of her response because it was, ‘Can't you just be a lesbian?’ (Phil Jan 2012)

In these instances a declaration of gender identification has been recontextualised as constituting a type of sexuality, something not uncommon in other contexts (eg Blanchard, 1993, Bailey 2003, Bindel
2016). A practice that has had a DS+ descriptor applied to it has been *re-principled* as a different practice using a DS+ recontextualising strategy, renaming it or redefining it as something else, something that in this case has a more highly institutionalised descriptor attached to it.

Moving anti-clockwise to the top right corner, a DS+ practice is recontextualised with a DS- recontextualising strategy, this is characterised as *de-principling*. There were few examples of this mode of recontextualisation from any participants’ data, with Phil presenting one of those as he questions the very categories of male and female for everyone;

> …and since then like I’ve come to all this tender theory that’s all these constructs of male and female that are quite unintelligible really, because nobody meets the criteria for man and woman right? And in the end it’s like for me, so I never felt like I was really a man, I don’t even know what that means right? I don’t even know what that means. *(Phil Jan 2012)*

Phil also adopts a de-principling recontextualisation of the entirety of gendering as a practice in the DS+. By declaring that neither of the binary genders are in any way meaningful he is, in effect arguing that, gender is not ‘real’. Something that, resonates to an extent with Butler’s (2004) conceptualisation of gender - although she characterises genders as both ‘real’ and ‘fake’ (Salih & Butler 2004 P102). This recontextualisation strategy functions by constructing the entire gendered culture as a fiction such that identifying as transgender is no longer a problem in itself, but the fault lies in the culture of gender.

Phil continues, referring to the non-binary descriptor ‘genderqueer’,

---

...but I more question what it really means to be genderqueer at all, I mean I'm not saying that those identities a invalid, what I’m saying is that I don't think they exist socially... (Phil Jan 2012)

His rejection of the descriptor ‘genderqueer’ as a social identity however appears to be based more on its absence as established and recognisable in both the DS+ and the DS-. Here, his de-principling is based, not on a rejection of alliances with either binary gender but on the lack of cultural acknowledgment, ie non-binary identities are weakly institutionalised in both the DS- and the DS+ of non-binary identities.

So all four modes of recontextualisation are observed in the context of young trans people recounting their experiences of epiphany, coming out, coming to understand the way they identify, explaining themselves and negotiating their paths through a culture that erases and/or excludes them. However rationalising was the recontextualising mode observed in the data of all participants with improvising and re-principling also significantly in evidence, but de-principling much less so, and only from two participants. To reiterate without wishing to enter into quantifying the data, rationalising represented the mode of recontextualisation mode manifest, in some form or other, in the data from all participants and improvising and re-principling in almost all, while de-principling was rarely evident and in only a small minority of participants’ transcripts.

The practice of gender performativity (Butler 1990) is here regarded as DS-. The principles of this performativity are mostly not expressed in language in the quotidian practice of gender. The mannerisms, preferences, appearances and gestures that are recontextualised as gender are constituted as a bricolage of different combinations of DS- modes of expression, from tone of voice to style of walking, to appearance to chosen

67 Institutionalisation is defined as ‘a regularity of practice emergent on autopoietic action’. (Dowling 2009 p273) A weakly institutionalised (I-) practice exhibits low regularity or practice. A highly institutionalised (I+) practice exhibits high regularity of practice.
interests, which are interpreted as making up elements of gender performativity. Consequently the two modes of recontextualisation that refer to a DS- recontextualised practice may be the most significant.

Thus it would appear, on the surface, that the modes of recontextualisation; improvisation re-principling and rationalisation represent the most important recontextualisations for analysis and of these rationalisation appears to be the most significant in this context. The DS- element of gender can be regarded as the most important reason for this; the ‘recontextualised practice’ in Dowling’s schema, is overwhelmingly a DS- one. However by regarding gender as constituting two different but linked elements, another important mode of recontextualisation; re-principling also becomes relevant.

It would appear that, initially at least, rationalising constitutes the mode of recontextualisation recruited by most participants, and sometimes others around them have also engaged in an improvising mode of recontextualisation. Rationalising as a recontextualisation is evident in Harry’s experience when he described how he was regarded as a boy by strangers even before coming out to anyone as transgender;

…but isn’t this funny and people notice that, you know I was being called a boy even before I identified as a boy, by strangers. I just kind of passed really well even before I identified as transgender, people called me a boy, and my friends would love that, ‘Oh my God he called you sir!’ (Harry May 2015)

Here Harry’s presentation, recontextualised by his friends as a kind of masculine or butch presenting girl, was recontextualised as that of a boy by those who did not know him. This was indicated by their use of the male signifier, ‘Sir’. Had they heard one of his friends refer to him with a third person feminine pronoun or had they known anything more about him they may have employed a different signifier. So what is now regarded as ‘attributing’ a gender (for example by Kessler & McKenna 1979) may also
be regarded as a *rationalising* recontextualisation of a number of different signifiers. Indeed Kessler & McKenna’s work on gender attribution from different visual cues can be regarded as revealing how DS- signifiers become rationalised into a DS+ description of one of the binary genders. So the act - of these strangers in gendering him as a boy - represents a rationalising recontextualisation of DS- visual cues in the absence of other information such as the historic. Indeed it is likely that one of the reasons his friendship group still regarded him, at that point, as a girl was solely the historic; they had known him in the past when he explicitly identified as a girl. Harry continues to describe how he responded to these incidents of being gendered male;

And it was funny because they didn’t know that that was how I felt so I would laugh with them you know it was so funny and I eventually could not hold back any more and told them you know, I am, I actually really am like that, so don't correct them or anything, and then they asked ‘What name do you want to go by?’ and I just suddenly, I just said ‘Harry’ (*Harry May 2015*)

His apparent spur-of-the-moment decision to come out seemed to come from his realisation that this represented a good opportunity to do so and, in terms of his friends he was engaged in a *re-principling* recontextualisation of himself in their eyes, as he came out as a transgender boy. In other words, from the point of view of recontextualisation, experiencing epiphany or attributing a gender is different from coming out as transgender. Coming out as transgender can be regarded as constituting a re-principling recontextualisation, from one DS+ designation to another, and this includes both binary and non-binary identifying trans people. In the practice of gender, insofar as it applied to him, he was recontextualised as male as opposed to female. The stranger’s *rationalised* recontextualisation was correct, fortuitously from his point of view, while his friends were still recontextualising as a girl someone whose gender expression in the DS- was regarded by strangers as that of a boy.
In this sense their recontextualisations were *rationalised* ones but based on different information; they had been introduced to him as a girl and, in the past both he and others around him had used female gendered language when talking about him, consequently they were drawing on their – now outmoded - historical knowledge of him as a girl. In coming out to his friends he was altering their *rationalising* mode of recontextualisation of him from one gender to another in the way that the stranger had already done, only this time in re-principling mode.

What is also evident here is the idea that intelligibility constitutes an important element in the DS- expression of gender. In most instances gender is expressed in the DS-, and to be regarded as a particular gender means that a number of DS- signifiers need to relate to a specific sedimented, DS+ descriptor, to enable this to happen. In Harry’s case the DS- bricolage of signifiers from his appearance and/or mannerisms resulted in strangers recontextualising these as rendering him intelligible as a boy, whereas to his friends’ their historic knowledge of him prevented that from happening. For them, what was required, on his part, was for him to use the DS+, to re-principle their recontextualisations of him, for him to become intelligible to them as a boy.

This suggests that there is a significant link between the DS- and the DS+, in terms of identity; being objectified as a particular gender is dependent on the DS- signifiers corresponding to the two strongly institutionalised DS+ descriptors to produce intelligibility as one of the two binary genders. Consequently a reflexive action between the two elements of gender can be identified, with the DS- affecting the DS+ in terms of intelligibility in individual instances, but with the DS+ also functioning to focus individuals on how to present in order to be intelligible in the DS+ as a gender.

Fiona’s experience also reflects the difference between improvising and rationalising modes of recontextualisation. As a sex worker she needed to
dress in a particular way and described the response she received from
building site workers as she walked past some construction sites on her
way to the Tube;

There’s like three construction sites near my place in the last 6
months, thankfully two of them are quite quick but one of those is
going to take a couple of years, and, walking past all three of these
places the builders leer and they say stuff and they talk amongst
themselves and look at me and it’s really degrading ‘cos there’s
nothing I can do, nothing I can say to them, if I say to them, something,
well, that outs me as a transsexual, because they’ll know my voice
right, so, so I can’t say anything. (Fiona Feb 2011)

She considers that she is forced to maintain her silence, allowing the
builders to continue their rationalising recontextualisation of the bricolage
of DS- signifiers that situate her as a woman, and a woman of a particular
type. Yet from her point of view, she is at least being rationalised by these
workers as a woman as opposed to a trans person, or as a man. Should she
start to speak, a ‘masculine’ sounding voice would probably alter their
improvised/rationalised recontextualisation from regarding her as a
cisgender woman to something else, something that she considers, for her,
as having dangerous consequences, so she subsequently makes the
decision that it is safer for her not to respond verbally to their abuse.

Samira describes how she initially engaged in a kind of improvised
recontextualisation of herself and also a rationalised recontextualisation as
a gay man;

I hate this as a cliché but I always knew I was different from when I was
young. From a very, very young age, my interests and that were
different, I didn’t like being with the boys I liked being with the girls, I
preferred... and a lot of people pointed out and said ‘You’re gay’ and
for me...that brought quite a bit of anxiety in me and I was questioning
my sexuality, so for a very long time I thought I was a gay or bisexual
man, but when it actually came down to the crunch it was... I like men
but I’m not a man, I don’t feel like a man I don’t like all these manly
things, the thought of cutting my hair short and conforming to all
manhood, that’s rough! (Samira May 2015)
The cliché to which she refers, that of knowing she was different from when she was young, is described as such because it represents the way many trans people describe their experiences of early childhood. Even after accessing the internet and reading different material, including blog posts, by other trans women it still took her around two years to change from improvised and rationalised recontextualisations of herself as an effeminate gay or bisexual man to a re-principling recontextualisation of herself as a trans woman.

It took me a couple of years, it was seeing, all, you know, Carmen Carrera’s posts writing about trans power and all that and I was ... I could really connect with what you’re saying, the thoughts, the feelings and I was like... I always knew deep, deep down but it’s accepting it in yourself.. you know what I mean... it’s a lot... (Samira May 2015)

Her recontextualisation of herself as a trans woman needed to happen as rationalising and re-principling recontextualisations however. It would appear that this is significant in the way she comes to identify; through a DS+ recontextualisation of the predominantly DS- practice of gender performativity as well as a DS+ recontextualisation of her gendering.

It would appear that one of the main ways it is possible to characterise Samira’s process of epiphany as a trans person is this move from a confused and problematic improvising recontextualisation of herself as an effeminate man to rationalising and re-principling recontextualisations of herself as a woman. Improvising entails using any kind of arbitrary resources that one has available to try and make sense of one’s identity and in most instances it would appear that these are inadequate for this purpose. In particular, assumptions that it is to do with sexuality seem to be a feature of many improvisations; David expresses how his improvising felt;
I dunno I've... I felt different since as long as I can remember, I do remember one day when I was walking to school in seventh grade, something... not sure why I thought it was just a random thought, gender identity and sexual orientation I would probably think of myself as a butch lesbian or masculine lesbian but that's just wrong... Does not compute... Do you understand? (David May 2014)

Here his prior improvisation is being destabilised by the DS+, in terms of gender, he is starting to rationalise himself into the DS+ from the DS- while at the same time, in terms of gendering he is starting to re-principle his gender identity from a female one to a male one. This would appear then, to be the move that trans people need to make when they come to understand themselves as transgender. In the case of those who were aware that they were different from others, but couldn’t put a name to it, their improvising recontextualisation is replaced with a rationalising one. This then also involves a re-principling recontextualisation from one DS+ identification to another. The rationalisation often occurs when a trans-related word is first acquired, or first applied to oneself, the re-principling recontextualisation when one makes the move, in the DS+ from one’s birth assigned gender to one’s identified gender.

Rationalising or re-principling recontextualisation means one is able to align one’s sense of self with representations already culturally available in the DS+ and form that sense of self into an identity constituted in language. What appears to be happening is that there is a need for a DS+ recontextualisation in order to begin identifying as a gender other than the one assigned at birth; in this sense then, it would be fair to regard gender identification as constituting oneself in language as a particular gender since improvisation does not and cannot constitute identification. As Dowling (2013 p 133) asserts, improvisation constitutes a ‘bricolage’ of available semiotic resources and the different ways they may be interpreted. The problem with bricolage, from the point of view of the individuals engaging in this kind of recontextualisation is the often arbitrary nature of the availability of these resources. In contrast what language
does is constitute an element of apparent order to otherwise disordered resources so that they may be communicated to others with what appears to be a greater degree of accuracy and shared understanding. The use of the term ‘bricolage’ here is significant in that it signifies a combination of various different signifiers, of diverse resources, of whatever elements are available, and often appears to function in ways that are weakly institutionalised as opposed to a group of signifiers constituting a strongly institutionalised and culturally recognisable identity.

So it is the process of attaching a linguistic signifier to a bricolage of different elements that can be constituted as part of the process of identification. For cisgender people a signifier is already attached to the specific bricolage of behaviours that constitute their gendered performances. They do not need to make this complex move from improvising to rationalising and/or re-principling that transgender people have to do, for them the process of identification in terms of gender does not normally include a need to rationalise their genders, at least not to the same extent that trans people do. In effect the link between the DS- and the DS+ in terms of gender has already been established, for the majority of cisgender people, they do not need to construct it for themselves, merely to follow a path already well established for them. What additionally characterises many trans people’s experience however, in comparison with the experiences of cisgender people, is the need, within the practice of gendering, to re-principle from one gender to another, again something cisgender people do not usually need to do.

Recontextualisation of the DS- by the DS+; rationalising, and recontextualisation of the DS+ by the DS+; re-principling would seem then represent the main ways in which trans people come to identify as transgender or as a different gender from the one they were assigned at birth. It is these particular processes of recontextualisation that are so significant. As Samira, Brett and many others describe it, trans people often
‘feel different’, or feel that they ‘don’t fit in’ from a very young age. What is difficult for them is to rationalise such improvised notions. As a consequence of I+ and predominantly DS- cultural processes characterised earlier as ‘cis-mythologisation’ young trans people (and sometimes older trans people also) do not have easy access to the cultural resources they need in order to be able to move from a DS- recontextualisation strategy to a DS+ one; *rationalising*. The cultural erasure, exclusion, abuse and misrepresentation of trans people contribute to this process of cis-mythologisation, which, despite some increased visibility of trans people in the recent past, still appear to make it difficult for young trans people to make the move from *improvising* recontextualisations to *rationalising* and *re-principling* recontextualisations of their genders.

So what this rationalising appears to produce, is the process of identification. In other words without a DS+ recontextualisation it is not possible to constitute an identity, as identification can only exist in the DS+. This might appear to represent a bold, or even controversial, claim but it would appear from an analysis of the data, that it is this move from DS- to DS+ which constitutes one of the most significant, if not *the* most significant, elements of the process of identification. Brubaker’s and Cooper’s (2000) essay about identification argues that the processes of identification constitute a kind of ‘classification’; either by marking difference between groups or by marking similarities between groups. It is argued here that this represents a process that only becomes possible in the DS+. Similarly Foucault (1984) argued that homosexuals were only constituted as a distinct group when they had been named as a group by the medical profession during the 19th century. This ‘taxonomisation’ resulted in the group being given a name, and therefore began the process of constituting it in the DS+. Consequently the ability to cohere and subsequently form alliances in similar way to that which Brubaker and Cooper have described, became possible. Subsequently it became possible to campaign for civil rights and against discrimination and oppressive
legislation. Based on the evidence presented here, we can regard the processes of grouping and differentiating as requiring a linguistic descriptor or signifier. Without such a signifier being associated with a particular cluster is very difficult, if not impossible, for it to form itself into a group. For it to become possible for a group to unite as a group with similar characteristics and for members of that group to differentiate themselves from other groups, a language of recognition to define that group is required. Once this has been achieved, as Foucault would argue, the ability (indeed the likelihood) of engaging in collective political action to improve that group’s position socially, culturally and politically becomes possible.

Characterising gender as including the DS- performativity of gender but also the meta-practice of gender, a DS+ activity referring to a corresponding DS- one, is therefore productive. It describes how trans people, in particular those who identify within the gender binary, engage in a re-principling recontextualisation within this practice of gendering. If we regard the DS+ practice of discussing or talking about gender as an important element of identification, then both rationalising and re-principling describe the means by which young trans people experience epiphanies, come out and assert their identities. This re-principling can take the form of simply regarding oneself as, or asserting that one is, a different gender from that assigned at birth, as participant Samira does;

‘Me, I’m a woman.’

This can be regarded as a re-principling by Samira of her own gender in that she has come to regard herself as a woman despite being assigned male and hitherto being treated as such, although it can also be regarded as a performative statement.

However, as I have argued above, rationalisation, a DS+ recontextualisation of a DS- practice is necessary for the establishment of identity. The
argument here is whether an identity can be regarded as being constituted
in the DS-, or whether it needs to be rationalised into the DS+ in order for it
to be regarded, and come into existence as an identity. Foucault’s
argument regarding the production of identity, suggests that an identity
needs to be recontextualised into language in order for it to come into
existence as an identity; prior to the taxonomic creation of homosexuality
the practice of ‘sodomy’ existed, but it was only when men who engaged in
this practice were constituted as a taxonomically defined group that the
identity of ‘gay man’ was produced. In this instance it is likely that the
production of this identity occurred through both a rationalising
recontextualisation from studying a group of men who apparently
preferred to have sex with other men and a re-principling
recontextualisation, from a practice to a named group of the already
defined practice of ‘sodomy’. If we consider Butler’s (Salih & Butler 2004
p102) argument that the process of identification is a social process, ie
identities can only be constituted relative to other people; whether this
refers to similars or dissimilars, it must be through language that this
process happens. It is argued here that the process of identification is
produced socially, through language, since language is the prime means of
social interaction. Consequently it is argued that, until a group is
constituted in language on the basis of a particular identifying
characteristic, members of that group cannot be regarded as having an
identity, at least not in relation to that particular characteristic.

The ways different individuals may be regarded as having a particular
identity may consequently be dependent on rationalising and/or re-
principling recontextualisations. The following example from Phil’s
experience as a child suggests that these recontextualisations of individuals
may differ significantly and present confusing results in terms of the
subsequent identities attributed or allocated. The first thing Phil described,
right at the start of his interview, was how he felt a ‘loss of identity’ after
he was introduced to another child who was also described as a ‘tomboy’,
which was the word used to describe him at that time;

...the identity I was given by other people, was a tomboy, was the
identity, that was given to me, and I do remember a specific instance
realising what was wrong with that term, which was that I was
introduced to this other child who was apparently also a tomboy, she
had long hair, and she was just like, she was like, she was just, for me...
she played football or something like that; and I didn't care about
football, I wasn't masculine at all, I'm still not very masculine at all, and
she was just like, she was a girl who liked boy things, and whereas for
me I was more like, and so for me, that's not really what tomboy
meant right, and I vividly remember sort of feeling like a loss of
identity... (Phil Jan 2012)

Here two different children, whose preferences and presentations are very
different, and ultimately whose genders are also different, have both been
identified as ‘tomboys’. Phil’s behaviour, which included rejecting any kind
of feminine appearance, as well as giving himself a string of boy’s names
throughout his childhood, was rationalised as constituting a ‘tomboy’
identity. However the actions of the other child, whose identity as a girl
was not in question, but whose preferences for activities, including sports,
were culturally associated with masculinity, was also recontextualised as
constituting the identity of ‘tomboy’. Consequently Phil either needed to
re-interpret the meaning of ‘tomboy’ as something different from what he
had originally believed it to mean or, as he did, feel the loss of identity, as
he was unable to constitute himself in that identity any longer. It would
appear that he had previously recontextualised the word ‘tomboy’ to mean
something like; ‘someone assigned female who wants to be a boy.’
However after this incident it appears that he has re-interpreted this as
meaning ‘a girl who likes boy things.’ It appears that the practice of an
otherwise female identifying girl liking boys’ sports, and that of a ‘girl’
appearing like a boy (and possibly attempting to assert a male identity)
have both been rationalised as the same thing by the adults around them.
What is also happening here can be regarded as a mythologisation; if we
regard ‘tomboy’ as a mythologisation, then an element of slippage in the connection between signifier and signified becomes likely, if not inevitable.

