Doing and being: Understanding how engagement in activities supports transgender, non-binary and genderqueer gender expression

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Table of contents

List of figures

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Abstract

'Transgender', a term which does not have a fixed meaning, is generally understood to include a range of gender diverse identities including non-binary and genderqueer. These latter terms refer to those who identify with some aspects of, or reject entirely, binary identities. There is emerging research from the field of occupational science into transgender communities, but non-binary identities have been largely neglected within this.

This study explored how gender expression for those who are transgender and non-binary related to their engagement with activities, objects and space and place. The research is located in the epistemological positions of feminist social constructionism and queer theory. Five participants who define as transgender or non-binary were recruited through snowball sampling and respondent-driven sampling. Three semi-structured interviews were undertaken over the course of a year. Analysis was informed by new materialism ontology.

The human body, objects and space - considered as an assemblage - intra-act to create capacities for gender expression. Activities and the environment can replicate and enforce binary understandings of gender leaving transgender and non-binary people feeling scrutinised and misrecognised. To counter this, participants, at personal cost, engaged in occupations to assimilate into hostile environments. However, engaging in activities provided opportunities for radical departures from binary gender expressions which facilitated kinship and recognition. Symbolic and personal meanings of occupation shifted when participants were able to express themselves in ways that felt authentic.

Occupations, space and the human body collectively can create agency for transformative gender expression. However, the need to remain safe can, for those who are transgender and non-binary people, necessitate a process of 'occupational assimilation'. This warrants further exploration and application to other marginalised communities. In particular the impact of navigating binary environments for those who are non-binary requires further research and occupational science with its concern for social justice is well placed to advance this.

Glossary of terms

These are terms which are used consistently throughout the thesis.

Gender-related[1]

Cisgender: A person whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gender identity: A person's innate sense of their own gender.

Gender expression: How someone may choose to express their identity or feel compelled to express it.

LGBTQIA+: Acronym for 'lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, asexual' identities.

Non-binary / genderqueer: This encompasses a range of identities which reject binary ('man' or 'woman') understanding of gender either entirely or in part.

Transgender: An umbrella term, also known as 'trans', to describe people whose gender is not the same as that assigned at birth. Whilst this term is understood to be inclusive of non-binary and genderqueer identities, in order to not homogenise the experiences of those who have a binary gender identity and those who have a non-binary identity this thesis will distinguish between these identities.

Occupation-related

[1] Definitions informed by Stonewall (2017)

Occupation: Human pursuits that fulfil needs and when meaningful have the potential to be transformative[2].

Occupational science: The study of the things which people do and how this relates to core concepts such as identity, health and wellbeing.[3]

Theory-related

Assemblage: Groups of diverse elements both material and non-material – including the human body – which collectively generate effects. Agency does not belong to one component in isolation but is collectively created.[4]

De-Territorialisation: The process which facilitates the emergence of new relationships within an assemblage. These can lead to a 'line of flight' which can create new ways of being.[5]

Territorialisation: The process whereby relationships within assemblages are stabilised and consolidated.[6]

[2] See Watson and Fourie (2004)
[3] See Hocking and Wright St Clair (2011)
[4] See Bennett (2010)
[5] See Alldred and Fox (2015)
[6] See Alldred and Fox (2015)

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Summary

This chapter introduces the thesis, discussing the rationale for the research and understanding how existing research, personal experience, people and objects informed my motivation for this endeavour. I also outline the social, cultural and political context of the research both in terms of the lives of transgender and non-binary people and the writing of this thesis. Finally, a summary of each chapter is provided.

1.2 Background and positionality

When contemplating this research and for the first year of this PhD I queried whether I had any right as someone who defines as cis gender to undertake this work. I address in subsequent chapters the role, ethics and complexity of being an outsider researcher with regard to transgender and non-binary communities, but it seems fitting here in this introductory chapter, to explain why it was I wanted to undertake this research.