Since the DS-practices of gender can be recontextualised in different ways by different individuals, it is also likely that the DS-nature of the practice of gender means that different behaviours may be recontextualised as constituting the same rationalised descriptor in the DS+. The two binary genders each cover a wide range of different behaviour within each of them, so regarding presenting and identifying in a masculine way but not liking ‘masculine’ activities, as part of the same group of who present in a feminine way but like ‘masculine’ activities is, in this instance perhaps understandable. However for Phil, the differences between him and the girl to whom he was introduced were so significant to him to the extent that subsequently he could no longer regard himself as a ‘tomboy’. From his perspective being associated with someone who identifies as a different gender from him and who has very different interests and presentation from him, was evidently a very confusing experience. Although gendering can be regarded as constituting a rationalising recontextualisation, there is no guarantee that the recontextualised practice will be rationalised in the same way by different people.

Samira also experienced a situation where her gender was re-principled and rationalised differently from the way she did, by a boyfriend, and consequently her identity was mythologised as a man rather than a woman;

I had one boyfriend and he was gay, he was very obviously gay and he was attracted to me, dunno why, I was in a dress and I had black hair and that, and he come up to me and he was all sort of kissy kissy, touchy, touchy and all that bollocks and I said ‘Do you like men innit?’ He goes ‘Yeah.’ I said ‘Well I’m a woman, and if you’re with me, there’s nothing masculine about me whatsoever.’ I said like, ‘I may come across as
cockney blokish but I’m a south Londoner, but actually emotionally, emotionally, I’m female’.
He said ‘Oh don’t worry babe, I’m in it with you…’
And two months later he said to me ‘I dunno what I’ve got myself in for.’
‘Well I told you.’ (Samira May 2015)

From Samira’s perspective we can start to see how recontextualising seems not to be too dissimilar to mythologising. Her partner regarded himself as in possession of the principles of recontextualisation of her as an effeminate gay man, principles to which she did not have access. He did not make those principles available to her; indeed he appeared to ignore her own self-definition as a woman. Despite her telling him that she was a woman he mythologised her as a gay man, probably based on one or more prior experiences of other people who he regarded as similar to Samira, perhaps because they looked similar in some way. Of course it is possible to interpret this situation as the boyfriend considering that there would be little difference between a cisgender gay man and a bisexual trans woman. However this also constitutes a mythologisation; he is effectively mythologising trans women as isomorphic with gay men, a common misapprehension and a common way of misrepresenting trans women. This is not so different from Phil’s experience with the tomboy, an apparent similarity was misrecognised as an actual similarity.

So far in this chapter I have presented evidence of the different ways the practice of gender has been recontextualised, and in particular how the practice of gender is constituted as a consequence of some of this recontextualising. I have drawn on Dowling’s schema which regards applying DS+ principles to a DS- practice as constituting a rationalisation. However it is significant because the gaze of the DS+ onto the DS- is transformative and probably represents one of the ways gender has become sedimented and established into the two binary genders. Gender is often argued to be socially constructed (Hacking 1999) and there is evidence to support this in that genders are performed differently in
different cultures (Williams 1986, Costa & Matzner 2007, Garber 1992)
whether historically, ethnically or geographically differentiated. However it is important to acknowledge the link between the DS- and the DS+ in our cultural environment, and how that influences the way gender is regarded and conceived.

So it is argued that consequently the two binary genders have only become sedimented as established genders because of the DS+. The ability to talk about gender, and to mythologise it, can be regarded as a consequence of the way it is represented in language. The DS+, therefore, is not merely a vehicle for gender identification, but for all sorts of cultural (mis)conceptions of gender. These would include the exercise of power over, in particular, women through prohibitions on certain behaviours or allocation of additional responsibilities based on gender assignment and objectification by gender. So gender in the DS+ can be regarded as a means by which gender is regulated, and cultural power over individuals, from a gendered perspective, exercised. Stryker’s (2006) argument that the advent of the Renaissance in Europe and consequent rise of the hegemony of the physical over the spiritual, resulted in a cultural erasure or exclusion of trans people is illustrative of this. When gender became associated predominantly with the physical, the prevailing culture since that time made it harder for trans people to engage in rationalising or re-principling recontextualisations of themselves. By attaching the concept of gender to the physical manifestations of bodies as opposed to less physical understandings cultural processes made the process of gender identification for trans people and of trans people by others significantly more difficult.

What is argued here is that the DS- practice of gender is to an extent dependent on, and regulated by, the DS+ practice of gender, a practice that is, in effect a recontextualisation of the DS-. It is this DS+ practice that enables the practice of gender as a whole to become mythologised. The
next section will look more closely at the ways gender is mythologised, and will attempt to move beyond gender as recontextualisation to gender as mythologisation and consequently cis-mythologisations of trans people.

7.3 Mythologising

This section recruits from the four mythologising modes schema as conceptualised in Dowling (1998) and organised into a relational space by Dudley-Smith (2015). This schema organises the four different types of myth conceptualised by Dowling into the relational space in fig 7.2 below. Here the relational space, Mythologising Modes is organised by two axes. The first of these is characterised as Claim over Recontextualising Context which is regarded as either Other or Same. In the other binary scale the Mode of Push Recontextualisation (Dowling 2010) each strategy is characterised as either Hierarchising or Enveloping constituting Dudley-Smith’s rationalising recontextualisation of Dowling’s four central strategies of mythologisation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Push</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Same</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchising</td>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enveloping</td>
<td>Emancipation</td>
<td>Certainty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 7.2 Mythologising Modes (Dudley-Smith 2015)

One of the distinguishing features of cis-mythologisation is the way gender is externally imposed, this distinguishes it from a recontextualisation strategy in that the individual doing the gendering is in possession of the principles of recontextualisation rather than the individual being objectified as a particular gender. It is this that, as much as anything else,
constitutes this as a myth. What is more, the process of external gender assignation appears to be regarded as unproblematic by most. Assigning a gender to others is such a commonplace act that it is not generally regarded as in any way problematic. Hence Fiona’s decision not to respond verbally when subjected to sexist insults from a building site (described earlier in this chapter), she considered that, should she allow any DS-signifier that she is transgender to become apparent to them, in this case her voice, she believes she would be regarded and treated as an effeminate gay man or worse, and subject to a higher level of abuse than otherwise, and quite possibly physical or sexual violence or threats of physical violence. In this situation her perspective is that being regarded as a woman, even as a sex worker is safer than being regarded as a trans woman, and that she believes that the workers on this building site will impose their own interpretation of her gender rather than the one she wants to project should she present any clue, such as the sound of her voice.

Characterising this as constituting a *myth of certainty* also derives from this feature. The referent activity of gendering, based on wider cultural beliefs that gender is essential, and consequently immutable and binary, means that the external imposition of gender, in being regarded as unproblematic, indicates that this constitutes an example of the myth of certainty. It’s claim over the recontextualised context is that of similarity to the recontextualising practice, it does not recognise any difference between its own regard of gender and the context being mythologised. It also constitutes an enveloping push onto this context; there is nothing other than this mythologisation, in this instance. In addition there is, in effect, a denial that any gaze at all is being cast; an individual’s gender *is* what it is interpreted as by the observer, who, in this instance, holds the principles of recognition, principles that, in this instance, are almost certainly constituted in the DS-. It is the non-availability of these principles, which, in
Social Activity Method, constitutes a mythologisation as opposed to a recontextualisation and which objectify the individual or group in question.

Cis-mythologisation is also characterised as a myth of certainty because it appears to be connected to being recognised as a human being characteristic of an enveloping push recontextualisation. As Phil observed;

> We live in a system where we have to have a gender to be human [...] it’s not that you’re schooled that you are this gender and you ought to be this, people are socialised in that way but they’re also exposed to gender as an ideology in the broader sense. (Phil Jan 2012)

Here this participant has arrived at these conclusions as a result of his experiences of attempting to identify, and present, as a non-binary person. Consequently cis-mythologisation can be regarded as an element, or a manifestation of this ‘system’ in which gender is mythologised as not merely essential, immutable and binary but as a constituent element of being regarded as human. It is a myth into which we are not merely interpellated as constituting a particular subject position as a gender but one into which we are also socialised into accepting, coming to regard gender as constituting what it means to be human in and of itself.

The predominantly DS- nature of the way cis-mythologisation is applied is significant however, in that it renders it difficult to identify, to understand, to resist and to counter its effects, both for individual trans people experiencing their own epiphanies and attempting to come out and to educate those around them about themselves and what it means to be transgender. The myth of certainty is characterised (Dowling 1998: 295) as a denial that any mythologising gaze exists at all, which is significant. So not only are the principles of recognition withheld, which is what constitutes the SAM definition of mythologisation, but there is a denial that this mythologisation constitutes any kind of gaze at all, since the referent gaze is claimed to be the same as the recontextualising activity. Gender is
regarded as essential, binary, immutable and externally imposed, and consequently trans people cannot exist because the original gender schema does not allow it.

One of David’s experiences as an LGBT role model who visits schools represents another, perhaps equally surprising, example of cis-mythologisation. In this situation David is visiting a school with two young gay men to talk to the pupils about LGBT issues...

I was in stealth one-time, there was this random question all of a sudden, with two people, and this boy just asked me openly, I’m not even sure if it was directed at me one of the just me, and one of them, are you together? Yet with three men out and they are gay at least two of them are gay, and that one hasn't said anything but naturally he has to be gay, and when gays are out together they are together... (David May 2014)

Despite this being a situation where all LGBT issues were discussed, David reports that the questioner seemed to assume that all of the three presenters were cisgender gay, or bisexual, men. There was no suggestion that any of them might have been considered as anything other than that, even though the circumstances were such that they were discussing LGBT issues as opposed to just gay men’s issues. The idea that one of them might be trans appeared not to cross the mind of the children in that school.

The predominantly DS- but I+ nature of cis-mythologisation however, goes beyond the erasure of trans people, although this is one of its most significant impacts. On the rare occasions when trans people’s lives are subject to discussion there seems to be an assumption amongst people who are not transgender that they know about what it means to be transgender, and can make consequent assertions about members of this group. Phil complains about this with reference to a journalist who does just that on a regular basis;
…there’s a total, total lack of understanding that trans people also have sexualities and also occupy a variety of sexualities and… one thing that I can’t stand, Julie Bindel’s ‘Oh well people are just transitioning so they can be straight.’ Has she seen the statistics? Has she seen them? The statistics where loads, loads more of us than cis people are gay and loads more of us than cis people are lesbian. (Phil Jan 2011)

Here the assumption, made by a prominent writer and anti-trans activist, that trans people transition in order to avoid the stigma of homosexuality, is countered, according to Phil, by statistics. In this instance Bindel’s mythologising constitutes a Myth of Participation; gender is mythologised as being for sex, it is reduced to a means of attracting a sexual partner, and trans people are transitioning in order to engage in homosexual sex whilst avoiding the stigma of being regarded as gay or lesbian. This resonates with what Phil reported about his mother’s reaction to him coming out to her;

I came out to my mum, ‘I think I’m a boy’ I can’t remember what I said to her because the vivid memory was of her response because it was ‘Can’t you just be a lesbian?’ (Phil Jan 2011)

Again the implication of this is that she regards gender identity as for the purpose of attracting a sexual partner, thus she considers his gender identity implies that he is attracted to women and considers himself as needing to present as male in order to achieve this. Gender is mythologised as for sex, to the extent that one employs one’s gender as a means of attracting a mate. What is significant in this instance is that Phil also regarded himself in this way for a while;

… It did take me a long time and a long process and I had loads of relationships with women and part of that was about wanting to feel validated... (Phil Jan 2011)

Phil was also affected by the myth of participation and the need for his gender identity to be legitimised on the basis of sexuality.
A more interesting example of this kind of mythologisation is Wesley’s reflection on identifying as a trans man while being sexually attracted to women;

It’s weird because when for example someone who is attracted to men transitions to become male, it’s almost like... it’s so hard to explain, but they’re already attracted to men so they see the good in men so to speak... but for me... attracted to women, transitioning to being something that I don’t find attractive, is almost a difficult thing, and it’s a weird way of looking at it. (Wesley April 2013)

Here, it appears that the myth of participation is so widely established that even though Wesley’s life experiences and attraction to women constitutes evidence that this myth is nothing more than a myth, he still feels that he should be transitioning to the gender to which he is attracted. His evident unease, or puzzlement at this suggests that the myth of participation in terms of gender is both internalised, at least in his case, and possibly more widespread than might otherwise have been expected.

The mythologising of gender as the myth of participation also appears to have influenced scholars, academics and psychologists specialising in gender or Gender Studies. The ‘feminist’ mythologisation of trans sexuality as the myth of participation can be evidenced in Tosh’s (2016) summary of ‘radical feminist’ approaches to theorising transgender people as similar in nature to conservative psychiatric approaches to transgender people;

Despite its critical stance on therapy, these radical perspectives parallel psychiatric and psychological perspectives that misgender trans people, in that they override trans individuals’ ability to self-determine their body and gender identity, frame life-saving procedures as ‘unnecessary’ and aim to prevent the existence of transsexuals. (p94)

Tosh’s perspective here is from the point of view of a psychologist, yet her observation can be recontextualised by SAM as describing the mythologisation of trans people by some psychiatric discourses and ‘radical
feminist’ narratives. She recounts how Jeffreys (2005 p53) mythologises trans people as having histories of sexual abuse and as motivated by masochism (2005). In both of these cases Tosh cites numerous studies that refute Jeffreys’ myths about trans people, but which Jeffreys ignores.

The output of conservative psychologists and psychiatrists such as Blanchard (1993) and Bailey (2003) can also be regarded as constituting an example of mythologising trans people by fabricating a diagnosis that was intended originally to be applicable only to trans women; that of ‘autogynephilia’. This diagnosis attempts to situate trans women as being transgender because of a sexual attraction to themselves as women. This is a difficult diagnosis to refute since it is the preserve of a psychiatrist to make such a diagnosis. It does not merely constitute a pathologisation of trans people but a disempowering diagnosis; the individual trans woman who is diagnosed with autogynephilia, is, in effect being mythologised with the myth of participation in that her gender identity is for something other than itself, and the psychiatrist making this diagnosis holds the principles of recognition which are not fully shared with her. It is significant that this diagnosis has only ever been made very rarely, yet its existence as part of the DSM5 (APA 2012) can be regarded as a means of attaching the myth of participation to trans women in a way that alienates, objectifies and disempowers – ‘we know more about your reasons for being trans than you do’ – and is employed by those campaigning against trans people’s human rights, as a means of delegitimisation by arguing that trans people are mentally ill. It is significant that the way this theory/diagnosis has been discredited most successfully is by Moser (2009) who applied this diagnosis to a group of cisgender women, with the result that 93% of participants in his research would have been classified as ‘autogynephillic’ according to this diagnosis.

To conclude this chapter the evident presence of the myth of participation with regard to gender is manifest by the person who devised the notion of
autogynephilia, Ray Blanchard, which may be regarded as significant. Blanchard is reported to believe that any sexual activity other than that which is for procreation, is inherently disordered (Tosh 2016 p14). Here the myth of participation has been referenced by Blanchard in his belief that sex is disordered if it is not for producing children. His mythologisation of gender is consequently of little surprise. If gender is mythologised as being for something other than itself, as having a use-value, in this instance for sex, (which is subsequently, according to Blanchard, disordered if it is not for procreative sex) then this suggests that culturally gender is effectively regarded as a largely utilitarian practice which is for the purpose of attracting a sexual partner with whom to produce children. If this is the case then, at its most fundamental, gender is mythologised as a means of attracting a mate.
Chapter 8: Enfranchisement and Justification Strategies

This chapter attempts to produce a constructive description of the emergence of trans people as a visible and identifiable group in public perceptions. To do this it refers to the strategies and discourses recruited by trans people in self-justification and attempts to establish how these strategies are deployed on a more general level, in the media and from a historical perspective.

Trans people sometimes need to engage in agitating for change, as well as helping other trans people to survive and often need to engage in justifying themselves, something, which most cisgender people do not, as cisgender people. This chapter looks at the ways participants pro-actively or re-actively engage in resistance to the forces that oppose them as well as how they justify themselves to others, and to themselves also, it does this in three sections. In the first section different activist strategies are characterised. The second section elaborates both local level and general level manifestations, including in the media, of the strategies employed in justification. The final section attempts to situate these in a historical context. These strategies index different ways these participants have come to understand themselves, to trust themselves, to deal with uncertainty as well as convince others of who they are. It goes on to consider how these may have impacted on the emergence of trans people in recent years.

68 www.time.com/135480/transgender-tipping-point/
8.1 Enfranchisement Strategies

One of the main explanations for the increased visibility of trans people has been the development of the internet and social media (Whittle 1998, Cromwell 1999, Stryker 2006) However these explanations, which can be regarded as alluding to an element of technological determinism often lack detail and fail to account fully for changes in cultural processes and social relations that have brought about the emergence of trans people as politically a relatively cohesive and campaigning group. Indeed Ian, a young trans man studying for an MSc and my first interview participant, made the following, on the face of it, quite controversial claim;

Wherever you get two or more trans people together, you get trans activism. (Andy, Jan 2011)

Although this might be regarded as an overgeneralisation it is significant that from his experience, as a young man who had spent the previous few years as a university student, this would be the case. This also reflects how higher education is becoming one of the main sites for young trans people to come out (Nicolazzo 2017 p37) More than half of the total number of participants in the study were either current university students or recent graduates at the time of interview, with one other studying in further education. From this perspective it is not very dissimilar to the proportion of the population of that age now going to university. It was clear that a significant proportion of participants regarded university or further education as a much safer place to come out than school. This chapter argues that coming out in any environment is likely to mean engaging in some kind of activism. Trans activism can be characterised as having two main focuses; the systemic and the cultural. Activism that focuses on the systemic, targets existing institutional structures such as the health service,

the legal system and bureaucratic systems. Activity that focuses on the cultural is concerned with aspects of the symbolic and learned behaviour institutionalised and sedimented in a particular society. These two elements, to a large extent, affect each other, with the systemic being produced by cultural processes but subsequently cultural processes in turn being affected by the systemic. A small, but representative example of activism focused on systemic change is when Fiona describes how she decided that she needed to take identification documents along to her GP next time she visits as she reported having trouble convincing her doctor of who she is;

   I think I'll take my passport and my deed poll next time, it's the best way. (Fiona, Jan 2011)

Although this appears to represent something relatively small, it is something she needs to do in order to be able to access healthcare. It exposes her doctor to first hand experience of interacting with a trans person, possibly for the first time, in a health service that still does not seem to have the awareness and knowledge to be able to treat trans people.70 In contrast David’s activism in becoming part of a group that visits schools to talk to children about LGBT issues, is different, instead of being aimed at altering any established bureaucratic systems it is aimed at affecting the cultural attitudes of adolescents;

   I'm part of this going out group in LGBT Denmark, the youth where we, visit schools different schools, going out and talking and about who we are, and taking questions from students, it's pretty cool... (David, May 2014)

This presents us with one scale for analysis characterised as focus; which is constituted as either systemic or cultural.

The second of these binary scales is characterised as *objective*, and represents the aim or aims of the action, this is constituted as *maintenance* and *change*. *Maintenance* is concerned with preserving the existing situation, repairing damage or developing capabilities as opposed to altering people’s perceptions and attitudes. Hannah describes how she accessed some of this help, in the form of online interaction, support and advice when she was in the process of coming out,

> I did sort of go on a few forums and a few chat rooms and spoke to other trans people who were in the same position as me and erm... they helped...they helped me explore how I wanted to be perceived. (*Hannah, May 2014*)

To some this may not appear to constitute what is regarded as activism but it fulfills a particularly important function of helping others to come out, to understand their circumstances, to navigate existing systems and come to terms with their ‘new’ status interactively and through support and signposting. In contrast *change* refers to attempting to alter the world in some way from the way it currently exists to something different. Melissa’s activism in this regard was to help organise an annual event for trans people;

> I helped organise the remembrance event. (*Melissa, Jan 2011*)

This refers to the annual Transgender Day of Remembrance held to remember the disproportionate number of trans people murdered every year in an effort to reduce discrimination of trans people. Although it represents predominantly a vigil for those who are murdered it also, by implication, represents a means of campaigning for change to try and stop violence against trans people.

These two axes are combined to constitute the Enfranchisement Strategies schema presented in fig 1 below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Systemic</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Cultural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>Guiding</td>
<td></td>
<td>Supporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>Debugging</td>
<td></td>
<td>Campaigning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Fig 8.1 Enfranchisement Strategies*

These strategies are initially identified here on both a local and general level and engaged in by both individuals and groups. To elaborate on these, in the top left corner of the relational space a systemic focus with the objective of maintenance is characterised as *guiding*. Navigating through the complexities of bureaucratic systems that, from trans people’s perspectives were not designed with trans people in mind is an example of this. They are often complex and inefficient for a number of purposes such as changing names and obtaining healthcare. Steve, working with another trans person, described putting together a guide for trans students at his university on how to navigate the system to get what they need,

> … at my university its very small and there wasn’t very much trans information so me and this girl we thought we might maybe put together an informational leaflet. *(Steve, Jan 2011)*

This is a more localised version of the work done in a more organised way by Action for Trans Health⁷¹, a loose alliance of groups around the UK who work to help young trans people through the process of bureaucratic and medical transition and Mermaids⁷², an organisation supporting parents of trans children and adolescents.

---

⁷² [http://www.mermaidsuk.org.uk](http://www.mermaidsuk.org.uk)
Mermaids provides a significant amount of activism in the form of support. Their objective is maintenance but their focus is both structural as well as cultural; in large measure providing emotional support for trans children and young people and their families, as well as guiding individuals through the medical and legal processes required for gender transition. Yet this kind of support also happens online in a variety of different areas of the internet, using online social media as Hannah describes,

I did sort of go on a few forums and a few chat rooms and spoke to other trans people who were in the same position as me and erm... they helped... (Hannah, May 2014)

Moving to the bottom right corner of the relational space, a cultural focus with an objective of creating change is characterised as campaigning. Here, a great deal of the campaigning work these days is done by larger organisations like Trans Media Watch\(^{73}\), All About Trans\(^{74}\) and Stonewall\(^{75}\), although Mermaids is also engaged in this kind of activism. However there are always examples of campaigning that takes place on a smaller scale, or on a local level. Jake describes how he became involved in a campaign to save a Guatemalan refugee in Denmark and change the Danish government’s asylum policy;

INT: So have you been involved in trans activism? Jake. Yes... yes... A lot. A lot with the Fernanda Milan case, awesome! And I guess working here is its own kind of activism in the trans/queer... like theatre, I think. (Jake, May 2014)

Yet he also considers that, in current circumstances, being a trans person who has any kind of visibility constitutes activism;

73 http://www.transmediawatch.org
74 http://www.allabouttrans.org.uk
75 http://www.stonewall.org.uk
I wouldn’t say I’m a trans advocate, but maybe just existing as a trans person you are doing… I mean you are… everyone you meet you’re educating. (Jake, May 2014)

Moving to the bottom left corner a systemic focus with the objective of change is characterised as debugging. Shane’s example of how he worked to ensure that he could change his name on the university system and graduate in his male name, with this name on his degree certificate;

The only people I had trouble with was the student office when I was changing my name on my records, and they kept telling me my deed poll wasn’t legal and I was saying, ‘It’s a deed poll. It’s legal and it’s signed by one of your lecturers, its her signature witnessing it. What more do you need? Call her and check.’ (Shane, Jan 2011)

This, pushing for relatively straightforward administrative changes occurs because systems have been designed without consideration for transgender people and both the system itself and the administration staff operating it do not yet understand the need to include trans people or how to include trans people.

So, Andy’s observation, at the start of this chapter, that trans activism is widespread and that many more people are involved in it than might otherwise be considered, can be regarded as significant in that, by looking at the different ways trans people engage in activism, we can see that activism can take many different forms, and if we include all of these then the extent of trans activism is probably much wider than otherwise appreciated. According to this definition, not quite all participants engaged in activism, but a significant majority did. That included activism working towards a wider, more general objective, such as acceptance of trans people more generally or towards a specific goal local to the individual. This is significant because it suggests that, while there have been some general level changes that support trans people, such as the introduction of the Equality Act (2010) in the UK for example, on a local level, structures
and individuals have not always changed in some of the finer details, as exemplified by Shane’s need to convince his university’s administration to allow him to change his name on his degree certificate. It is also clear that there is a need for activism that is aimed at maintenance as well as change. Broadly this means helping other trans people with practical aspects of transitioning or helping them to cope with discrimination, social exclusion and the emotional aspects of living in their identified genders. Enfranchisement strategies do not simply mean attempting to change the world through campaigning for rights but helping people live in the way they need to live, and making small adjustments to the world on a local level to enable this.

What is significant here is that there is evidently a need for all these different types of activism, suggesting that participants experienced cultural and social exclusion as a consequence of identifying as transgender men, women or non-binary people and that transphobia and cis-mythologisation have had an effect on their lives. Whether this is an indication that there continue to exist significant hurdles to trans people at both general institutional and cultural level, is difficult to say from this data, however the qualitative study into trans people’s experiences, Injustice at Every Turn (Grant et al 2016) reports widespread and persistent discrimination against trans people in the United States, even prior to the installation of president Trump. In the UK, there are also reports of a significant rise in reported transphobic hate-crime since 2016.

8.2 Justification strategies

Not all trans people transition physiologically and of those who do, not all transition fully (for example it is not uncommon for trans men to have ‘top

---

surgery’, i.e. double mastectomies, but not ‘bottom surgery’, especially since surgical techniques for this are not as well developed as bottom surgery for trans women.). Consequently, any examination of justification strategies for trans people needs to regard justification to oneself as an important element, not merely in terms of whether to have surgery and if so what surgeries to have, but in terms of how they might identify. In addition to interpreting DS- notions of how they regard themselves in gendered terms, there is a need, in many instances to justify who they are, not merely to themselves but to others. So the justification strategies described and analysed in this chapter need to be regarded in that light. They constitute not merely modes of persuading others that trans people are who they say they are, but also ways of drawing on cultural resources to justify their decision to themselves in response to both DS+ and DS- social and cultural resistance to their existence and legitimacy as trans people.

8.2.1 Participant data analysis

Boltanski and Thevenot (1991) constituted a model of justification, which consisted of six elements; the principle of common humanity, the principle of differentiation, common dignity, an order of worth, an investment formula and the common good. Within this they identified that often the initial appeal when justifying would be to a higher common good, with subsequent resort to more local level justifications using the other elements if this proved to be unsupported by circumstances. The evidence in this chapter from research participants reflects this local-general binary scale and is reflected in the strategies employed in self-justification.

However there is a significant difference between the circumstances of most trans people and one of the main theoretical examples Boltanski and Thevenot give. Their example, of a commercial visitor being shown round a factory suggests that the initial privileging of the general which stems from
the need to show this theoretical visitor a well-functioning organisation from a systemic point of view. When there appears to be something that does not fit into this harmonious generality, the level of justification subsequently moves from the general to the local – maybe a machine that is idle can be explained by a staff member absent due to illness, for example.

However, in contrast to this, the difference in terms of the circumstances of trans people is that their needs are different in that there is a need to self-justify, and to engage in justifications most importantly, at a local level first, to be accepted by oneself, by family, friends, classmates and work colleagues, as well as others living in one’s locality. So the initial justification in Boltanski’s and Thevenot’s conceptualisation of justification operates from an entirely different vector from the needs of individuals who need to justify themselves. This does not mean that a general level justification is not needed but, for the individual the local needs to come first, acceptance in their immediate social milieu is important initially. Yet there is a related need however, to engage in justification on a general level also. Indeed there is a connection between the two in that legitimisation of trans people’s existence and human rights needs to proceed at the general level and influence politicians, the media and professional bodies, the judiciary and many others. So this chapter examines both these perspectives, drawing on data from individual trans people at the local level as well as examining data drawn from more general levels, in particular drawing on media output.

This section then presents data from interviews with individual trans people for the purpose of constituting axes for analysis in terms of justification in a sense that justification strategies are relevant to all kinds of activism outlined in the first section of this chapter. Brett is in the early stages of coming to understand themself as a non-binary trans person, and appears to be developing along the lines of expressing greater masculinity.
While describing how they feel they explain how difficult it is to know how they identify in relation to their sexuality,

I can’t really explain the... way I feel about my gender to anyone properly because it varies a lot and because it’s not clearly as a man, so its not really as I can expect someone else to know because I don’t know myself...but then, there’s concrete stuff like, I don’t want to do certain things. (Brett, Sept 2012)

Here Brett refers to things they don’t want to do as ‘concrete stuff’. This is noteworthy. They are attributing the status of concrete evidence to their own feelings. This is significant because it attributes the status of concreteness to that which might not be regarded by some as concrete; the need is to justify their gender identity and this is achieved effectively by concluding, ‘I feel this way so therefore this must be the case’. This constitutes an expression of significant departure from what many might regard as justifications based on external factors. It constitutes a Cartesian-like departure from the external imposition, assignation and attribution of gender that predominates in our culture (Kessler and McKenna 1979 p158), yet it can also be regarded as a stage through which the majority of trans people go. Having been assigned one gender at birth initially the only resource trans people have with which to justify the genders with which they identify is their own internal gender incongruence or dysphoria in relation to groups with which they identify. This mode of identification can be regarded as embodied, since it is regarded by participants as coming from within themselves. They are justifying who they are by drawing on their own internal knowledge of themselves.

However justifying both to others and to oneself that one is trans, represents a problem for many trans people, for many reasons, not least because of general level cultural expectations of an immutable, binary and externally imposed gender (Kennedy 2013). In contrast to Brett, Phil arrived at his own decision that he needed to transition, for pragmatic
reasons. This was despite much profound thought and engagement with research and ideas presented online in the form of ‘feminist’ and transfeminist blog posts and discussions in forums, for example, as well as the work of academics in the field of (trans)gender such as Butler (1990), Spade (2009) and Serano (2007).

...what I came to in the end was that I had to accept the uncertainty, and also that it wasn't about whether I was really a man or not, whether I was really a man, that was totally irrelevant, it was like, how will I be able to live, how can I make my life livable? My life is not livable right, the options that I have are non-options. The option to keep binding77... is not livable, the option to stop isn't livable... right... so it became the only option. (Phil, Jan 2011)

Here it appears that Phil is drawing on a pragmatic or material reason to justify his need for a double mastectomy, however this is based in turn on his need to be perceived as male to others and to constitute himself as a masculine presenting non-binary person. So although his justification appears to be based on the material, this justification is based on a cultural objectification that results in people with breasts being regarded as women. Although it was possible to continue binding, to do this all the time became physically too difficult; he could no longer continue to live without a double mastectomy because continuing binding all the time was becoming too uncomfortable and too impractical for the long-term. For Phil breast reduction or removal represented the only way he could adapt his appearance to one that would enable him to be regarded as other than female. How he is objectified represents a significant concern and it is this element on which Phil needed to consider most important to justify, in spite of many earlier quite profound doubts and uncertainties, his physical, and ultimately social transition to living as a ‘stealth’ trans man. He made this decision because he described his experiment living as an openly non-

77 “Binding” refers to the practice of trans men wearing a specially constructed tightener over their chests to make their breasts flatten enough to be regarded as a masculine chest.
binary person as impossible; he was persistently objectified by others as female;

...when I tried to assert a genderqueer identity when I was about 17 it was, it was like...people would just gender me female, it wasn't like they recognised that identity, so that's what I mean when I say there's no, that its not socially possible. (*Phil, Jan 2011*)

Here he indicates how the DS- expression of gender is usually only recognised as within the male-female binary, and how there is no possibility, except in the DS+ of identifying as non-binary. These two examples constitute the first binary scale with which to construct a description of strategies of justification employed by trans people. This is characterised as the *evidential basis* of the justification strategy; this scale is constituted with two modes of evidencing; *objectification* exemplified by Phil’s experience and *embodiment* exemplified by Brett’s. This forms the horizontal binary scale for analysis in the relational space in fig 2 below.

Having established the *objectification* – *embodiment* binary as one scale, the next binary scale will be evidenced; constituting discourse as either *localised* or *generalised*.

Wesley draws on general justifications about his identity as a trans man by asking older, more experienced trans men about himself,

...there were a couple of trans guys I knew and I asked ‘What do you think?’ You know and they both said ‘We pretty much think you’re trans’ But then it was almost, you know ‘Oh God!’ It made it real... (*Wesley, April 2013*)

Here he is arguing that he is a trans man because, although he has not yet obtained a medical diagnosis he draws on the experience of others who have gone through the process of gender transition. He also describes how he has engaged in research about transitioning;

I’ve researched the pathway for years.... I’ve researched it and researched it and researched it (*Wesley, April 2013*)
And

If had an assessment and I and they say, ‘Yep, you fit all the criteria.’ You know trans, all that kind of thing. If I had that and I thought, ‘Oh that would make it easier because I’ve got a professional’s opinion, I know that this is right, I don’t have to, almost, rely on my own thoughts I know that it’s right.’ (Wesley, April 2013)

For him the opinions of others, in particular those with greater knowledge and experience are clearly important. Indeed he is drawing on a general level discourse about trans people from medical practitioners. In contrast David’s justification, also referred to in Chapter 7, was very highly personal,

...not sure why I thought it, it was just a random thought, gender identity and sexual orientation, I would probably think of myself as a butch lesbian or masculine lesbian, but that’s just wrong... Does not compute... (David, May 2014)

Here David draws on his own feelings and refers to no generalities, simply to himself. He cannot describe himself as a butch lesbian, as he has been widely regarded by others around him, he simply knows that this is not him, he makes no claims beyond himself, merely that a widely generalised and recognised identity that has been attributed to him, does not represent him. In that sense he is describing the process of undoing an inappropriately applied generalisation. These two examples, from Wesley and David serve to illustrate generalising and localising discourses in this context, Wesley’s discourse indexes the general and David’s discourse indexes the local. This forms the second scale for the relational space in fig. 8.2 below.
This relational space produces these four justification strategies, which will be elaborated clockwise around the relational space starting from the top left. In the top right corner a combination of a localised discourse and drawing on objectification as an evidential basis produces a strategy characterised as *pragmatic*. This is illustrated by Phil’s decision to obtain surgery cited above. As he outlines, his justification is based on his need to be recognised as male in public, and the extensive practical discomfort he endures in order to do so by binding his chest. After a long and sometimes tortuous journey of questioning and self-justification, he came to the realisation he is trans and justifies it to himself following an experience at a music festival;

> I realised, it came to me that that was what the realisation was, I was at a festival and I was like ‘I would love to not have to be binding right now...’ It was so hot you know, it was one of those years where the mud is baked, it’s solid and it’s from the heat and its like... Why is this happening to me? *(Phil, Jan 2011)*

He is able to justify to himself that he needs to transition including surgically, by the discomfort he feels and coming to the realisation that a state of affairs that is unsustainable is going to continue unless he decides to obtain surgery. This is characterised as a localising discourse; he is only referring to himself, not making any generalisations. It constitutes an objectifying evidential basis; he needs to make this change in order to be objectified in gender terms, in a particular way, using a justification

**Table 8.2 Justification Strategies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse</th>
<th>Evidential Basis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Localising</td>
<td>Objectifying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Pragmatic</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Performative</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalising</td>
<td><em>Taxonomic</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Essentialising</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

259
strategy that has its evidential basis in *objectification*. He clarifies later;

... now I feel that I’m really a man because that’s the social position that I occupy, not because there’s something inside me that makes me really a man because I don’t think that that exists, but, so I guess, I have a binary identity because I want to be identified as that thing, I also have a big critique on the concept of gender which enables me to understand why I want to be that thing and I think that its necessary for my emotional survival to be recognised as that thing... (*Phil, Jan 2011*)

Here it becomes more evident that his justification for the way he identifies is constituted by his need to be objectified by others in a particular way, as opposed to requiring a particular embodiment for its own sake. This justification strategy is characterised as *pragmatic* in that it represents an argument that constitutes itself, in effect as saying; ‘there is no other way.’ He has exhausted all other ways of considering this and has come to the point where he declares that this is the only way he can live his life in practical terms. Here he does not argue on any basis other than that this is right for him, in contrast to other justification strategies he employs at other times which make reference to more generalised principles.

In the top right corner of the relational space the evidential basis is embodying and the discourse localised. This mode is characterised as *performative*, in that it relies on a specific localised discourse which draws on the individual’s own understanding of their identity and its expression, usually in the DS+. The way that Brett regards these feelings as ‘concrete’ quoted earlier in the chapter signifies an embodied justification of (trans)gender identity; in effect this participant is saying ‘I am trans because I say I am.’ In a similar way to Phil they do not attempt to generalise beyond themselves. However, this is a justification strategy that has wider implications, which will be returned to later in this chapter.
In the bottom right corner a generalised discourse employing an embodied evidential basis is characterised as *essentialising*. Interestingly none of the participants recruited this strategy either explicitly or implicitly, although only three explicitly rejected essentialism.

However these strategies appear quite often in discussion groups in online social media. In these contexts however it would be ethically problematic to cite instances where this has occurred. They often consist of positively citing news reports of neurological studies that suggest there is a difference between transsexual or transgender brains and cisgender people’s brains, or specific similarities between trans women’s brains and cisgender women’s brains, and likewise for men and trans men. These types of study have been discussed in the work of Fine (2011) and Jordan-Young (2011) who provide evidence that these studies lack validity, and argue that these publications are affected by cultural bias or other reasons outside neuroscience. It is not within the scope of this thesis to elaborate on the neurological, although the descriptions of Fine and Jordan-Young with regard to their prevalence may be relevant as evidence of how essentialism constitutes the prevalent discourse regarding gender within our culture. However one example of an essentialised justification strategy being employed is in a blog by some trans people in the American Midwest. The ‘Transas City’ blog represents a typical, albeit rather lengthy, post about the ‘transgender brain’, which commences as follows;

> It’s clear that a significant segment of human society has difficulty accepting that transsexuality is a real medical condition which is part of our inherited genetics.⁷⁸

This strategy reflects what appears to be a wider cultural position that gender is essential (Messner 2000).

---

⁷⁸ [http://transascity.org/the-transgender-brain/]
The final section of the relational space in the bottom left corner is characterised as *taxonomic*, and represents a generalising discourse with an objectifying evidential basis. Here *taxonomic* relates not merely to the process of officially diagnosing trans people according to established psychiatric or psychological criteria, such as those in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual 5 (American Psychiatric Association 2013). The formal diagnosis of ‘gender dysphoria’ would constitute an example of this but so would informal diagnoses made from accessing online materials, or the opinions of others more familiar with the sedimented cultural processes established by medical professionals. Here the definition of taxonomic is widened slightly to include the knowledge held by other, non-expert people who have significant personal experience that is corroborated by others of the same group. So where a person has, either directly or indirectly, appealed to a more general, higher or more authoritative source, which in this instance, is constituted as other trans people with significant experience, is regarded as recruiting a taxonomic justification strategy. It is also worth remembering that the opinions of more experienced individuals who are not professionals, are often, at least in part, indirectly based on highly institutionalised medical definitions.