I have identified openly as a gay woman for almost thirty years and have known for longer still that this is how I wanted to live. Tenacity, some luck and privilege meant that I was able to come out as a young adult and live an open life which has largely been accepted by those who know me. I remember, though, that time when I could articulate only to myself who I was and not to others and the feeling of claustrophobia that it caused. I was recognised, however, when I was 15 years old by my step-mother, Veronica, who discretely and unequivocally acknowledged my sexuality by giving me two books: Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* - two books of the queer literary canon and which now sit in the bookshelf behind me as I write this. They are wonderful books but so much more, they grounded me in a queer space by someone I loved, and they are

objects which continue to orientate me to her and to myself. The reason I share this is because I have always appreciated the importance of objects in expressing and shaping ones' identity. I believe those whose identity is marginalised in any way are perhaps more attentive to the symbolism of objects and how we are orientated to and by them.

The lesbian and gay community has not always been supportive or recognised transgender communities, thankfully this is now changing within the UK. Whilst gender and sexuality are distinct entities they are related, and I doubt whether anyone who defines as lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer has never had their gender questioned or commented upon. Whilst I am cis, my gender expression is not what would be described as typically feminine and this is something I was aware of before I was aware of my sexuality. I was perpetually described as a 'tomboy' and as a child I was given freedom to roam beyond societal expectations of gender. Whilst I may have grown out of the label 'tomboy', I am not so sure that I have abandoned its associated aesthetic. Growing up I was rarely made to feel that this was a problem by my family. One of my warmest childhood memories was been taken clothes shopping by my grandmother and her willingly allowing me to lead her to the boy's section of C&A[7] to pick an outfit. She and I had an unshakable bond and growing up she would tell me how stories from the 1930s when she and her sister were music hall artistes. The fact that my grandmother was a male impersonator in the tradition of Vesta Tilley[8], was not the most interesting thing about her and I just understood this as being part of who she was. It was only when I was in my 20s when hearing the curiosity of friends who I relayed this to that I realised that this was quite exceptional. I realise now that she had little time for the conventionality and rigidity of binary and societally determined gender expressions both when on the stage and in subsequent years when she no longer acted.

[7] UK-based clothes retailer.
[8] Tilley (1864 – 1952) was an English music hall performer and one of the most famous male impersonators.

I have taken the insert below from a blog I wrote for potential participants which introduced my research and myself. It seems fitting to include it along with a photograph of my grandmother's music hall alter ego Billie. It feels all the more appropriate as I had asked, as I outline in the Methodology chapter, participants to bring with them to the initial interview a photograph of a meaningful activity or place to help contextualise the concept of 'occupation'. Below I present mine.

Figure 1: Billie

The photograph on the home page is of both a fine-looking gentleman called Billie and my equally fine-looking grandmother, Louise.

Louise was a male impersonator, working in music halls in the 1930s with her younger sister, Enid as the duo 'Billie and Bunty'. During this period, male impersonators were a celebrated and familiar part of popular culture. It was an act which was very much of its time and, increasingly arguably, ahead of our times.

Eighty years on, I share Louise's interest in the fluidity, and expression, of gender identities. I don't have a theatrical bone in my body but my interest is personal and political and increasingly research-based. I am part of the LGBT+ communities and an advocate for the rights of those who define as such.

In 2011, I retrained to be an occupational therapist, an important but little known or understood profession. Often confused with occupational health, occupational therapy is a profession which works with people whose independence, and sense of identity and being in the world, has been knocked for six as a result of illness or impairment.

Occupational therapists will work with people by helping connect or re-connect people with activities (known, perhaps not helpfully, as 'occupations') and places important to them. People in this situation often face injustice manifest in many forms. So, as well as providing practical support, occupational therapists tend to also act as advocates. After

qualifying I worked in a hospital in London and it was the most exhausting, rewarding and humbling period in my life.