Jake had the following volunteered by other trans men when he started socialising within a queer community,

I think it was maybe two years ago and I was kind of getting more and more into a queer scene, and being around these phenomenal, like incredible trans men, [...] and talking about that with them [...] and they were going..."well Jake, let’s..." and very open to talk about it and really kind of like they could see it, everyone else could see it... (*Jake, May 2014*)

In Jake’s case this prompted him finally to make the decision to start transitioning physiologically, and suggests that the opinions of other trans people carried more weight than those of the medical profession. Indeed further data from Jake suggests that the formal medical diagnosis, while it
may be used as an external justification, is primarily regarded by trans
people, as a gatekeeping function only, unlike the opinions of other trans
people;

I have control over my body now, I’m taking hormones and I started
taking hormones before being in the gender system, like I’m going
through a private doctor but before I was even going through this
private doctor, I was taking them, I was buying them online, because I
wanted to, I didn’t want some fucking cis person to tell me that I
wasn’t trans enough... (Jake, May 2014)

Here it is important to make the distinction between the taxonomic and
the pathologising. The taxonomic has been drawn, on a general level, from
the work of people like Hirschfeld (1910) and Benjamin (1966), yet Jake
expresses a negative regard to the need to go through a psychiatrist in
order to transition. The taxonomic, from the point of view of medical
experts is clearly rejected by Jake as a justification, indeed he seems to
regard his own judgment, and the judgment of other trans men in this
matter to be of greater consequence. So the taxonomic can be regarded in
different ways, and in his case, the opinions of other trans people outweigh
those that may be regarded as little more than gatekeepers. In contrast
Wesley’s attitude seemed to be that he was looking to a formal diagnosis
to provide him with a greater level of certainty;

If I had that [a medical opinion] and I thought, ‘Oh that would make it
easier because I’ve got a professional’s opinion’, I know that this is
right, I don’t have to, almost, rely on my own thoughts I know that it’s
right. (Wesley, April 2013)

Here his own lack of certainty appears to cause him to consider a diagnosis
as a means of justifying his gender identity to himself and to others. Indeed
he considers that it might represent a way of convincing his very skeptical
mother;
If they could do a blood test and say ‘Yeah, you’re definitely trans, this is what you need to do…’ It would be great and it would almost give my mum something … hard to work with… some hard evidence… (Wesley, April 2013)

In order to quell her doubts he expresses a desire for some physical evidence to show that he is trans, considering that something of this kind is likely to be harder to delegitimise. In this sense he is combining both strategies that employ generalised discourse, taxonomic as well as essentialising.

It is important to regard this relational space as an illustration of different strategies, and to recognise that individuals may use more than one justification strategy. One example of a strategy that appears, superficially at least, not to fit into this schema to be Jake’s reference to self-harming;

I remember that being when I stopped hurting myself, and I think that maybe like an important thing to say, that when I really started feeling my body, I was like ‘Well this is my body why would I want to hurt it?’ And like ‘cos I think that’s a really big problem within the trans community, is self harm, it’s massive, it’s like fucking 90% or something, you know it’s massive… (Jake, May 2014)

Here it is argued that he is recruiting a pragmatic strategy, one that combines an objectifying evidential basis with a localising discourse, but on a general level. Yet this justification strategy can also be regarded as recruiting a taxonomic strategy; his justification is ultimately a means of explaining his own self-harming, and to that end he draws on a generalisation that many other young trans people do this also, something for which there is now evidence from Stonewall Scotland.

There also seems to be a significant difference between the level, or extent of justification people engage in, for some there is no argument, they

consider themselves to be the gender with which they identify and justifications do not matter a great deal. If there is any kind of justification strategy employed it is, implicit rather than explicit, and mostly characterised by the *performative* strategy, which can be recruited in the DS- more easily. This probably helps when dealing with situations where one is threatened with delegitimisation; Steve clearly feels he does not need to engage in any kind of justification, either to himself or anyone else when this occurred in an incident at work. Simply by making his displeasure known in a combination of the DS- and DS+ he has dealt with the situation to the extent that it has not happened subsequently,

...the new manager, and I think she said it as a joke [...] just when everyone was starting getting used to the pronoun and everything, she was like ‘Do this or I’ll call you she!’ and I was... ‘Whoa...!’ [...] She hasn’t said anything since. (*Steve, Jan 2011*)

Although Steve was clearly unhappy at his manager’s actions, it did not precipitate any kind of need to engage in discursive justification, however this contrasts with Phil, who admits to having very high levels of doubt about justifying who he is and needing to engage in lengthy research processes to the extent that it led him to choose to study a degree in philosophy in order to help him with this,

I don’t think other people have the same anxiety about justification that I do, I know a few people online that have expressed similar levels of anxiety to me... The level of anxiety and doubt I had about transitioning was quite extreme, I think, compared to a lot of other people’s, so for me like, the ability to justify myself was very important. (*Phil, Jan 2011*)

Phil’s case is interesting because he engaged, in quite a profound way, with ‘feminist’ debates that oppose the existence of trans people and with trans feminist writing on the internet in opposition to that, as well as with other trans scholars such as Spade (2009) and Serano (2007). He did so to the extent that he was the participant who was most able to engage with many
of the debates and ideas in transgender studies and feminism during his
interview, and did so at quite a high level. Yet his level of uncertainty was
so high at the time of his transition that he reported still needing to know
that he was making the right decision, so he went to a private counselor
not attached to his gender clinic in order to work through his feelings;

I went and got private counseling in *****, with a random guy I found
off Pink Therapy, I just emailed a bunch of people and I said I need you
to be completely impartial, because I was scared that doctors might
sway me into thinking that I was trans or I wasn't trans, I have to have
someone totally impartial (Phil, Jan 2011)

What is revealing here is that he appears to have been influenced quite
significantly by arguments that gatekeeping doctors constitute a
patriarchal plot that is attempting to create trans women in order to
infiltrate women’s spaces (Raymond 1979). Although these arguments
refer specifically to trans women, and not trans men or non-binary people
the idea that, in the gatekeeping consultations anyone could be persuaded
to change one’s gender, appears to have been derived from this source.
This theory does however, argue, however mistakenly, that the patriarchal
psychology profession is also constituting transsexual men as a means of
legitimising the existence of transsexual women whose function is to
‘infiltrate’ women’s spaces (Raymond 1979). This would appear to
constitute evidence of this group of ‘radical feminists’ engaging in online
action to try and persuade trans people that they are trans, or not to
transition, something that, in Phil’s case, has resulted in him going through
an extended period of exploration and self-justification that he may
otherwise have avoided.

In comparison with, for example Steve and Fiona, Phil needed to spend a
great deal more time and effort justifying himself, something which others
did not report doing. What is interesting however, is that his lengthy period
of exploration has resulted in no significant change in his own justification
strategy. Indeed he explicitly rules out essentialism and the taxonomic as
strategies and mentions no other justification strategy except the *pragmatic*.

Hannah, also implicitly indexed a *pragmatic* justification strategy;

I couldn’t associate with myself ‘cos I couldn’t see myself in myself ...it...it meant that I couldn’t connect with other people in the same way. *(Hannah, May 2014)*

Yet it is clear from her interview data that she did not experience the same kind of pressures to justify herself that Phil did, although the justification strategy may be regarded as the same as Phil’s, she did not experience the level of doubt that he experienced nor did she feel the need to spend lengthy periods researching and justifying herself to others. This suggests that different individuals may take different lengths of time and adopt different routes to arrive at the same justification strategies, depending on their life experiences and interactions.

Although this section has contrasted discourses that have been characterised as localising and generalising, it has only referred to data from individual trans people who have taken part in this study. The next section examines data from the media, ie published sources, which recruit justification strategies into a more general level.

### 8.2.2 Analysis of data from the media

This section presents data analysed from a more general level; in this case from the media, including social media. Up to this point I have examined how individuals construct their justifications for identifying as trans at a local level, the intention here is to apply the strategies from the Justification Strategies relational space in fig 9.2 above from the local to a more general level. To return to the top right-hand area of the space the
A performative justification strategy is illustrated by the way prominent trans journalist and broadcaster Paris Lees expresses it in Grazia, a women’s magazine;

Well, I’ve come to the conclusion that, as a feminist myself, I don’t need a man to validate me as a woman. And guess what? I don’t need a woman to validate me either. Not Germaine Greer. Not internet weirdos. Not anyone. I don’t need permission to use the label ‘woman’. I’m a woman because I say so. (Paris Lees, Grazia May 2016)

Here, although she is writing for the readership of a popular woman’s magazine, it is clear that she is explicitly referring only to herself. Yet this statement also contains the implication that it is true of every other trans woman. Lees has repeated this claim in a tweet in the following year;

Trans people are valid. I’m exactly who I say I am and nothing anyone does will suppress that again for as long as I live. (@parislees, Twitter 18th Oct 2017)

These two examples of performative justification strategies are significant because, although the performative is a localising strategy that applies only to an individual, it is used in a general way. In the quotation from Grazia Lees is implying that other trans women are also the gender they say they are. As a well-known trans women the implication is clear and she is offering herself as a role-model. In the second quotation Lees is more explicit. Whilst referring specifically to herself again, she also prefaces it with a generalising statement, ‘Trans people are valid’. So she is employing a justification strategy that draws on a localising strategy but is applied in a generalising context. Lees’s discourse here is primarily about herself, but she goes further than simply implying that it can be applied to others, she makes this implication explicit. This is important because it illustrates how justification strategies that depend on localising discourses, can be used in a generalising way. Here it is important to recognise that although the

origin of the strategy is through a localising discourse, this does not mean that it cannot subsequently be applied in a generalising context. Lees is suggesting that, like hers, all trans people’s identities are valid, yet the original performative justification can only be constructed in the local.

The same is true of justification strategies that are constructed by a generalising discourse such as the taxonomic. Although the taxonomic is constituted through a generalising discourse, it can be recruited in a localising context, as the above quotations from Wesley and Jake demonstrate. So just because a justification strategy is constituted through a localising discourse that does not mean that it cannot be recruited in a general context, and vice-versa.

Paris lees’ statements above seem to be echoed to an extent, by Stonewall’s well-known slogan ‘Some people are trans, get over it’. This slogan can be regarded as a more general statement that predominantly implies the taxonomic, a justification strategy constituted from a generalising discourse and the performative, a justification strategy constituted from a localising discourse and ultimately problematises those who do not accept trans people rather than trans people themselves. Indeed this slogan could easily be interpreted as ultimately drawing on an essentialising strategy also. What appears to constitute a taxonomic justification strategy has also been used with reference to the historic;

Transgender rights are not an idea whose time has come - trans people have existed throughout history despite deliberate attempts to erase them.81 (Kaite Welsh, Daily Telegraph Dec 2015)

Journalist Kaite Welsh’s justification strategy draws on historical and archaeological evidence (eg, Garber 1992, Stryker 2006, D’Eon de Beaumont 2001 [1810], Lester 2017) which suggests that trans people have

existed in most, if not all, time periods throughout history, consequently this can be regarded as drawing predominantly on the taxonomic. In particular this needs to be regarded as a response to systemic attempts by anti-trans activists to portray trans people as simply the product of a very recent trend or fashion; indeed two prominent anti-trans websites employ the term ‘trend’\(^\text{82}\) in their title in an evident attempt to give this impression. It is significant that the relatively rapid emergence of trans people into general discourse in the media over the last 10 years would probably make it appear that people who identify as transgender constitute a relatively recent phenomenon, so the use of the taxonomic justification strategy is significant. It is significant because it avoids the psychopathologising connotations suggested by recruiting an essentialising strategy.

In early 2016 the state legislature of North Carolina enacted a bill requiring trans people to use the public toilet consistent with the gender they were originally assigned at birth. On the 9\(^\text{th}\) May 2016 US Attorney General Loretta Lynch commenced federal government legal proceedings against North Carolina and her announcement\(^\text{83}\) of this included a number of justification strategies. In her speech about this at the White House she included the following justifications for commencement of legal action against the legislature in that state;

...they created state-sponsored discrimination against transgender individuals, who simply seek to engage in the most private of functions in a place of safety and security – a right taken for granted by most of us.

[...]This is about the dignity and respect we accord our fellow citizens and the laws that we as a people and as a country have enacted to protect them, indeed to protect all of us. And it is about the founding

\(^{82}\) eg “Gendertrender” and “Transgender Trend”.
ideals that have led this country, haltingly but inexorably, in the
direction of fairness, inclusion and equality for all Americans.

[...] Let us reflect on the obvious but often neglected lesson that state
sanctioned discrimination never looks good and never works. It was
not so very long ago that states, including North Carolina, had other
signs above restrooms, on water fountains and on public
accommodations keeping people out based on a distinction without a
difference.

[...] Let me also speak directly to the transgender community itself.
Some of you have lived freely for decades. Others of you are still
wondering how you can possibly live the lives you were born to lead.

(Loretta Lynch, 9 May 2016)  

These justification strategies not only reflect the justification strategies
employed by individual participants in interview data cited earlier in this
chapter. It is notable that these strategies reflect Boltanski’s and
Thevenot’s observation of how effective justification often refers to higher
principles, here the second and third quotations employ this level of
argumentation, referring to historical discrimination experienced by black
Americans and recruiting higher ideals by referencing the US Declaration of
Independence, these can be regarded as performative strategies since they
imply that trans people are like any other American citizen. The second
employs a *taxonomic* strategy; referring to trans people as ‘our fellow
citizens’ and employing terms such as ‘dignity and respect’ which are then
referenced to the way all citizens would expect to be treated as human
beings. This strategy is also recruited to persuade her audience to regard
trans people as fellow human beings and fellow citizens, in an attempt to
create an alliance.

The first and the third sections employ *pragmatic* justification strategies.
They reference how, at an individual level, trans people in North Carolina
simply wish to relieve themselves in safety, something everyone else does

also, again an alliance-formation technique which reminds listeners that
discrimination has not worked in the past, with the implication that it will
not work in the future again, recruiting the pragmatic.

The final quotation from this speech also employs an essentialising
justification strategy; ‘the lives you were born to lead.’ This might be
regarded as reflecting a gender essentialist element of cultural beliefs
about gender. Asserting that trans people are ‘born transgender’ absolves
trans people from responsibility and which challenges the argument, often
recruited by those opposed to trans people, that identifying as a gender
other than that assigned at birth constitutes a ‘lifestyle choice’.

Loretta Lynch employs another, more direct performative strategy. It is
significant that she changes the apparent audience of her speech to speak
directly to trans people who live in North Carolina; ‘Some of you have lived
freely for decades. Others of you...’ In doing so she is asserting their
personhood by showing others that she accepts them as transgender
people, conveying an implicit message, to others watching, that she
believes they are who they say they are.

So while Loretta Lynch has recruited all four justification strategies in her
White House speech, when she handed over to her deputy Vanita Gupta,
who had been more closely involved with handling the legal issues relating
to transphobic legislation in North Carolina, Ms Gupta appeared to recruit
taxonomic and performative justification strategies;

Transgender men are men. They live, work and study as men.
Transgender women are women. They live, work, and study as women.
(Vanita Gupta, 9 May 2016)

Here, she avoids employing the essential, instead characterising trans
people as trans by virtue of how they live their lives as opposed to
recruiting any ‘born this way’ strategy. But what is interesting here is that
she is recruiting a localising justification strategy, the *performative*, but employing it in a more general context, and in doing so it could be argued that she is moving it from the performative to the taxonomic, constituting an alliance between transgender people and cisgender people of the same gender identification. This utterance also indexes the practical justification strategy on an individual level; if a trans person lives, studies or works as a man or a woman then not using public conveniences appropriate to the way they present becomes problematic. Of course this utterance also erases non-binary people, why this occurs is only speculation but could either relate to her own lack of knowledge of this group or her desire not to complicate her message.

The next section sets these justification strategies into historical context with reference to the discourses of justification in the past.

8.3 Historical data

Above the different justification strategies can be seen in the contemporary context, the effects of these strategies may be observed historically also, and may be regarded as an indicator of how acceptance of trans people has developed over time. We have seen how the justification strategies schema is relevant to both local and general discourses of justification, operating on multiple levels and in various different ways. However, applying them to historical contexts gives a different view. In this regard data will be examined relating to three trans women from the past whose lives have been relatively well documented; The Chevalière D’Eon de Beaumont (D’Eon de Beaumont 2001 [1795]), Pilot Officer Roberta Cowell (Cowell 1954) and ‘Agnes’ (Garfinkel 1965). Evidence relating to a number of other trans people from history will be referred to, reported in the third person and in rather less detail by Boroughs (1975).
The Chevalière D’Eon was a minor member of the French nobility who left France at around the time of the French revolution and settled in London. She transitioned to living full time as a woman there in 1777. Her justification for being regarded as a woman was an essential one. Since she had lived most of her life as a soldier, and was unmarried, she reported that no-one had seen her genitals since she was born (D’Eon de Beaumont 2001 p69). Her main justification was that she had been wrongly assigned male at birth and was really a woman. She died in 1810 after complications arising from an injury caused by a broken foil in a fencing bout, because she made a living in London by fencing.

During the second world war Pilot Officer Roberta Cowell flew a Spitfire during the D-Day Landings, having previously been allocated to submarine hunting and air escort duties based in Iceland, she was shot down and spent 3 months in a prison camp before the end of the war. She finally transitioned physiologically in the 1950s after having a secret orchiectomy to enable her subsequently to claim to be intersex, which enabled her to access full genital reconstruction surgery and hormone treatment.

‘Agnes’ – a pseudonym - was a research subject of sociologist Harold Garfinkel. She was also able to claim to be intersex after stealing her mother’s hormone pills from the age of 12, which enabled her, like Cowell, to claim to be intersex in order to obtain surgery. Garfinkel’s study of her (1965, Chapter 5) was as an intersex woman, however the ‘Appendix to Chapter 5’ (Garfinkel 1965) at the end of Garfinkel’s book revealed that she had contacted him later after her operation and after changing her name and moving to a different location, informing him that she was a transsexual woman as opposed to intersex and had deceived both Garfinkel and the psychologists who dealt with her in order to obtain surgery.
All three of these individuals employed essential justification strategies in order to obtain the recognition, and in the case of Cowell and Agnes, access to the medical treatment that they needed. This suggests that the essentialisation of gender represented the only way gender was regarded at least between the 18th century and the 1960s. It would seem improbable that any other justification strategy would have been effective during that time, there was no official taxonomy of transgender or transsexual people until the 1960s (Benjamin 1965), with the exception of Hirschfeld (1910).

Foucault (1976) argued that the emergence of homosexuals as a recognised group occurred as a consequence of medicalised/psychopathologised discourses in the 19th century, and, to an extent one can see how this is reflected in the establishment of psychological/psychiatric discourses in the early to mid 20th century relating to trans people.

Re-examining, in the light of the justification strategies schema, Foucault’s argument that the medicalised discourses of the 19th century produced the group now recognised as homosexuals reveals that his central argument is based on the emergence of a taxonomic category following this process, as Foucault observed,

Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of anterior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. (p43)

The different taxonomisations of trans people, however problematic they might have been (eg Benjamin 1965), can be argued to have had a similar effect, releasing trans people from dependence on essentialising justification strategies and opening up other possibilities, possibilities that not only resulted in justifications that may be more convincing but a variety
of justification strategies that can be recruited in different circumstances and to suit different audiences.

The production of a taxonomic classification of ‘homosexual’, from what was previously regarded as merely a practice, ‘sodomy’, in addition to naming this group as a group, can be regarded as the beginnings of a taxonomic justification strategy, and one that can be argued subsequently to have enabled the production of other justification strategies. When ‘homosexual’ became a taxonomic entity, then, rather than ‘sodomy’ being just an act, as Foucault describes it, the possibility of employing both taxonomic and essentialising justification strategies became more readily available. Subsequently the problem of criminalising what by then became a recognised group of people, as opposed to an act, can be argued to have led to arguments for decriminalisation and represented one of the arguments deployed in favour of same-sex marriage. What appears to have happened in the case of homosexuals is that the essentialised arguments have been replaced by performative ones. Although there are still groups of scientists attempting to isolate a ‘gay gene’ for example, these tend to be subject to heavy criticism and are often dismissed contemnuously by other scientists and gay journalists. So while there is still a number of people attempting to attribute an essentialist explanation to the existence of trans people, the equivalent search for an essentialist explanation for the existence of gay, lesbian and bisexual people seems to be regarded as generally lacking credibility.

It also appears that an academic often regarded as a long-term opponent of trans people’s rights, Janice Raymond (1979) may have been, at least subconsciously, aware of the possibility that the availability of taxonomising strategies for transgender people, might bring, and the

---

85 For example; https://www.theguardian.com/science/blog/2015/jul/10/born-this-way-society-sexuality-gay-gene
86 https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/assault/genetics/
danger – from her perspective – of those taxonomies enabling trans people to deploy justification strategies other than the essential, including, in particular, the taxonomic;

‘The Transsexual Empire’ is ultimately a medical empire, based on a patriarchal medical model. This medical model has provided a ‘sacred canopy’ of legitimations for transsexual treatment and surgery. (p142)

Here Raymond’s concern appears to be regarding the legitimation that the ‘medical model’ provides. Writing in 1979 it appears that Raymond was opposed to any move to construct any new means of legitimisation for trans people at a time when trans people had few other means of justifying their existence beyond the essential.

In addition one of the pragmatic justification strategies that has operated, also in the case of gay men and lesbians, were the arguments against ‘Conversion Therapy’ during the late 20th century but which can be traced back to some of the work by Freud in the 1920s (Drescher 1998). The need to change people’s sexualities was questioned throughout the 20th century and eventually the effectiveness of Conversion Therapy was successfully challenged. It is significant that Conversion Therapy for transgender children continued into the 21st century albeit on a less overt basis. 

However there are a number of examples from history that might not fit this analysis. Boag’s (2005) citation of Alan Hart’s explanation for why he had gender affirmation surgery in 1917 is interesting in that it can be regarded as a pragmatic justification;

I had to do it.... For years I had been unhappy. With all the inclinations and desires of the boy I had to restrain myself to the more conventional ways of the other sex. I have been happier since I made this change than I ever have in my life, and I will continue this way as

87 http://time.com/3655718/leelah-alcorn-suicide-transgender-therapy/
long as I live.... I have long suspected my condition, and now I know.
(p481)

Hart’s justification, that he was happier than ever in his life, relies entirely on the pragmatic and although it can be argued that there are elements of an essentialising strategy in his reference to his childhood it can be regarded as predominantly pragmatic. Bullough’s (1975) enumeration of trans people in history, most of the examples to which he refers are people living as another gender with no kind of surgery at all. In some instances, especially for those assigned female at birth, the ‘progress narrative’ represents one of the main likely reasons for their living as a different gender, and some who would appear to have done so as a means of marrying a woman. Few of these people, however, are reported to have expressed any justification for their gender change. Fiona Macleod (1855-1905) described herself as having a feminine soul, and had lived a previous life as a woman. She also maintained an alter ego, her original male persona in order to express a more ‘rational and logical’ side, perhaps in line with the prevailing cultural positioning of men and women in the second half of the 19th century. However Josephine Montgomery, was discovered to have been assigned male at birth when in prison in San Quentin in 1950, Bullough reports that she described herself as having been brought up as a girl and lived as a woman all her life and consequently considered herself to be a woman who just happened to have a penis (p567). This is interesting because, although her justification strategy can be argued to be a justification strategy not unlike essentialism, in that being brought up as a girl means she can avoid blame for her gender presentation yet her subsequent assertion that she considers herself to be a woman represents a performative justification strategy.

In a sense she could not recruit essential, taxonomic or pragmatic justification strategies in her position so she had to fall back on a performative strategy ‘mitigated’ by claiming her childhood was to blame.
Bullough also reports that Ulla Irene Lundin in Sweden, was explicit about wanting to become a woman, insisting that she had the psyche of a woman, again an essentialising justification. In the same way in 1951, Georgia Black, who had been known as a woman since she was 15 was exposed as a ‘man’ due to critical illness in hospital dismissed male genitalia as ‘growths’ and declared that she thought of herself as a woman and had the emotional condition of a woman.

What is important in this last example is how the performative and essentialising justification strategies can appear very similar. Georgia Black says she thought of herself as a woman, a performative strategy, yet also resorts to an essentialising strategy referring to herself as possessing the essential qualities of a woman, like Fiona Macleod 60-70 years earlier, alluding to the culturally constructed divide where men are positioned as rational and women as emotional. So although there are few justifications reported, one of those appears to constitute a performative strategy, two others essential and one is a mix of the essential and the performative.

The only significant commonality drawn in Bullough’s conclusion between all of these was that they all lived under the fear of being exposed. It appears that the only way we know about the majority of these people is that they were revealed at some point, if not during their lifetimes then after they died. Not only does this reveal a significant amount of fear of being stigmatised but it demonstrates the considerable risks they took to live in the ways they did. Under such cultural conditions it is easy to see how the main justification strategy recruited, is essentialising, and this strategy can be regarded as normally only recruited at a time of discovery, and almost certainly at a time of great stress and danger with the threat of social exclusion or condemnation and possibly the threat of legal sanctions. Thus the recruitment of essentialising justification strategies can be regarded as a response to cultural stigmatisation. It is difficult to imagine recruiting any other strategy under those conditions. So the recruitment of
taxonomic, pragmatic and performative strategies - especially the performative - can be regarded as consequences of the reduced stigmatisation of trans people.

To summarise then; the four justification strategies identified in this chapter can be characterised as follows:

The essentialising strategy claims that all instances of this state of affairs are always this way because it is an inherent and permanent quality of a particular state of affairs. The performative strategy claims that a particular state of affairs exists because those whose subjectivities are most affected by it say that it is. The taxonomic strategy claims that a state of affairs exists because an existing general level cultural definition says it exists. And the pragmatic justification strategy claims that this state of affairs should exist because to claim otherwise would create significant and unnecessary problems for individuals concerned.

What this schema does not include, however, are strategies for responses to these by those arguing the opposite, delegitimisation strategies. Very common arguments against trans people asserting their identified genders tend to draw on essentialising strategies which often make the argument that ‘men’ and ‘women’ constitute biological ‘realities’ as opposed to socially constructed categories. The use of taxonomic strategies often includes arguments that situate genders as socially constructed but immutable because of shared characteristics based on childhood socialisation (e.g. Raymond 1979 p139). Such arguments often foreground older trans women, such as Caitlyn Jenner, in order to construct an

---

88 For example; http://www.cnsnews.com/blog/michael-w-chapman/johns-hopkins-psychiatrist-transgendered-men-dont-become-women-they-become Date; 5/5/16 and http://www.kate-gould.co.uk/2017/06/05/transwomen-the-new-misogynists/ ND. Both last accessed 9/7/17

89 For example; https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/be-trans-be-proud-but-dont-call-yourself-a-real-woman-frtld7q5c Date; 5/3/2017 Last accessed 9/7/17
argument that trans women must have benefitted from male privilege as a consequence of ‘being’ male most of their lives. Dr Joanna Williams’ assertion that schools are ‘confusing’ children by talking about transgender people\(^{90}\) constitutes an example of a pragmatic delegitimisation strategy, even though there appears to be no indication that her argument is based on any kind of evidence at all. Pragmatic delegitimisation strategies\(^{91}\), although existing, seem to be less in evidence and tend to focus on speculative assertions that women are not safe sharing public conveniences with ‘men’ and assertions that gender non-conforming children might find themselves on a ‘conveyor belt to transition’. To return to the quotation from Bindel referred to in chapter 6;

> If I were a teenager today, well-meaning liberal teachers and social workers would probably tell me that I was trapped in the wrong body. They might refer me to a psychiatrist who would prescribe fistfuls of hormones and other drugs. And terrifyingly, I might easily be recommended for gender re-assignment surgery... just because I didn’t like the pink straitjacket imposed on girls.\(^{92}\)

Here a number of alliances and oppositions are constituted with the aim of constructing a speculative generalising argument implying that cisgender children could be mistaken for trans children and placed on an irreversible path to physiological transition, somehow (it is not explained how) being unable to change their minds.

\(^{90}\) \url{http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2017/06/23/schools-accused-sowing-confusion-childrens-minds-over-promoting/} 23 June 2017 Last accessed 10/7/17

\(^{91}\) For example; \url{http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/life/germaine-greer-defends-her-transgender-views-and-starts-another/} Dated 12 April 2016 Last accessed 9/7/17

Finally performative delegitimisation strategies appear to be even rarer\(^{93}\) and tend to consist of an assertion along the lines of ‘I will never recognise trans women as women’\(^{94}\), which is recruited by a few anti-trans activists.

So the historical development of the way trans people have been able to recruit justification strategies, developing from predominantly essentialising strategies through taxonomic and practical strategies to performative ones, appears to follow the recent emergence of trans people as a group in Western society. Essentialising strategies, largely the only justification strategies available before the mid 20\(^{th}\) century, have given way to the taxonomic and subsequently the pragmatic and more recently the performative, although this does not mean that the essential has ceased to be deployed as a justification strategy. Since gender is widely constituted as essential in culture generally (Messner 2000), it would not be reasonable to expect that some trans people are not going to recruit a justification strategy with regard to gender that reflects the beliefs of the majority population.

Whether this can be regarded as one of the ways that trans people as a group have emerged, in a similar way that Foucault claimed that the creation of a taxonomic group resulted in the emergence of gay men in the 20\(^{th}\) century, is however, difficult to establish. There are so many different variables that establishing a causal link of the kind he postulates may be difficult. From the point of view of trans people however it is arguable that only when the sole justification strategy that is required is the **performat ive**, that the campaign for civil rights for trans people can be regarded as approaching success and signify obtaining full civil rights in comparison with everyone else. After all gay men, lesbians and bisexual

\(^{93}\) http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2015/12/04/germaine-greer-you-can-hold-a-knife-to-my-throat-i-wont-recognise-trans-people/ 4/12/2016, last accessed 9/7/17

\(^{94}\) http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2015/12/04/germaine-greer-you-can-hold-a-knife-to-my-throat-i-wont-recognise-trans-people/
people rarely have to justify their sexualities with reference to anything other than the performative. However, what may be important from this analysis is the potential it holds for understanding how the process of trans emergence has occurred, and how the emergence of others in the future might proceed. To that end two of the most important texts, for trans people, may well turn out to be Stone’s (1991) essay ‘The Empire Strikes Back’ and Feinberg’s (1992) pamphlet ‘Transgender Liberation: A movement Whose Time Has Come’ which both advocated, probably for the first time, a clear performative justification strategy. Although Feinberg is credited with producing the term ‘transgender’ these two texts can be regarded as significant beyond individual items of lexicon in that they both modeled a discourse of performative justification, something that is likely to prove more significant in terms of the emerging visibility of trans people claiming their rights as trans people. It is argued here that one of the signifiers of becoming fully enfranchised subjects is the ability to employ performative justification strategies, ‘I am like this because I say I am like this’
Chapter 9: Conclusions

This chapter will initially summarise the material and analysis that has been presented in the preceding five chapters, it will then draw on the evidence and the analyses presented in them and bring these together into conclusions, from which implications will be examined and further research in this area suggested. Finally the limitations of this study will be addressed.

9.1 Summary

Initially this study looked at the epiphanies undergone by participants and produced a description of the different ways these epiphanies were experienced. Affirming, overcoming resistance, introducing and constructing (fig 4.1) characterised their different reported experiences of epiphany. Participants all subsequently engaged in what is characterised as ‘self-learning’ (fig 4.2), in four different modes; supporting, modelling, informing and responding. These different modes of learning about themselves, others like them and what it might mean for them to identify as transgender, usually occurred, for young trans people, after epiphany - although there was at least one instance of epiphany experienced concurrently with this learning. These different modes demonstrated that there is already considerable variation in the ways that young trans people experience the initial stages of identification as transgender. In addition to these most participants engaged in some form of responding, in the form of activism, which suggests that becoming aware that one is trans reveals the different ways society needs to change to accommodate trans people, this was described in Chapter 4.

However the homogenisation of the wide diversity of trans people and their different experiences, by others, from conservative psychologists and
psychiatrists, right-wing politicians and journalists to ‘radical feminists’ as well as some academics, can be regarded as constituting an element of cis-mythologisation. Constituting trans people as all very similar, not only erases the diversity of different trans identities but also the different backgrounds trans people have, including race, class, sexuality, ability, religion and cultural background, indeed their very humanity. The frequent use of the term ‘transgenderism’ as opposed to ‘trans people’ by some academics (eg Jeffreys 2014) reinforces this homogenisation as well as attempting to dehumanise. This can be added to the characterisation of cis-mythologisation. This initial characterisation below constitutes the start of the construction of a characterisation of cis-mythologisation based initially on Kennedy’s (2013) characterisation of ‘cultural cisgenderism’,

* Cis-mythologisation is characterised as a predominantly tacit but systemic cultural erasure and problematising of trans people based on the external imposition of an immutable, essentialised and binary gender and obliteration of variety within the group of people who might be regarded as ‘transgender’.

At this point it needs to be emphasised that this is not the final version of this definition, it will be developed further throughout this chapter. Given the very different experiences of participants in coming to identify, come out and adjust their lives to living in their identified genders, this homogenisation and erasure of difference can be argued to constitute a significant problem in terms of reinforcing cultural exclusion. Cultural exclusion that is this instance seems to stem from generalising rather than localising discourse. But this erasure of difference goes beyond straightforward transphobia and can be regarded as cis-mythologisation also; it is not necessarily done out of malice but out of a desire to rationalise the existence of a group that appears different according to one characteristic, but will probably vary to a rather greater extent internally, given the variety of backgrounds and experiences different transgender people have. However it is also important to remember that
generalisations – or overgeneralisations - are often used by those who are antagonistic to trans people’s existence.

The different ways that trans people organised their social interaction were explored next, and four different social interaction strategies were characterised; *Accentuating, masking, compartmentalising* and *harmonising* (fig 5.1). These interaction strategies suggest different approaches to the way trans people engaged with others in social contexts. In particular the difference between the way Brett socialised and the way Phil socialised was significant. Brett’s social interaction was mainly carried out in what is characterised as *compartmentalising* mode – interacting in the kind of group that Phil described as a ‘niche queer space’ - which entailed high group selectivity but with low personal adaptation to that group. Phil, in contrast interacted in *masking* mode, which meant that he kept his trans status and history concealed from those he interacted with on a quotidian basis, with only his partner and a few close friends knowing his gender history and identification. This strategy can be characterised as deploying high adaptation to group but enabling low group selection; he did not need to restrict those with whom he interacted because of his trans identity, because he was able to conceal this.

This raises the issue of which of these strategies can be regarded as constituting the most ‘authentic’ identity. Brett did not need to pretend to be anyone other than themself (at least in gender terms), they were accepted as who they were and did not need to fit in to any kind of pre-prescribed gender role, behaviour or presentation. However their options for social interaction were severely restricted to very small groups of people. On the other hand Phil did not merely not reveal his transgender status but that he also identified as non-binary, but while presenting as a man. This meant that he could be regarded as not revealing significant information about himself on the one hand but on the other he believes he has considerably more, and more diverse, options for social interaction.
Not only that but he argued that he did not want to constantly have one element of his life foregrounded and that he did not wish to be ‘the trans person’ or the representative of trans people; often being asked about trans issues. This also meant that all the other aspects of his personality would not be overshadowed during social interaction and with other people he meets. The discussion of the issue of authenticity raised by this will be continued in the next section, (9.2) of this concluding chapter.

The subsequent chapter examined the different pathways taken by some individual participants and compared and contrasted different aspects of their journeys from epiphany through existential learning to social interaction strategies. This produced an analysis of the different ways that identities are allocated. This chapter also revealed quite big differences between participants in terms of levels of doubt, with most participants exhibiting no doubts about transitioning but with a small number expressing quite significant doubts, but largely in very different ways and only at certain times, with apparently no-one in between, expressing moderate levels of doubt for example.

In particular this chapter addressed the issue of the way inappropriate identities are imposed or claimed with some trans people claiming, either intentionally or unintentionally, inappropriate or inaccurate identities either because their identities were confused with others or because they were unable for some reason to claim trans identities. As Beemyn & Rankin (2011) showed, these were a particularly noticeable feature of older trans men, however there were also examples of this among these younger participants, including young trans women. This is argued to constitute a feature of cis-mythologisation, a tacit cultural process that erases and delegitimises trans people. In addition the other two social interaction strategies, accentuating and harmonising were also significant, accentuating in particular since it represents the way everyone coming out
as trans needs to interact, at least for a short time, one of the reasons it can be such a difficult thing to do.

Chapter 7 analyses (trans)gender from the perspective of recontextualisation and mythologisation, and does this by separating out the DS- and the DS+. Gender in the DS-, especially from the perspective of a trans person who has not come to the realisation that they are transgender yet, is constituted, using Dowling’s Modes of Recontextualisation schema (fig 7.1) as improvising, whereas coming out and experiencing an epiphany as transgender is characterised as either rationalising or re-principling modes, which involve a DS+ recontextualising strategy. This suggests that the allocation of a gender identity (and possibly any identity) needs to be regarded as primarily a function of the DS+, which raises the question as to whether an identity can exist, or come into existence without the language with which to express it. This resonates with Foucault’s (1976) argument that homosexuals were brought into existence as a group as a result of the way they were pathologised during the 19th century. This suggests that recontextualising an identity into language, rationalising in SAM, constitutes the only way an identity can be regarded as existing at all. Also significantly, it would appear that some individual trans people report that they felt they were different in gender terms, ‘I’m not a girl’ before they knew the term ‘transgender’, but that they thought they were the only one who felt like that (Kennedy 2012). The acquisition of their first piece of trans-related vocabulary consequently brought with it the realisation that there must be other people like them, something that can be regarded as a revelation in and of itself.

The second part of Chapter 7 moves on to the way gender is mythologised, and recruits Dudley-Smith’s (2015) schema of Mythologising Modes (fig 7.2) based on Dowling (1998). Something is regarded as mythologised when its principles of recontextualisation are denied, and so gender can be regarded as regularly constituted in this way. Under this schema it would
appear that the way gender is mythologised is with the Myth of Certainty. It can be regarded as constituted by a recontextualising push characterised as *enveloping* with a claim over the recontextualised context that is characterised as the *same*. Widely held essentialising beliefs about gender, constituting it not merely as binary but immutable and externally imposed on the individual suggests that gender can be regarded as constituting this kind of Myth of Certainty, here it is constituted as something other than itself; that the practice of gender is all enveloping to the extent that it is seen as ubiquitous and inherent in everything, or every one, and in the way gendering is perceived as legitimately done to the individual by others. However it would appear that gender can also be regarded as what is characterised as the Myth of Participation, that it is *for* something other than itself. Gender is mythologised, by some at least, as for the purpose of attracting a mate with a view to reproduction of the species.

Since a mythologisation is regarded as constituted when a practice is recontextualised and where the principles of recognition are withheld, this can be regarded as a productive way of regarding gender. In particular from the perspective of transgender people, trans people’s existence can be regarded, in many instances, as revealing the way gender is mythologised. This will be discussed further in section 9.2 below.

The final data chapter looks at the work that trans people do in order to enfranchise themselves in terms of obtaining the human rights they need. This may be regarded as an instance of the *responding* existential learning strategy characterised in Chapter 4 (Fig 4.2) here four enfranchisement strategies have been characterised; *guiding*, *supporting*, *debugging* and *campaigning* depending on whether the objective is regarded as maintenance or change, and whether the focus is systemic or cultural. This can be regarded as a description of the different types of trans activism, which are evident in the data from participants.
This chapter also produced evidence for four types of justification strategy, characterised as pragmatic, performative, taxonomic and essentialising. These strategies can be evidenced largely from the data from participants but was also obtained and supported by data taken from the media. These different strategies were examined in relation to available historical data and some appear to be more predominant in different historical periods. Essentialising strategies were almost without exception, recruited prior to around 1960, few other strategies were in evidence prior to this time. This was around the time when the recruitment of taxonomic strategies became possible and subsequently pragmatic and more recently performative strategies. This ordering resonates gently with Foucault’s (1976) account of the way homosexuals became constituted as a group, in particular from the perspective of the taxonomic justification strategy.