Sometimes I am asked by occupational therapists why I am interested in gender and I am sometimes asked by non-occupational therapists what occupation has to do with gender. In the words of someone very wise, I would say that the link is 'fundamental'. How can we express ourselves, or live a life authentic to us, if we cannot interact with the world around us?
www.rebeccaswensonblog.wordpress.com

'Billie' was a product of her time, a creative expression of music hall, that was societally applauded and acknowledged. Whilst my grandmother, I think, was not transgender she knew how queer (and I use this in both my understanding of 'queer' and as hers as something peculiar) gender could be. In writing about Billie here, I am not suggesting that I can use this to compare or equate with the lived experiences of those who are transgender and non-binary whose expression of their gender identity can be met with questioning and hostility. My relationship with Billie and primarily my grandmother grounded my connection with the fluidity of gender

I was motivated to undertake this research by hearing accounts, some from friends, how the healthcare needs of transgender and non-binary people were overlooked, deliberately and otherwise, and that drove my academic interest in this area. This intensified when I started training as an occupational therapist in 2011. I was by no means surprised at the lack of research - at that point there were only two published studies from the field of occupational therapy (Jessop, 1993; Beagan et al., 2012) – but I was disappointed that these communities were quite neglected by the professional field I intended to enter. Prior to re-training as an occupational therapist, I was unaware of occupational science as a theoretical field, which is the study of things we do and how this influences health, wellbeing and identity (Wilcock, 1998; Hocking and Wright St Clair, 2011). This theoretical premise excited me because there had always seemed to me such a clear relationship between how

we express ourselves and our interaction with the world, through what we do and where we do it and our sense of self and wellbeing. Yet, I was frustrated that the profession had not acknowledged or enquired into the consequences of the admonishment that transgender and non-binary people faced for expressing their authentic self through what they do. Whilst there has been an increase in research since embarking on this research, such as studies by Schneider et al. (2019) and by Dowers et al. (2019) these have focused largely on binary transgender identities. I was fortunate to have a mentor and a friend, Dr Sally Beckwith, who was a lecturer at London South Bank University who encouraged me to channel this interest and desire for equity in the form of research, firstly in the form of an MSc and then embarking on this research project.

I have, as this thesis will later explore, conceptualised actions, intent and the environment within the new materialist framework of assemblages. It seems apt to understand my motivation for undertaking this research in this way, that is as a consequence and happenstance of friendships, family, the places I have inhabited, healthcare and social inequities.

1.3 The changing landscape

There has been a surge in research interest regarding the transgender and non-binary communities (Vincent, 2018) since starting this research. This has arguably mirrored the cultural and societal attention paid to these communities and the developing understanding of what it means to be trans. This is seemingly evident in public reaction from the lurid fascination of the coming out of Caitlyn Jenner in 2015 to the respectful curiosity regarding Elliot Page's announcement that he was transgender in 2021. This could seemingly be in part due to the representation of transgender lives in film and TV series such as 'Transparent' in the USA and 'Emmerdale' in the UK where characters are played by transgender actors and, in the case of 'Transparent', scripts being written by transgender writers. Whilst this could present a progression of sorts

this period has arguably represented an intensely precarious time with regards to transgender and non-binary rights.

In 2016 the UK government undertook a far-reaching review of the rights of transgender and non-binary people which culminated in the Transgender Inquiry report (House of Commons, 2016). A key finding of the report, and one generally greeted positively, was the committee's acknowledgement that the Gender Recognition Act of 2004 required updating. The committee acknowledged that the Act's medicalised approach regarding mental-health diagnosis pathologises transgender identities and called for a model of self-declaration of gender identity to be adopted replacing the onerous, and often humiliating process, of having gender assessed.

This appeared to be a clear signal of development and intent on the part of the UK government to recognise and advance the rights of transgender and non-binary people. Yet, just one year following the progressive discourse of the report the government formed an allegiance with the DUP, a party which vigorously opposes LGBT equality (Pasha-Robinson, 2017). Simultaneously in the USA an order was signed (since repealed) which prevented anyone who defined as transgender from serving in the military. The UK journalist Zoe Williams (2017) commented how it is no coincidence in that there is a global rise in the prohibition of rights afforded to LGBT people and how history is not 'an arc heading towards justice' but instead a series of cycles. In 2018 the government undertook a public consultation into the Gender Recognition Act, which despite having support, faced a backlash from the trans-exclusionary feminist (TERF) movement to protect women-only spaces (Pearce et al., 2020). Pearce et al. (2020) wrote how the 'TERF wars' reflected how contemporary public discourse was dominated by political polarisation, misinformation and distrust of facts. More recently still, the government disbanded their LGBT advisory panel which was seen to further alienate those within the communities the panel represented (Allegretti, 2021). The often-hostile public discourse levelled at transgender and non-binary people touched the lives of

the participants in this study in differing ways and inevitably shaped this research.