9.1.1 Referring back to the research aims

The initial research aims, described in section 1.2 on p16 was to produce new knowledge about how young trans people manage, handle and deal with transitioning while young including self-learning, coming out, organising their social lives and campaigning for their rights as well as understanding their everyday lives while going through this process. This study also attempted to construct an idea of what the cultural process of exclusion, erasure and delegitimisation of trans people might look like.

The different chapters summarised in the first part of this section demonstrate that a significant amount of new knowledge was produced in the form of understanding the following:

a) Young trans people’s modes of epiphany, and their self-learning strategies have emerged from a SAM analysis of the data in chapter 4. The two relational spaces, drawn from the data, demonstrate that the process
of coming to understand oneself is not the simple ‘Eureka!’ process of revelation is might otherwise be considered to be. The self-learning strategies schema also shows that different self-learning strategies were employed by different participants.

b) The different social interaction strategies schema, analysed in chapter 5 further demonstrated that, both during and after transition, participants recruited very different ways of organising their social lives, in particular the two strategies ‘compartmentalisation’ and ‘masking’ are relevant to an analysis of the concept of authenticity.

c) Chapter 7 analysed the different pathways a selection of participants took, with reference to each of the different relational spaces presented in chapters 4 and 5. This starts to uncover the complexity of different young trans people’s journeys. For a relatively homogenous group the variety in different paths taken was considerable.

d) Chapter 8 applied two analyses from the work of Dowling; his Modes of Recontextualisation schema (Dowling 2013) and his Mythologising Modes schema. By considering gender from the perspective of its DS+ and DS-components three of his four different recontextualisation strategies could be identified; improvising, rationalising and re-principling. This showed how different recontextualisations were required before epiphany (improvising), during epiphany (rationalising and re-principling) and coming out (re-principling), demonstrating how young trans people often needed to engage in considerable different recontextualisations in order to begin to assert their identities. The Mythologising Modes schema suggests that there is evidence that (trans)gender can be constituted, at least as a myth of certainty (i.e. that gender is something other than itself) and, in some instances a myth of participation (i.e. that gender is for something other than itself). (references QQ Dowling)
e). The enfranchisement strategies schema demonstrated that all but one participant had engaged in some kind of activity to help change existing structural relations or cultural processes in order to obtain recognition as subjects and to further trans liberation or help others to transition safely and in the face of considerable opposition both culturally and socially. These included small individual acts of ‘debugging’ such as getting a university administration to institute a system for changing names and genders on degree certificates as well as taking part in international campaigns to change laws and cultural processes.

f) The strategies different trans people recruited to justify themselves as trans people were examined at a local/individual level and then found to be replicated on a more general level in speeches from Obama administration lawyers attempting to take legal action against the State of North Carolina in 2016. Despite emerging from data from young trans people, these justification strategies have subsequently been found by the author to be employed in many different contexts suggesting that matrix of ideal types of justification strategy might be generalisable beyond the context of this study.

What has proven to be harder to achieve is a characterisation of the concept of cis-mythologisation that satisfies the author. The author recognised that the concept of ‘cultural cisgenderism’ (Kennedy 2013) which characterised a tacit but consistent cultural erasure of trans people, which was relevant prior to the date it was published was becoming outmoded as society and culture changed as characterised by Barker (2017) and Braidwood (2018). A number of characteristics of cis-mythologisation have been identified but the situation would appear to still be in flux socially and culturally, such that coming to a fixed characterisation at present would probably be of very limited use. This element of this thesis can be regarded as moving towards such a conceptualisation, but a final definition may have to wait until the current
changes, including moral panic generated by the media, have run their course.

These findings raise significant issues for analysis in this chapter including an examination of the concept of authenticity discussed in section 9.2 below, the role of language in identity formation (section 9.3) and the possibility of building on Butler’s concept of performativity (Section 9.4).

The next sections analyse some of the major concepts produced by these data chapters and the organisational language produced in relational spaces coming from them, starting first with an analysis of the concept of authenticity, which was raised in Chapter 5 but also has implications beyond this.

9.2 Constituting a social model of authenticity: Alliances and oppositions

This section starts with a brief exploration of the notion of ‘authenticity’ more generally before proceeding to examine this concept in relation to the experiences of the young trans people who participated in this research.

Authenticity is characterised here as always a value-judgement. In social or cultural terms there is no ultimate arbiter of the authentic or the inauthentic, merely perceptions. To use the metaphor of currency, in some instances things may come to be regarded as a reserve currency, like the current position of the US Dollar, the Euro, the Swiss Franc or the Japanese Yen. Yet these currencies are just reflections of broad general agreement that they have value, other than that they are nothing more than pieces of paper and packets of data on computer networks of no intrinsic worth. They are given value only because most people involved agree that they
have value. The notion of authenticity can be regarded in much the same way. Yet regardless of how we might characterise the notion of authenticity as socially constructed it would appear that, in contrast, there is something widely perceived as tangible, solid, enduring and inherent in that which is deemed authentic. This is crucial to understanding authenticity; that it is always constructed but not always perceived as such. Consequently it can be characterised as a mythologisation.

In SAM terms, authenticity can also be regarded as a form of mythologised alliance and/or opposition. When something, or someone is constituted as ‘authentic’ a mythologising alliance is being formed with an essence of genuineness, realness, legitimacy, truth or indisputability. To constitute something or someone as ‘authentic’ is to constitute an alliance with these notions giving it the appearance of possessing some kind of fundamental, primary source of realness. In many instances this alliance may also therefore set up a corresponding opposition, that something else is inauthentic. So ‘authenticity’ can be regarded as the formation and maintenance of this alliance, and destabilising as attempting to de-authenticate something. As Grazian (2012) illustrated, the American politician who was pictured wearing jeans driving a second-hand pickup truck when, in reality, he came from a wealthy family and went to an Ivy League university, can be regarded as using the media to constitute an alliance of authenticity in the eyes of the voters, as being ‘one of us’. Although Grazian’s description of this constitutes a destabilisation of this alliance, the difference between the two is that Grazian’s version will be seen by a small number of academics and students, while the media version was seen by a large and targeted group of this politician’s potential voters, and presumably just prior to an election.

So the formation, maintenance and destabilising of these alliances and oppositions relating to authenticity can be regarded as primarily, if not entirely, subjectively perceived whether or not they are constituted with
intent to deceive. It is possible that a significant number of voters considered Grazian’s politician to be authentically American working-class, maybe even enough to get him elected. Of course he is playing a dangerous game, unless he is able to monopolise the media, because his opponents can point to elements of his life that contradict the image he is projecting.

In terms of trans people the issue of authenticity can be regarded as complex but, increasingly having an effect on issues that might affect their living spaces. Indeed some might argue that the notion of authenticity constitutes a life-and-death issue in some circumstances (eg Stryker 1994 p239). However authenticity can be regarded as one of the most significant elements of cis-mythologisation and trans people’s cultural, social and political emergence in recent years. The essentialising of gender as fixed at birth, biologically-determined and immutable constitutes one of the prime modes of de-authenticating trans people, the external imposition of gender reveals a culture that constructs gender as not a property claimed by the individual but something that society imposes on them.

However if we look at the material summarised from chapters 4 to 8 we can see how the effects of cis-mythologisation can be regarded from the perspective of authenticity. In particular the ways that the two social interaction strategies, compartmentalising and masking are recruited, can be regarded as responses to the issue of (in)authenticity. From the data on social interaction strategies we can see that those openly identifying as transgender fear leaving themselves open to questions about their authenticity, whether subtly or explicitly. The two participants, Brett and Phil recruited these two different ways of responding to this in the, very different, strategies they recruit to organise their social interaction. These raise this issue of authenticity from this perspective.
So when constructing a characterisation of the way authenticity functions in different instances in relation to trans people it is useful to regard this concept from the SAM perspective of the formation, maintenance and destabilising of alliances and oppositions. If the notion of authenticity can be regarded as constituted as a mythologised objectification, which constructs an apparently naturalised or essentialised alliance, that alliance may be regarded as constructed in response to what those doing the construction think will be perceived by others as constituting authenticity.

So these alliances and oppositions are constructed on the basis of subjective personal beliefs regarding what those attempting to construct something as (in)authentic, believe others will regard in that way also. In this sense those attempting to constitute something as authentic or otherwise can be characterised as revealing what they consider their target audience will regard this way. Whether that target audience is very general, ie arbitrarily-selected members of the public, or members of a specific group, the construction of authenticity can be regarded as an attempt to form an alliance with that group. Consequently we can regard Phil’s mode of authentication, based on masking social interaction as targeted on a wider general level, while Brett’s compartmentalising is targeted at the specific ‘queer’ group with which they interact socially.

For trans people, achieving authenticity can be regarded as balancing and managing issues such as openness, ‘stealth’, normative presentation, non-normative presentation, performativity and intelligibility as well as issues such as personal safety and wellbeing, all within the resources available at any given time and in relation to personal history. Obviously different people will have different resources available whether, social, cultural and economic, and these may vary over time. So the way authenticity needs to be constructed can be regarded as an element of cis-mythologisation. Cis-mythologisation has already been characterised earlier as constituting ‘a tacit but systemic cultural erasure and problematising of trans people based on the external imposition of an immutable, essentialised and binary
gender.’ (Kennedy 2013) and it would appear that the issue of authenticity needs to be included in this definition to the extent that it now reads as follows;

*Cis-mythologisation is characterised as a predominantly tacit but systemic cultural erasure and problematising of trans people based on the external imposition of an immutable, essentialised and binary gender, obliteration of variety within the group of people who might be regarded as transgender and undermining of their authenticity.*

This is not the final construction of this definition however the use of the term ‘undermining’ needs to be clarified here, it includes the ways in which trans people’s gender identities are undermined through systemic, cultural or other processes. For example the way that trans people are often held to higher standards of physical presentation than cisgender people in the same situation would be required in order to justify themselves. However, the deployment of (de)authentication strategies needs to be regarded as attempting either to legitimize or delegitimize trans people with an appeal to an alliance with something socially constructed but appearing essential. As Hacking (1999 p12) characterises it, this would constitute a typical example of social construction, in that what is regarded as natural or essential, can be characterised as a consequence of social or cultural action.

If that which is constructed as authentic is always the product of social action then the process itself of constructing authenticity needs to constitute the focus of any analysis, since authenticity cannot be regarded as an essential quality of anything or any one. What is significant here is how the conception of authenticity has been regarded by some as changeable, and recruited as such. Stone (1991), Feinberg (1992), Stryker (1994), Mock (2015) and Ehrensaft (2016) have all published works that attempt to change what is conceived as authentic in (trans)gender terms. So we can see a change taking place over time in the way that trans people’s authenticity is regarded. When transsexual surgery first become
available the advice to trans people, as evidenced by Garfinkel (1965), was to change one’s name, relocate, create a past life story that fits one’s identified gender and not tell anyone about one’s previous life (something which, in any case, needs to be regarded as available only to those with the resources to do so). Stone’s (1991) well-known essay ‘The Empire Strikes Back’ and Feinberg’s (1992) publication, ‘Trans Liberation: A Movement Whose Time has Come’ can be regarded as marking the start of a change in the way trans people regard their own authenticity. This resonates with the Justification Strategies schema characterised in Chapter 8 (Section 8.2). The attempts by these writers to alter the way authenticity is perceived in relation to trans people can be regarded as constituting a change from the essentialising, taxonomic and pragmatic justification strategies to what is characterised as a performative strategy, in effect one which claims authenticity regardless of history, appearance, operative or endochrinological status, relationship to the gender binary or level of ‘passing’ as cisgender.

This can be regarded as constituting one of the main areas of conflict, as those attempting to delegitimise trans people for political reasons attempt to undermine what constitutes ‘authenticity’ in relation to trans people, while trans rights campaigners do the opposite. Of course the simplistic nature of any such campaign of de-authentication is likely to gloss over the nuances of the social interaction strategies different trans people recruit in their daily lives but the issue of authenticity with regard to trans people’s lives and other issues also, is likely to present a productive site of future research.

Researching the changing nature of alliances and oppositions constituted by efforts to generate or undermine authenticity or otherwise, in relation to trans people is likely to be very valuable, as will research into the nature of the social construction of authenticity itself.
To this extent characterising authenticity as *mythologised validation*, may be productive. As noted earlier, in Social Activity Method mythologisation is regarded as a denial of the principles of recontextualisation. Authenticity can therefore be regarded as constituted as a type of myth-making, in that it obscures the nature of the validation, which is always a subjective value judgment. Instead it attempts to present its authenticity (or inauthenticity) as objective, essential or natural. Furthermore one of the central concepts that this thesis has intended to elucidate is the concept of cis-mythologisation, which can also be regarded as a system of authenticating and de-authenticating people’s gender identities. This can be regarded in the light of the notion of *mythologised validation*. The de-authentication of gender that cis-mythologisation attempts or intends is characterised as a mythologisation of cisgender people, bodies and lives as authentic, ie as natural, normal and essential. This then constitutes an opposition, constituting trans people, their bodies and lives as unnatural, abnormal and fabricated.

In a general reference to authenticity Sartre argues that basing one’s decisions around that which is already socially or culturally established constitutes inauthenticity (Bell 1989), arguing that these decisions are made in ‘bad faith’ (Sartre 1966 p70). If one considers this in relation to gender identity it might suggest that only those who might be regarded as identifying outside the normative gender binary can be regarded as authentic. This resonates with Halberstam’s (2006) assertion that trans people should maintain unintelligible bodies and identities in order to challenge gender normativity. This is something rejected in practice in particular by participants Jake and Phil, who negatively referred to this as ‘subversivism’ in the same way that Serano (2007 p346) employs the term. Sartre’s assertion of authenticity, like Halberstam’s ‘subversivism’ can therefore also be regarded as a value-judgment, although one based on the argument that social and cultural pressures to conform produce inauthenticity. This may be regarded as precluding identification as binary
transgender (or indeed as cisgender at all) from being regarded as authentic. It can consequently be argued that the implication here that there pre-exists some kind of essential self, unpolluted by social and cultural coercion, posits an essentialist view of authenticity.

Taking a sociological view, and regarding authenticity as socially constituted through mythologised validation by the constituting of alliances and oppositions, which are always subjective, avoids this trap. We can regard Sartre’s and Halberstam’s assertions as constituting attempts to construct mythologised validations of their arguments rather than regarding their positions as based on any kind of essential truths.

This view of gender potentially conflicts with that put forward by Butler who characterised the mythologisation of gender in the following way:

Genders can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, neither original nor derived (2004 p115)

If genders are characterised in such a way then it can be argued that there is no such thing as an inauthentic or indeed authentic gender identity, even if one regards some gender performances as principled acts of what McGann and Samuels (2001) characterised as ‘deformance’. What is important to understand however, from a sociological perspective is how the topic of whether or not anyone’s gender identity is regarded as authentic or otherwise then becomes an issue of the effect of the cultural processes of mythologised validation that produce the appearance of authenticity on both local and general levels.

The notion of ‘authenticity’ is one that has been critically explored in this thesis, as part of the theme of cis-mythologisation. The threat of de-authentication can be regarded as a part of the cultural process known as cis-mythologisation. What this thesis argues is not only that authenticity is
always constructed, but that it is often regarded as the opposite. Authenticity (or inauthenticity) is recruited in order to mythologise a kind of inherent or essential validity (or delegitimacy). Withholding or attempting to deny authenticity to trans people can be regarded as an attempt to delegitimise in a way that will be regarded as inherent and indisputable, but which is socially constructed, entirely subjective and disputable.

The de-authentication at the heart of cis-mythologisation operates on a number of different levels and functions both tacitly and explicitly, including tacit erasure, explicit delegitimisation and open discrimination, from the lexicon used to the unspoken assumptions made and the belief that gender should be externally imposed. So returning to the development of the definition of cis-mythologisation started earlier in this chapter, incorporating the social model of authenticity into this, develops it together as follows;

*Cis-mythologisation is characterised as a predominantly tacit and systemic cultural erasure and problematising of trans people based on the external imposition of an immutable, essentialised and binary gender system. It also consists of the obliteration of variety within the group of people who might be regarded as transgender and a socially constructed process of de-authentication - mythologised as intrinsic and self-evident - of trans people’s lives and identities.*

It is important that this characterisation, as things stand the final characterisation of cis-mythologisation in this thesis, incorporates the issue of authenticity as a social-construction because it is important to understand that de-authentication is at the heart of cis-mythologisation. As a process of mythologised (de)validation this needs to be characterised as the process whereby something is made to appear naturally or inherently valid or not valid, when that (de)validation is actually the product of social and cultural action. In the case of cis-mythologisation that de-validation is argued to be mostly constituted in the DS-, but with elements of the DS+
also and to result in the erasure and delegitimation of trans people in part, at least, through the mythologisation of the gender binary as immutable and essential. What is also relevant to the process of cis-mythologisation is Pearce’s (2018) analysis of the medical/psychiatric influences. The binary-oriented, condition-focused nature of trans health provision in the UK may be regarded as having an influence on cis-mythologisation as well as being produced by cis-mythologisation.

The implications of this are, resonating with both Butler and Pearce, that there are ultimately, if we were to attempt to regard this from an entirely neutral perspective, no authentic or inauthentic genders, no hierarchy of authenticity and no special status for cisgender people in relation to transgender people. Whether something is considered authentic or otherwise is a socially constructed, subjective value-judgement. Yet it is important to bear in mind William and Dorothy Thomas’s well-known statement, ‘If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences’. If a group (or an individual) is labelled authentic or inauthentic, that will have consequences for that group or individual. To regard that labelling as anything more than a subjective opinion masquerading as a fact would be dishonest. Yet this is how the notion of authenticity is constituted. However that constructed subjective opinion will have consequences, regardless of its subjective nature. The important thing to remember is that those constructions of (in)authenticity can always be challenged, changed and revealed to be myths.

It would appear then that, in many instances the gender binary is mythologised as a fixed and immutable entity such that some people regard it as un-crossable. Although it can be characterised as socially constructed, it is perceived as essential to the extent that cis-mythologisation cannot merely be characterised as constituting a tacit resistance to identifying as transgender, but also an explicit opposition to trans people’s identities, something that has been more evident in the
media recently. Indeed, in the same way that identities are argued as requiring language to be constituted, the de-authentication of trans identities that is manifest in the existence of the two mythologised gendered groups is also dependent on their constitution in language. The existence of transgender people, and their reported existence throughout history (Garber 1992, Williams 1986, Stryker 2006, 2008, Bullough 1975, Weissmantel 2013) as well as in different cultures (Williams 1986, Costa & Matzner 2007, Wiesener-Hanks 2011) in the face of considerable, and often violent opposition to their existence, constitutes evidence that cis-mythologising beliefs are nothing more than self-reinforcing constructions. The different ways young trans people have had to respond to these mythologisations explored in this thesis are argued to constitute evidence of the nature of this belief.

One of the implications of the existence of this belief is the persistence of attempts to de-authenticate trans people, and how mythologised (de)validation is employed to achieve this. By examining the ways that individuals attempt to authenticate or de-authenticate trans people we can start to understand not merely the belief systems of those creating or spreading these myths of (in)authenticity but also how they consider their target audience will respond to them.

In the next section the issue of authenticity as mythologised validation will be argued as relevant to identification and language, and this will be elaborated in the following section.

9.3 Recontextualisation: Identity and Language

Some of the more interesting material evident from participants was the issue of identity and language. Being able to experience an epiphany as a trans person appeared to be dependent on having the language available
to do this, something that can be regarded as multilayered. In SAM terms, attempting to recontextualise one’s understanding of one’s gender identity without language is constituted as *improvising*, recontextualising a DS-practice with a DS-recontextualising strategy. It is argued here that one needs to be able to express one’s identity in language, either through *rationalising* or *re-principling* in order to establish an identity. There were a number of examples of this from the participant data; when Phil described how arbitrarily he first acquired the term ‘transgender’ and when Harry attempted to Google ‘I don’t want to be a girl’, or when Samira was able to express femininity at school but not be termed a ‘girl’. The implications of this are that one needs to acquire the language with which to describe one’s claimed identity, something that, in the case of young trans people is difficult because these terms are often not available to them. Indeed in some instances this language appears to be actively kept from them or referred to in such negative ways that they are deterred from identifying in that way. This can also be regarded as an effect of cis-mythologisation.

However the effects of the way language is used with reference to young trans people and trans children, can also be regarded as constituting a barrier in other ways. As Halberstam (1998) and Beemyn & Rankin (2011) have noted the way language, and its limitations, affect trans people coming out is significant. Here the way language is used can be regarded as constituting an obstacle. From the data presented in this thesis, in particular from Wesley, Hannah and Shane, there would appear to be a cultural tendency in some to regard gender non-conformity as preferable to transgender identification.

This is reflected in the way adjectival characterisations of gender variance seem to be regarded as preferable to substantive ones. So Samira’s experience at school, of being regarded as a feminine boy, was acceptable to those in her school, yet describing her as a girl, or using female pronouns was not considered appropriate. Not entirely dissimilarly was the
way Phil’s experience as a child, of being inappropriately labeled a ‘tomboy’, which resulted in him feeling a loss of identity as a consequence. In addition, his mother’s reaction, when he came out to her as a trans man prompted her question, ‘Can’t you just be a lesbian?’ suggesting that sexuality and gender identity are sometimes confused and conflated, but that identifying as a lesbian would be preferable to identifying as a trans man. It would appear that, at least in the experience of many participants, those close to them seemed happy to embrace and accept gender non-conformity, but were reluctant to accept them crossing this cultural border, and identifying, in the DS+ from one gender to another. Whether this reluctance can be put down to the effect of culture on cognition - including in the way language is used in this area - in a similar way that Luria (1976) evidenced it, is not within the scope of this thesis to determine. However it would appear that, in some instances there is an element of resistance to identifying someone crossing what is culturally constituted as the male-female boundary while gender non-conformity is accepted.

This can be regarded as a cultural barrier comprised of confused or conflated descriptors and mythologised (de)validation, but one that, when it is overcome, is recontextualised in different ways by drawing on cultural referents from elsewhere, and using those cultural referents; evolution, metamorphosis, rebirth and purification to make sense of apparent changes. What this study suggests is that this barrier, partly constituted in language, represents a significant obstacle to identifying and accepting others as transgender, but that recontextualising cultural referents from elsewhere appear to be recruited in order to recognise and understand these apparent changes. Thus the relationship between identity and language may be more complex than a simple link between acquiring vocabulary and being able to apply that to one’s own, or someone else’s identification. Once again this could be regarded as an effect of cis-mythologisation, not merely that language may be required in order to
understand, express and assert an identity but that language, at least as far as it is constituted in English, can be regarded as forming an obstacle to identification, at least in terms of trans people, where the perception is of crossing a clearly defined and delineated border, not only establishing a new identity but annihilating one assigned originally.

The data that produces the four *cultural referents for change* (p119) can also be regarded as constituting evidence regarding the way many opposed to trans people’s existence and rights have constituted the notion of the existence of a ‘transgender ideology’ (Jeffreys 2014 p15). The way that trans people and cisgender people clearly draw on a variety of different cultural referents in order to interpret the apparent change when they come out or a trans person comes out to them, constitutes strong evidence that no such ideology exists. If there is no established way of explaining these apparent changes such that there exist very different perspectives recruited for interpreting them by trans people as well as others, this suggests that, despite people having identified as transgender and engaged in transgender practices for thousands of years (Bolich 2007 p17) there would appear to be no unified ideology or group of ideological beliefs that can be identified, and none that can present any consistent interpretation of the apparent change in gender from that assigned at birth which trans people undergo.

Although it is difficult to substantiate a negative, the lack of evidence for a ‘transgender ideology’ is further reinforced by the dearth of language available, until very recently (and even then only up to a point) to describe trans people’s identities and experiences, despite the wide variety of experiences that trans people go through before and after their epiphanies. Indeed this variety suggests that any possible unifying ideology is not present. The, up to now, restricted availability, at least until very recently, of the language that does exist, resulted in some being unable to identify because of this unavailability. This also suggests that, at least in the
DS+ no such ideology exists. On the contrary, the characterisation of cis-mythologisation, one of the themes of this thesis, suggests that, if anything resembling an ideology regarding trans people does exist, then it is one that erases and delegitimises them and does so predominantly tacitly, which is characterised here as an element of cis-mythologisation.

The relationship between language and identification, and the initial identification process in particular, suggests that Butler’s (1990) notion of performativity in relation to gender needs to be re-considered. This is the focus of the next section.

9.4 Performativity

One of the most interesting questions to ask in relation to the transgressive nature of crossing from one designation that is sedimented and regarded as fixed, to another designation that is also sedimented and regarded as fixed, or identifying as neither binary gender, something that is sedimented as culturally non-existent, is the relationship this has with Butler’s (1990) notion of performativity. Butler’s view of gender can be regarded as rooted primarily in the DS-. In her characterisations of gender performativity it is the tacit expression of gender that dominates, although not to the complete exclusion of the explicit. Yet it would appear that, at the point of coming to understand oneself as a trans person the significance of language cannot be understated, at least in terms of those experiencing epiphany. As one of the participants, Steve noted, he doesn’t go round constantly thinking ‘man, man, man’, yet the significance of being able to apply an explicit descriptor to oneself would appear to be important. Harry, Phil, Melissa and Shane all vividly remember the moment when they discovered an element of the terminology relating to identifying as transgender. So while Butler’s concept of performativity appears to be relevant to participants as they produce the effect of the genders they
assert, the importance of being able to identify explicitly is more important from the point of view of that part of the process of epiphany that constitutes a revelation.

Of course words carry with them connotations that can be understood differently by different people, indeed Judith Butler, describing her own epiphany as a lesbian when a teenager, when she discovered the term ‘lesbian’ suggests that this designation resulted in a negative affect for her\(^{95}\). Yet the difference would appear that, in her case, ‘lesbian’ was already a term she knew, so it was a case of coming to understand that this term applied to her. In the case of those participants who described it, acquisition of the term ‘transgender’ or something similar was not usually a word they already knew, and consequently the term, and the concept to which it referred were both new to them. However two participants, Jake and Caroline were acquainted with the term ‘transgender’ prior to their epiphanies, and in the case of Jake, he resisted it partly because, having earlier come out as a lesbian, he had experience of stigmatisation, and surmised that trans people were likely to be negatively stigmatised to an even greater extent, so his epiphany is characterised, in possibly the same way as Judith Butler’s might be, as ‘overcoming resistance’. In Caroline’s case they also reported that the term had pre-existing negative connotations attached to it. The reaction of many participants who described their epiphanies in detail was predominantly one of relief, a typical response was ‘Now I know what the problem was!’

Yet as Butler acknowledges, these linguistic descriptors have had the consequence of sedimenting what appear to be two separate gendered groups onto which the performative aspects of gender are overlaid and through which they are interpreted, and interpreted through the gaze of the culturally mythologised gender binary. So this rigid divide has the

\(^{95}\) ‘Judith Butler: Part 5/6’ Oct 2008 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHVugezlG8
appearance of naturalness while at the same time being culturally constituted. This is evident from the data in which a number of participants identified as non-binary but who, like Phil, came to the conclusion that, at least in the DS-, they needed to present as an intelligible binary gender. These participants all presented as in some way intelligible as one of the binary genders, most, but not all of them, as men. Here it is important to be slightly more specific about language, the main term that appears to be decisive in terms of experiencing epiphany was ‘transgender’, rather than ‘man’ or ‘woman, ‘girl’ or ‘boy’, yet these gendered identities were the ones with which the binary-identified participants used to describe themselves.

9.4.1 Beyond Performativity

So the descriptor ‘transgender’ can be regarded, in some instances, as a means to an end in identity terms, rather than constituting an identity in itself. It can be regarded as an opening up of possibilities, for example by making it clear to those acquiring that term, that there must be others like them, and thus, through the internet, enabling them to make contact with other trans people. However the majority of participants in this study, when coming out as trans, wished to be regarded as the other binary gender (even if they identified as non-binary), and this is where there appear to be problems in some instances. The apparent reluctance of many of those close to them to recognise their explicit transfer from birth assigned gender to identified gender suggests that the divide between genders is culturally well-entrenched, while those identifying as men were often accepted as masculine women, and in some instances those identifying as women were accepted as feminine (or effeminate) men there was a resistance to crossing this linguistically mythologised line from, for example, feminine man to woman. This raises the issue of just how
entrenched this culturally-constructed border between the binary genders has become.

So what this research characterises is a constructed binary gender system that is entrenched to the extent that it is mythologised as such even in the face of compelling and immediate evidence to the contrary. This results in the possibility of identifying as transgender being made inaccessible to some, and trans people suffering from stigmatisation and abuse and that there is often a resistance to transitioning, for example, amongst close family members, and even trans people themselves (eg Brown 1988). This suggests that the culturally/linguistically created binary may present more of a barrier to crossing it, or remaining outside it, than we might think.

This implies that the relationship between gender performativity and the explicit characterisation of gender in language is an issue that this thesis raises, and potentially brings to the fore the nature of explicit identification in contrast with performative identification, in the case of trans people. Regarding gender as performative would at least, from the evidence from participants, in the case of trans people, appear to be insufficient, focussing as it does on the DS- expression of gender but not its initial revelation which it is argued here, necessarily involves language in some way. Butler, (Salih & Butler 2004 p102) agrees that an identity cannot exist without the means to describe it, if that is the case then the production of gender performatively, and, as importantly, the way gendered performances are interpreted by others, is still dependent on the linguistically sedimented definitions of male and female. A tacitly produced gendered performance produces what is recontextualised as a gender in the DS+, ie rationalising. The performative may be regarded as constituted in the DS- but these gendered performances index something that is also constituted in language.
The evidence from this thesis points to an understanding of gendered performativity that includes the linguistic as a referent, although not in every instance. Butler refers to gender performativity as constituting a domain of agency (ibid p115) which suggests that the performative can also index gender identities that are not yet sedimented enough to be recognisable by all (or even by many) as constituting, for example non-binary genders. Indeed it is arguable that non-binary genders, in many instances, may still exist predominantly in the DS+ rather than the DS-.

Phil’s description of how he tried to present a non-binary identity and Brett’s experience with their gender studies lecturer evidences this. While some non-binary genders exist in the DS+ it would appear, from the experience of Phil, that they do not yet exist, in the DS-, except in the ‘niche queer spaces’ where Brett socialises, in that the interpretation of these gendered performances is likely to remain within the gender binary, presenting a challenge to the concept of performativity in that the interpretation by most observers may be at variance with that intended by the individual. Characterising gender poststructurally as something repeatedly and citationally produced to give the impression of a man or of a woman needs to be understood within the context of sedimented language-based descriptors that guide people’s interpretations of gendered performances into the DS+. So producing a gendered performance that produces such an effect is dependent on one’s understanding of the way others will interpret that performance.

Butler’s ideas of performativity can be regarded, from a SAM perspective, as constituting the *maintenance* element of identification, if we regard identification as an alliance. However the formation and destabilising elements of this are not entirely present in Butler’s theorisation. The performative can be constituted as the ongoing production of identity but it ignores the revelatory element, an element very important in the lives of participants in this study. So while the performative can be regarded as
constituting validation in the DS- and signifying to the DS+, the processes of identity acquisition take different forms.

Drawing on the language of Piaget (1958) here, revelation in the DS- can be regarded as a kind of equilibration. Here the realisation that one’s identification might be other than what was assigned at birth is formed, from dis-equilibrated understandings, expressed for example by David’s utterance, ‘does not compute’ referring to his assumed identity, up to that point, as a butch lesbian. At some point this becomes expressed in language, ie a rationalisation occurs and what was manifest in the DS- is recontextualised into the DS+, which is where the revelation occurs, followed by a re-principling of prior identification. This process must be constituted as a social process, as the interaction between the ‘I’ and ‘you’ or ‘they’, with language as the vehicle for this. This is acknowledged by Butler, when she describes identity as formed only in relation to others (2004 p15), and can be regarded therefore as the formation, or joining of an alliance. The performative mode of identification is subsequently constituted predominantly in the DS-, here as signifying, although it could also be regarded as constituting in the DS+ describing as in Samira’s straightforward response to the question of her identity “Me. I’m a woman.” something that can be regarded as performative in addition to her feminine presentation. This produces the relational space in fig 9.1 below. Although Butler acknowledges the social nature of identity she does not enter into discussion of the revelatory process of epiphany in a ‘new’ identity, something that is dependent on the explicit rather than the tacit.

So while the performative, which she describes as producing the effect of a man or of a woman characterises the ongoing production of identity in the DS-, the initial revelation, which constitutes a rationalising recontextualisation, must involve language. This is argued to be because language enables alliance production, the process of identification, as a social process is argued to function by the constitution of an alliance,
something that requires communication, and hence language. This initial identification can be - and often is - modified later through DS-performative signification; one can give the impression not merely of a man or a woman but of a particular kind of man or woman.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discursive Saturation</th>
<th>Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DS+</td>
<td>Revelatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rationalising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS-</td>
<td>Performative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Describing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equilibrating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implying</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general terms then performativity can be regarded as tacitly implying gender in the way it is produced most of the time. Describing is characterised as when one needs to refer to oneself or others explicitly in gendered terms, and is contrasted with the way gender is continually produced through tacit means, something that would normally be much more common.

The revelatory aspect of gender refers to that time when one realises one is a boy or a girl or a non-binary person, as an initial epiphany. However it could also be constituted as a further revelation at other times when one comes to realise, for example, that, from a cultural perspective, being a boy means doing X or being a girl means doing Y. In tacit terms, for trans people, equilibration can refer to the feeling of ‘not fitting in’ that many trans people experience, often from a very young age. This was evidenced
in those participants who experienced anaphoric epiphanies, they felt
different but didn’t know why. However the way they come to identify as
transgender and as trans men, trans women or non-binary people is
argued as only occurring through rationalising, as characterised by Dowling
(2013 p329) as the DS+ recontextualisation of a DS- activity, which entails
expressing it in language. It is this rationalising recontextualisation of the
tacit into language, which constitutes its move from the realm of the
personal/psychological, to the social, and can thus be regarded as
constituting identity formation through social action. And it is this, which
ultimately leads from the revelatory to the performative, where implying
predominantly but also describing take over as the gendered alliance is
maintained as opposed to formed.

So identification is not merely performative, in the case of trans people at
the very least, it is also revelatory. The revelatory nature of identification
may be argued to be attached to any identity, but it normally occurs
imperceptibly for cisgender people, as cisgender people, because this
revelation is expected and constituted as the norm, which makes it
unremarkable, and may be perceived simply as part of the process of
growing up, for example. However this revelatory element of identification
becomes evident when this epiphany or revelation occurs differently, and
contrary to all expectations. Indeed what makes it a particularly noticeable
revelatory process is the very normality of it for most people, it only
becomes apparent as a revelation when it is regarded from outside that
which is the norm. In other words the standards of the norm produce and
emphasise the non-standard revelation while at the same time concealing
the revelations that fit within the norm.
9.5 Other Factors

This conclusion has so far focussed on what is present in the study but what is absent from it is also significant, especially given the open-ended nature of much of the questioning, which included all the participants being given the opportunity at the end to add any other information they might like to give. So what they did not talk about is also of interest, especially in relation to existing theories about trans people.

Probably the most significant absence was any evidence to support theories about gender roles applied to trans people (Raymond 1979 p81). The ‘radical feminist’ view of trans people is, not unexpectedly, focussed on gender roles, yet this was something that was conspicuous in its absence. Indeed There are no direct references whatsoever in the transcripts from participants that referred to gender roles directly, only evidence that these roles were being ignored, such as Phil’s interest in dancing and ballet, for example, which explains why he refers to himself as identifying with Billy Elliott, and indeed experienced an element of role strain for a while in terms of asserting his identity as a man. In addition John, who was both a sporty young man while also working as an early years assistant in a Nursery described how he consciously attempted to break down stereotypical gender roles with the children he taught.

What was more noticeable was the way identity played a greater part in the lives of these people. Being able to identify, and be identified, and in some instances obtain the physical body they need through hormone treatment and/or surgery, were the main concerns that participants expressed consistently in this area. Identification and body morphology were important and even then participants did not enter into lengthy discussions about their physical transitions. Any surgeries, whether already undergone or desired were either mentioned in an unremarkable way or not at all. While surgery may have been important for them, the fact that
they needed it was not regarded as a controversial issue. This is significant and can be explained in a number of ways but most significantly participants probably made certain assumptions about the interviewer, that she would know about surgeries and endocrinological changes, and so they may have felt little need to explain them. The attitude to these was very matter-of-fact and largely unproblematic. The only participant who referred to these more than in passing was Wesley, who was in the process of coming to a decision about his surgical future.

This suggests that not only are gender roles not particularly important for participants but that identification is very important. In terms of performativity this might mean that, as a secondary effect some participants adopt elements of gender roles that might help reinforce the performative nature of their genders. If so, this was clearly something that appeared to be a secondary consideration and in most cases not a consideration at all. Conversely it was also clear that, more often than not, the culturally prescribed gender binary roles were not merely not an issue, but that they were actively flouted. So whilst it is not surprising that ‘feminist’ theorists might attempt to look at trans people’s lives through the gaze of gender roles, after all that is one of the main focuses of feminist discourse, it would also appear to be problematic. This gaze can be argued to constitute not only the imposition of an inappropriate construct but also a significant misunderstanding and/or misrepresentation of trans people on their part. From the data obtained from participants here it would appear that interpreting trans people’s lives and experiences through this lens may produce problematic conclusions based on an inappropriate interpretation of the data. This might explain why Riddell (1980) has criticised Raymond (1979) for ignoring the empirical data collected from her research participants, it was simply not intelligible through the gaze of gender roles.
The other noticeable absence was data about sexuality. This was not entirely absent, it was discussed often in the context of personal relationships but it was neither an overriding feature nor a common experience amongst participants. Many theoretical assumptions about participants’ sexuality would appear unable to explain the data that was obtained about sexuality. It would appear that there are no consistent patterns or conclusions to be drawn about people’s sexuality, from the data. If we define sexuality, for the purposes of this thesis, as the object(s) of one’s desire, then some participants changed their sexuality as a result of transition while others did not, and of those who did appear to change, they did not change in any uniform way. For example one appeared to change from identifying as a gay man to identifying as a bisexual woman, one appeared to change from identifying as a heterosexual woman to a pansexual non-binary person, a couple of participants originally identified as lesbians but their sexuality changed to that of gay men and another appeared to change from identifying as a lesbian to identifying as a pansexual man. Yet others retained their sexualities; one went from appearing to be a bisexual man to identifying as a bisexual woman, another from a lesbian to a straight man, another from a heterosexual man to a lesbian. Also significant were a number of participants who appeared not to be interested in sex either before or after transition.

What did appear to be important to a number of participants however, was the way they were identified when engaging in sexual relationships. For example one non-binary participant assigned female at birth was unable to enjoy sex if they were identified as a woman during sex, a pre-operative trans man was also clear about how important it was for him to be regarded as a man by the person he was sleeping with. This suggests that sexuality and identity are not unconnected. In addition the issue might also be raised as to why two of the trans men who were attracted to men, needed to transition before being able to engage in sexual relationships with other men. It would seem that, from their perspective, they could not
engage in sex at all until they had transitioned. So the objects of their desire could only be engaged with sexually, from a specific gendered position. This supports some of Bettcher’s (2013) theory of sexual structuralism. This may be the only conclusion that can be drawn from this and then only tentatively so. Identity and sexuality would appear to be related in some instances but not in the ways previously theorised (eg Blanchard 1989, Raymond 1979). In the examples reported here, identity sometimes preceded sexuality and appeared, in some instances, to be required in order to engage in sexual relationships of any kind. However it would also appear that sexuality was different for different participants and that the variation in sexuality was not uniform across everyone.