Over the final year of my PhD, London like most of the UK has been in and out of lockdown due to COVID-19 and it is impossible to extricate this from this thesis both in terms of how it impacted upon the writing process and more significantly its effect upon transgender and non-binary communities. Lockdown brought social isolation and a loss of routine to populations globally and transgender and non-binary people are understood to have been disproportionately affected due to having lower job security, possible decreased resilience due to ongoing stigmatisation and reduced access to gender affirming interventions (van der Missen et al., 2020). For those who are transgender and non-binary the ability to access public spaces safely diminished further still and with that contact with others who provided connection and validation of their very being. Whilst interviews with participants were undertaken prior to COVID-19, the Findings chapter explores experiences of being scrutinised. Writing this and the Discussion chapter during the pandemic it was difficult not to consider how those who are cis gendered, white and heterosexual and experience the privilege of having an identity which is never questioned, are now – albeit temporarily – assessing their safety when leaving their home and sensing what it is to be scrutinised and prohibited from accessing public spaces.

1.4 Research question and aims

This thesis sets out to address how engagement in activities and spaces supports, or otherwise, transgender and non-binary people in expressing their gender identities with the following aims:

- To examine how objects, space and embodied knowledge relate to the formation and expression of identity for those who define as transgender, genderqueer or non-binary.

- To explore how themes, associated with transgender, genderqueer and non-binary identities, such as agency, social stigma and environment, are embodied and / or enacted through engagement with occupations.

1.5 Summary of chapters

Below is a summary of each of the proceeding chapters.

1.5.1 Chapter 2: Background and Literature review

In exploring the relationship between space, objects and lived experience of trans and non-binary identities, this chapter reviews literature from the fields of research, theory, memoir and cultural representations across the media. The points of tension, divergence and common standpoints between representation of transgender lives within academia and popular culture, and lived experience of those who define as transgender, is considered. In particular, the chapter examines how theoretical understandings of gender, such as performativity, is often at odds with the lived experience of those who are transgender and viewed with suspicion by many who strive to have their identities accepted as authentic. To explore these contradictory perspectives, memoirs, articles and blogs by people who define as trans will be reviewed alongside academic texts. The theories of phenomenology and new materialism are introduced, specifically how each conceptualise space and objects and how bodies are orientated to and relate with these in expressing gender. The chapter introduces occupational science, the theoretical field which understands how interaction with activities and environments impacts on wellbeing and identity. As well as drawing on the parallels with queer theory, this section on occupational science critically explores existing research into the lives of those who are transgender or non-binary from this field. Finally, the chapter reviews literature regarding the notions of space and place and how they can function to exclude marginalised identities.

1.5.2 Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the thesis' epistemological position, of feminist theory, social constructionism and queer theory and details the ontological approach undertaken, namely new materialism. The complexity of collecting and analysing narratives is critically explored particularly through the lens of queer theory which critiques the notion of stable identities for both researched and researcher. The chapter foregrounds how new materialism reframes social constructionism as social production conceptualising human bodies as not being separate to the material world but instead as relational and existing within an assemblage. The position of being an insider or outsider to the community being researched is critiqued and discussed in terms of informing the ethical approach of this research project. Approaches such as recruiting an advisory group and including participants in the analysis of data are described. The recruitment of participants via social media is detailed; five people were recruited one of whom, Eli, participated in only one of the three interviews. Details of the interview process is provided, in summary there were three interviews over one year. The first interview was semi-structured where participants were asked to bring a photograph of a meaningful activity or place, the second and third interviews were unstructured, the latter being a walking interview.

1.5.3 Chapter 4: Analysis of data

This chapter describes the process of the analysis of data within a new materialism framework. In recognising that the researcher is part of the research assemblage extracts from a research journal I kept are threaded through the initial section. Details of the transcribing process is provided and how the audio recording was listened to three times as part of the familiarisation with data is also described. Participants were sent transcripts and respective findings and these were discussed with them. The steps of the analysis are detailed: stage 1 – the identifying of the components of the assemblage; step 2 – identifying how components intra-act to produce capacities and affects which influence gender expression and step 3 – locating instances of territorialisation when the assemblage works to stabilise binary

notions of gender and de-territorialisation when assemblages, bodies, objects and spaces create new ways of being.