As with much of the other data from this study it would appear that there is a great range of diversity in sexuality, some people seem to have changed their sexuality some have not, and those who have changed their sexuality have changed it in different ways. A lot of different issues are also raised by this data, and further study in this area is likely to be useful, although it is argued that the language may need to be developed with which to express different sexualities, if this is to be both accurate and productive.

Whilst it might be unusual to refer to omissions and to data that is absent from a particular study, it is also significant when so much antecedent theoretical material has suggested these issues would be important. Their absence is argued here to be of significance, not least in terms of flagging up possible further study.
9.6 Reflections from constructing this thesis

As a researcher, I have learned a great deal from constructing this thesis, in particular in relation to performativity, authenticity, anti-trans cultural processes, the variety of different experiences experienced by young trans people about SAM and about myself.

In terms of using SAM in this study, it was initially difficult to apply to (trans)gender, especially since the main antecedent study in SAM (Dowling 1998) was based on an analysis of printed text objects, and one of the others investigated an online text-based fandom (Whiteman 2007). However, once apprenticed into SAM, and coming to understand my own thought processes, it became possible to make full use of it and produce analyses that were far more detailed and productive than had been expected, and which could be deployed at a variety of levels of analysis. What was also unexpected was that analyses produced in relation to this field could be re-deployed to analyse others. For example the Justification Strategies Schema (p253) while describing the different strategies trans people employ to justify themselves, derived from the data also, surprisingly, characterised the different justification strategies employed in a conversation with teachers advocating the teaching of mathematics in schools. The Cultural References for Change Schema (p 119) also appears to be valid for analysing other situations where apparent change is taking place. One of the aims of using SAM in this thesis was to apprentice myself in SAM specifically so that it can be used for further sociological research, I hope to be able to do this subsequently.

In terms of the subject matter of the thesis, in relation to performativity, it would appear that the way it is characterised by Butler does not entirely account for the experiences of young trans people, especially in relation to their epiphanies as trans. Although Butler recognises the role of culture in determining the parameters within which gender can be produced
performatively, which must include language, the role of language in being able initially to understand one’s subjectivity as a trans person cannot be underestimated, nor, do I feel, does Butler quite capture the significance of this.

The concept of authenticity is one that I did not expect to come from of this thesis has turned out to represent a significant element, but one that is complex, nuanced and multi-layered, much more so than there is room to develop here. It represents something that needs to be researched in greater depth from a sociological perspective. This is an area to which I hope to return, as a researcher.

In terms of anti-trans cultural processes, since I wrote about the concept of cultural cisgenderism in 2013 (Kennedy 2013) I have felt that this concept was no longer adequate to describe anti-trans processes in the second half of this decade. This is largely because the – predominantly passive – cultural erasure of trans people has been replaced by a - more active – delegitimisation of us (Kennedy 2019). While it, as a weakly discursively saturated but highly institutionalised practice still exists in some milieux, in general it has been replaced by intense attempts at delegitimisation and widespread hate-mongering targeted at trans people, largely based on misrepresentation and the production of ignorance. When the president of the United States actively campaigns against trans people’s rights and The Times publishes 343 articles about trans people, almost all of them regarded as anti-trans, one can no longer claim that the background culture constitutes what Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Eagleton 1982) characterised as a doxa. It is likely that, since there is a great deal of cultural change in progress in this area both in the UK and worldwide at the moment, that productively characterising cis-mythologisation as a concept may need to wait until this period of particularly intense change has passed.
What was expected was the variety of experiences that different young trans people had. Despite otherwise being a relatively homogenous group in racial and class terms, these young people described a wide variety of different experiences, revealing a complexity that has the potential to render obsolete many antecedent theories about trans people, ideas that tend to homogenise trans people’s lives, erasing different experiences.

The issue of the learning that the young trans people engaged in, largely in online contexts, is an issue that arose from the data, and there was evidence of different types of constructivist learning going on. The ideas of Piaget, Vygotsky, Alexander and Freire were all relevant, and merit further exploration. Such an inquiry would probably require more data and data directly from these online learning sources possibly obtained and analysed in the same way that Whiteman (2007, 2012) carried out her study of online fandoms. Although there was enough data for an analysis of this learning from the perspective of looking at trans epiphanies and self-learning more data would be needed for such a study. Consequently this may be a focus for future research.

9.7 Implications and Recommendations

You are who you are even though the price you pay is being disinvited from the rest of the world... You’d be crazy to choose this life if you didn’t have to.

‘Stan’ to ‘Angel’, Pose (Murphy et al 2018) Season 1 Ep 2

9.7.1 Challenging the ‘Docile Victim’ narrative

The main implications of these findings are that those who attempt to portray young trans people as victims or as passive need to be challenged robustly. From the data collected as part of this study the docile victim narrative is so evidently inappropriate and misleading to the point of being
both dangerous and offensive to young trans people. The levels of agency and perseverance required of young trans people to negotiate the social, cultural, practical and economic barriers to transitioning are remarkable to the extent that being able to transition at any age, but particularly when young still needs to be regarded as a considerable personal achievement. The resilience, determination and fortitude of these young people should not be taken for granted and attempts by others, whether in the media, academia, cultural, medical or political spheres should be regarded with suspicion. They have constructed these dehumanising narratives for purposes other than those they claim (Burns 2019).

From this point of view the need is to change the discourse to one that critiques the ‘docile victim’ narrative and starts to regard young trans people as both human beings and with at least as much agency as anyone else. The docile victim narrative, can be regarded in the same way as Raymond’s (1979) narrative that claimed that trans people were the product of manipulation by anti-feminist psychiatrists that Riddell (1980) observed as underpinning the entirety of Raymond’s ideology.

9.7.2 Acknowledging Diversity

The variation and complexity of young trans people’s lives is also evident from this data and stands in opposition to the over-homogenisation of trans people’s lives by theorists in psychological (eg Cauldwell 1949, Blanchard 1989, Cantor 2011, Dreger 2015) and ‘radical feminist’ (e.g. Haussman 1995, Greer 1999) narratives that attempt to gloss over this diversity. Their apparent desire to produce hostile theorisations of trans people relies on this glossing over the individuality of different trans people. Pathologising or problematising theorisations rely on homogenising generalisations that permit these sweeping
oversimplifications. The dehumanising nature of these narratives should be challenged in all spheres, and research of this kind treated as problematic for these reasons.

**9.7.3 The Conveyor Belt Myth**

The conveyor belt myth; the idea that once a child decides he, she or they are transgender they are on an conveyor belt to inevitable transition. The quotation from Bindel (2017) on p 281 QQ is an example of this. This is based on the docile victim narrative as characterised above but more broadly draws on the, largely tacit, idea that any outcome for a trans child or young person which does not involve growing up to be trans, and more specifically to involve surgery, is better than any other outcome. The conveyor belt myth is without any empirical basis but would appear to have the effect of making parents of trans children more resistant, through fear, to obtaining help for their child. This is one of the factors against which trans children and young people’s considerable agency needs to be deployed. This myth also suggests that gay, lesbian or bisexual young people are likely to be misinterpreted as trans when it is evident, from data presented in this thesis (eg p185), that the opposite is much more likely.

**9.7.4 Future Actions**

The above implications draw out from this study the profundity of the misleading narratives that have characterised (young) trans people in the academic, media and medical spheres. Future scholarship and research regarding (young) trans people needs to focus on challenging these narratives and exposing their mendacities, misrepresentations, deceptions and spurious unreliability. Trans people’s lives in general, and those of
young trans people and trans children in particular have been pushed to the top of the news agenda in many locations, but specifically in the UK. In academia the production of misleading and ethically questionable research into trans people has continued (Restar 2019, Pain 2018). Producing research and scholarship which exposes its untruths and harmful nature, as well as moves forward a greater understanding of trans people as people, would seem to be urgently needed, implying that the processes, individuals and organisations that have produced this material also need to be researched.
References

Written Texts


Baiocco, R; Fontanese, L; Santamaria, F; Ioverno, S; Marasco, B; Baumgartner, E; Willoughby, B and Laghi, F (2015) Negative Parental Responses to Coming Out in a Sample of Lesbian and Gay Young Adults *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 24.5 1490-1500


Bell, L (1989) *Sartre’s Ethics of Authenticity* University of Alabama Press Tuscaloosa


Bettcher, T (2013) When Selves Have sex” What the Phenomenology of Trans Sexuality Can Teach about Sexual Orientation *Journal of Homosexuality* 61.5 605-620

Bettcher, T (2014) Trapped in the Wrong Theory: Rethinking Trans Opposition and Resistance *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 39.2

Blanchard, R (1989) The concept of autogynephilia and the typology of male gender dysphoria *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 177.10 616-623
Blanchard, R (1993) Varieties of Autogynephilia and their Relationship to Gender Dysphoria *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 33.3 241-51


Boag, P (2005) Go West Young Man, Go East Young Woman: Searching for the Trans in Western Gender History *Western Historical Quarterly* 36.4 477-497


British Sociological Association (2017) *BSA Statement on Ethical Practice* BSA Durham
https://www.britsoc.co.uk/media/24310/bsa_statement_of_ethical_practice.pdf

Bullough, V (1975) Transsexualism in History *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 4.5


Brunskell-Evans, H & Moore M (Eds) (2017) Transgender Children and Young People: Born in Your Own Body Cambridge Scholars, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne

Burchard, E (1914) Lexikon des gesamten Sexuallebens Adler-Verlag Berlin


Cable, J (2015) Mathematics is Always Invisible Professor Dowling
Mathematics Education Research 27 359-384

Cameron, L (2013) How the psychiatrist who co-wrote the manual on sex talks about sex

Cantor, J (2011) New MRI studies support the Blanchard typology of male-to-female Transsexualism Archives of Sexual Behavior 40 863-264


Cauldwell, D (1949) Psychopathia Transsexualis Sexology: Sex Science Magazine 16


Clark, T (2008) 'We're Over-Researched Here!': Exploring Accounts of Research Fatigue within Qualitative Research Engagements Sociology 42; 953

Conway, L (2007) *An investigation into the publication of J. Michael Bailey’s book on Transsexualism by the National Academies*
http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/TS/LynnsReviewOfBaileysBook.htm


Cowell, R (1954) *Roberta Cowell’s Story* Heinemann Portsmouth NH


De Beauvoir (1949) *The Second Sex* Editions Gallimard Paris


Dowling, P (2009) *Sociology As Method: Departures from the Forensics of Culture, Text and Knowledge* Sense Rotterdam


Dugay, S (2014) ‘He has a way gayer Facebook than I do’: Investigating sexual identity disclosure and context on a social networking site. *New Media and Society* 18.6


Elbe, L (2004 [1933]) *Man into Woman: The First Sex Change* Blue Boat Books Brighton


Freud, S (1923 [2010]) The Ego and the Id Pacific Publishing Studio Seattle


Geertz, C (1973) The Interpretation of Cultures Basic Books New York

Gill-Peterson, J (2019) *Histories of the Transgender Child* University of Minnesota Press Minneapolis


Glick, J; Theall, K; Andrinopoulos, K & Kendall, C (2018) For data’s sake: dilemmas in the measurement of gender minorities *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, DOI: 10.1080/13691058.2018.1437220


Green, R (1987) *The ‘sissy-boy syndrome’ and the development of homosexuality* Yale University Press Newhaven CT


Cambridge MASS

Hahn, A et al (2015) Structural Connectivity Networks of Transgender People *Cerebral Cortex* 25.10 3527-3534


Hirschfeld, M (1923) Die Intersexuelle Konstitution *Jahrbuch fur Sexualle Zwischenstufen*


Jeffreys, S (1997) *Transgender activism: A Lesbian Feminist Perspective* 
Journal of Lesbian Studies 1 3-4 55-74


https://rozk.livejournal.com/173751.html

Kennedy, N (2012) Transgender Children: More than a Theoretical Challenge (Updated Version) 
https://www.academia.edu/2760086/Transgender_Children_More_than_a_Theoretical_Challenge_2012_updated_version_


Kergil, S (2017) *Before I had the Words: on Being a Transgender Young Adult*. Skyhorse New York


Kiss, C (2017) *A New Man*. Matador Kibworth Leics


Ku, H et al (2013) Brain signature characterising the body-brain-mind axis of transsexuals *Plos One* 8 e70808


Lester, C (2017b) *The Shock of the New: Cultural Amnesia, Trans Erasure and what we can do about it.* Oxford University Podcasts 24 Feb 2017 Oxford


Littman, L (2017) Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria in Adolescents and Young Adults: A Descriptive Study *Journal of Adolescent Health* 60.2 95-96


MacDonald, E (1998) Critical Identities: Rethinking Feminism Through Transgender Politics *Atlantis* 32.1

Matic, U (2016) *(De)queering Hatshepsut: Binary Bind in Archaeology of Egypt and Kingship Beyond the Corporeal* Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory 23.3 810–831


Merleau-Ponty, M (1945) *Phenomenology of Perception* Gallimard Paris


Money, J (1975) Ablatio penis: Normal male infant sex-reassigned as a girl
Archives of Sexual Behavior 4.1 65-71


Moser, C (2011) Yet another paraphilia definition fails Archives of Sexual Behavior 40.3 483-485

Munro, S (2005) Beyond male and Female: Poststructuralism and the Spectrum of Gender International Journal of Transgenderism 8.1


Nicolazzo, Z (2017) *Trans* *In College* Stylus Sterling VA


Olsen, K; Durwood, L; DeMeules, M & McLaughlin, K (2016) Mental Health of Transgender Children Who Are Supported in Their Identities *Pediatrics* 137.3

O’Shea, S (2016) I’m not that Caitlyn: a critique of both the transphobic media reaction to Caitlyn Jenner’s Vanity Fair cover shoot and of passing. *Culture and Organisation* DOI: 10.1080/14759551.2016.1230856


Piaget, J (1958) *The growth of logical thinking from childhood to adolescence* Psychology Press Brighton


Raymond, J (1979) The Transsexual Empire The Women’s Press London


Ross, C; Mirowsky, J & Pribesh, S (2001) Powerlessness and amplification of threat: Neighbourhood disadvantage, disorder, and mistrust American Sociolgical Review 66.4

Rossi, N (2010) “Coming out” Stories of Gay and Lesbian Young Adults Journal of Homosexuality 57.9 1174-1191


Serano, J (2008) A matter of Perspective: A Transsexual woman-centric critique of Dreger’s “scholarly History” of the Bailey Controversy *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 37.3 491-4


Shelley, C & NcInroy, L (2014) You Can Form a Part of Yourself Online: The Influence of New Media on Identity Development and Coming Out for LGBT Youth *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Mental Health* 18.1 95-109


Stryker, S (1994) *My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage* GLQ 1 237-254


Stryker, S (2008) *Transgender History* Seal Berkeley
New York

gender identity, transsexualism and sexual orientation *Gynecological
Endocrinology* 19.6

Sciences? *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 4/5 295-303

Todd, R and Edwards, S (2004) Adolescents’ Information-seeking and
Utilisation in Relation to Drugs In Chelton, M and Cool, C (Eds) (2004) *Youth
Information-seeking Behavior* Scarecrow Toronto

and transgenderism* Routledge New York

Tosh, J (2016) *Psychology and Gender Dysphoria: Feminist and Transgender
Perspectives* Routledge New York

Transgender Trend (2018) *Supporting gender non-conforming and trans-
identified students in schools* Transgender Trend
https://www.transgendertrend.com/wp-

Trussell, D; Xing, T & Oswald, A (2015) Family leisure and the coming out
process for LGB young people and their parents *Annals of Leisure Research*
18.3 323-341


Wiesner-Hanks, M (2011) *Gender in History: Global Perspectives* Wiley-Blackwell Chichester


World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) (2011) *Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender and Gender Nonconforming People, 7th Edition.* WPATH

Other Media


Bryant & Nazimova (1922) *Salome* Nazimova Productions


Shadyac, T (1994) *Ace Ventura Pet Detective* Warner Brothers Los Angeles
Appendix 1 – Examples of questions

Example questions asked in the interviews. In many instances the interview flowed onto prepared topics without the need for specific questioning, for example family often flowed on from talking about history of identity. The aim was to allow participants to speak as freely as possible but to guide that conversation where necessary, and to probe more closely into certain utterances where it may be productive.

1. Identification and History of identity

“So could I just go back and start at the beginning, with your history and stuff like that, when did you first start to feel that you were, if not trans but different at least?”

“Can you think back to when you first realised you were a guy, do identify as a guy?”

“So when did you realise this, when did you think you were different?”

“How have you come to arrive at that way of defining yourself?”

“When did you feel different at least, even if you didn’t have the words to express it?”

“How do you identify and help you how did you come to that?”

“Can you explain to me how you identify and the history of how came to identify like that?”

“Can you think back to that time you found out you were trans...?”
2. Family and Coming Out

“How did your mum come to, kind of understand it, or...what was her reaction?”

“I was going to ask about your family...?”

“...So has your dad pretty much accepted you then?”

“So how is it in terms of relationship with your family?”

“How were relations, family and friends when you came out?”

“When you go home to your parents, how are relationships there?”

“How about your parents how did they accept you?”

“What was their reaction then when you first came out...?”

“What about your family?”

3. School, college and work

“Did you have any trouble at school?”

“So when you came out what people's reactions?”
“So how was your time in school?”

“. . . at university, how are people there about accepting you?”

“Did you get any unexpected interactions with your tutors and people like that?”

“What about at work, are you out at work, or stealth or . . . ?”

“So how has your life been since you moved out of home, where did you go, did you go to work, university. . . ?”

**4. Relationships and Sexuality**

“Have you always known you are bisexual or has that come out as you’ve come to understand you’re trans?”

“So is it your attraction to someone that’s important or its it how you feel when you’re with someone that matters. . . ?”

“Can I ask about relationships. . . how has being trans, genderqueer, bigender affected your relationships?

“So have you had any partners, or potential partners who have said no because you’re trans? Or problems with any. . . ?”

“What about relationships?”
5. Epiphanies, Information and Learning

“So you found out the word transgender from a newspaper of something like that, but then you went over to the Internet...?”

“How did you...how did you find out about yourself?”

“Can you think back to that time you found out you were trans...?”

“So what helped you to sort of digest it, to come to terms with it?”

“So, what about finding out information about what it is to be trans?”
“So what happened after that, after you saw that program?”

“When did you first put any kind of words to it; you know “I’m a girl or I’m trans, or whatever...?””

“So when did you realise this when did you think you were different?”

“Can you think back to when you learned any kind words related to trans...?”

“Do you think you would have been able to come out without that support network?”

“You’ve been looking at all these blogs, and then you’ve been involved in debates, has it affected how use thought about yourself...?”

“Any particular sites you went on...?”
6. Social interaction

“So what are your trans friends like, are they all kind of supportive and...?”

“So do you have any friendship groups with cis people, or mixed groups?”

“How did those sort of interactions go?”

“So how did you meet up with these people?”

“So, you talk about socialising in queer genderfluid sort of spaces, do you ever find problems with socialising in sort of, say, normal, straight sort of spaces with people who are not queer, gay...?”

“What sort of things did you talk about on Mermaids....?”

“So, you talk about socialising in queer genderfluid sort of spaces, do you ever find problems with socialising in sort of, say, normal, straight sort of spaces with people who are not queer, gay...?”

“What sort of things did you talk about on Mermaids....?”

“Do you think you deliberately socialise with trans people because of that... via the internet or offline or do you seek to mostly socialise with cis people...?”

“Was it different hanging out with the people online compared to real life?”

7. Abuse and violence

“So have you had like sort of really bad negative responses from people?”

“So other than that have you had any out and out transphobia?”

“So have you encountered people who say “you’re not real”?”
8. Various depending on the participant

“When you started university you started in stealth...?”

“Do you think your interest in Gothy things came first or you became trans first, or did one come before the other or did they both come together?”

“Did you have to quote the Equality Act at them...?”

“So do you think the media, for example the Daily Mail etc... has affected your life at all for better or worse?”

“What particular programme on the TV was that?”

“So there were things in your past before that had made no sense?”

“Do you find you’re always having to explain what trans is to people...?”