1.5.4 Chapter 5: Findings

In this chapter the findings are presented for each participant and discussed collectively in the Discussion chapter. It was decided to attend individually to each participant's accounts, not only to enable depth of exploration but with the aim of ensuring that their voices are embedded within this thesis. As well as introducing the participants, the assemblages, capacities and affects and instances of territorialisation and de-territorialisation in relation to gender expression are discussed. The participants (pseudonyms are used) are, in summary:

- Fred: non-binary trans masculine (pronouns he / him)
- Max: non-binary (pronouns they / them)
- Sam: non-binary or gender fluid (pronouns they / them)
- Eli: trans-masculine (pronouns he / him)
- Dee: transgender woman (pronouns she / her).

1.5.6 Chapter 6: Discussion

In addition to discussing the findings, in this chapter I reflect on my role within the research assemblage and how the format of the interviews affected the findings with particular attention to the 'walking interview'. Integrating theory and research, the findings are presented in two sections: 'visibility, recognition and assimilation' and 'creativity, being queer and recognition'. The former section explored how people, the environment (physical, social and institutional) and occupations themselves organise gender in binary terms, rendering - in particular - non-binary people either hyper-visible or invisible. The concept of occupational assimilation is introduced whereby transgender and non-binary people engage in activities which conceal their gender identity and so enable the evasion of scrutiny but at the cost of self-expression. The

latter section explores how occupational engagement can enable liberation of gender expression from binary gender notions and connect with others creating queer agency and spaces. The idea that the meaning of occupation can change in line with gender transition is discussed. Creative endeavours in relation to gender expression did not portray a static gender identity but rather one that is in a state of becoming. Finally, this chapter calls for a reconceptualising of transactional understandings of occupational engagement which has located gender within the individual into one which conceives of gender as produced by the environment.

1.5.7 Chapter 7: Conclusion

This chapter provides a summary of the research findings, explores the tensions within the methodological approaches alongside implications for future research and outlines the ways it has advanced current theoretical thinking. In addition to outlining the study's rigour and limitations I also provide a reflection on what it meant to be an outsider to the transgender and non-binary communities – a pertinent concern to this study. I explore how queer considerations of identity, supported by my own experience as a researcher, re-configures the very notion of what an insider or outsider may be and conclude that the importance may lay not in whether the researcher acknowledges their position to participants but in that they make themselves locatable throughout the research process.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the study, outlining the rationale and background which explains the drive for doing this research and the forming of the research question. I have foregrounded the impact of the precarious and unpredictable social discourse upon the lives of those who are transgender and non-binary and how the global pandemic touched upon the writing of this thesis and impacted the lives of those in the trans communities. A summary of each chapter has been provided. The following chapter 'Literature Review and

Background', discusses in depth extant research, theory alongside the voices of those who are transgender and non-binary.

Chapter 2: Background & Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In exploring the relationship between space, objects and lived experience of transgender and non-binary identities this chapter reviews literature from the fields of research, theory, memoir and cultural representations such as film. This chapter was written over a period (2017 – 2021) when there has been arguably unparalleled interest in, and scrutiny of, transgender and non-binary lives within popular culture and academia in the UK. As such, the points of tension, divergence and common standpoints between representation of transgender and non-binary lives within academia and popular culture, and lived experience of those who define as such, will all be explored.

Throughout the chapter attempts are made to combine theoretical debates and cultural representations with the voices of those who have defined as transgender or non-binary. It is important to state that whilst writing and researching this chapter the discourse, cultural representation and legal rights of transgender and non-binary people was rapidly shifting. It is troubling to observe, however, the instability regarding such change: one day the media could herald the bravery of someone willing to discuss their gender diverse identity and the following day deride them; legal and constitutional rights would be afforded to transgender people and, as rapidly, retracted or criticised in the popular media.

This literature review will first explore the theory relating to gender and legislation alongside the lived experience of those who define as transgender and non-binary. It will then address theory and lived experience from the perspective of phenomenology, new materialism and within the research and paradigms of occupational science. Finally, it will focus on the relationship between gender, space and objects.

2.2 Theory, law and lived experience

The theoretical and legal contexts cannot be fully understood without appreciating the influence of cisgenderism as an ideology. Cisgenderism is the belief, prevalent in Euro-Western societies, that there are only two sexes, male and female and aligning gender identities (Iantaffi, 2021). Therefore, those who do not identify in such binary terms are understood to be outside of the 'norm' and pathologised. Legislation is arguably made within the parameters of cisgenderism, even that which directly affects those who are transgender. In examining how gender identity is represented in human rights discourse, Waites (2009) argues that the inclusion of gender diverse identities in legislation, rather than contesting heteronormative understandings, further privilege a binary understanding of gender through the assumption of essentialist understandings of heteronormativity.

Understanding gender in terms of the relationship between power, discourse and the human body, is at odds with the essentialist understanding that identity is set and innate (Jagose, 1996). Foucault (1978) explored the conditions of socialisation and wrote how restrictions imposed upon sex are done so through particular discourses, such as those of the legal and medical domains. The sexuality and gender of a person are tightly woven and can be often conflated to the extent that it is part the policing of gender that shores the boundaries of heterosexuality (Butler, 1990). For example, a person can be the victim of a homophobic attack because their gender is read as being either too effeminate or too masculine. Whilst Foucault himself paid little attention to gender (King, 2010), for those from the field of queer theory it became a central concern. This section of the literature review will explore how theory relates, through points of connections and contentions, to lived experience of those who define as transgender.

Performativity is where arguably gender and queer theory converges. Theorists argue performativity illuminates how gender comes into being, a position not

without controversy for some who define as transgender. The theory of performativity is integral to queer theory but it is an idea which precedes this theoretical field. The sociologist, Erving Goffman, wrote in 1958 (p.45) 'when the individual presents himself [sic] before others, his performance will intend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of society'. West and Zimmerman (1987) developed this idea, explaining gender as something that is done in social interactions. Whilst such performance absorbs and illustrates social values, performativity contests that identity, specifically gender is an effect – rather than a stable identity - that is produced through repeated actions (Butler, 1990). Furthermore, it is posited that there is no subject which precedes the process of gendering, rather it is discourse itself which produces the effect it names (Butler, 1993). To illustrate the concept of performativity Butler (1990) presents the practice of drag, an undertaking, she argues, that clearly scuppers the distinction between 'imitation' and 'original' in relation to gender identity since by performing and being read by others we become. An often-overlooked component of Butler's analogy is that drag does not alone appropriate a gender, in fact she argues all gender is an impersonation, being an imitation for which there is no original (Butler, 1991). Furthermore, gender cannot be selectively and voluntarily assumed, in the words of Hall (2000, p.28), performativity is a 'process shorn of its association with volition'. Rather, gender is for all, heteronormative or otherwise, 'a practice of improvisation', being constantly repeated (Butler, 2004, p.1)

The understanding that gender is an artifice, something that is performed, can be contentious for those with marginalised gender identities. The practice of drag and the lived experience of transgender people have erroneously been conflated and Butler (1990) has had to clarify that the two are distinct. The inaccurate fusion of the act of drag and transgender identities is apparent in some academic papers, such as that authored by Rodgers and O'Connor (2017, p.143) who, in presenting a psychoanalytical case studies of trans men, appear to argue that like drag performance, gender can be deconstructed through 'increased understanding of transgender lives'. Butler (1990) is clear that the

assumption that a drag performer has authentic and illusory gender identities is not a transferable concept to transgender identities. More problematic still, is the position that there is no subject which precedes gender, a position which is significantly at odds with the essentialist belief that gender is innate to a person's being. The transgender activist and writer Julia Serano (2016) argues that queer theorists' opposition to the notion of stable and genuine identities undermines the lived experience of transgender people.

Queer theory can then be for transgender people, who have fought to have their gender identity recognised as authentic, be understood to be at odds with, if not undermining, their lived experience. More so, Serano (2010, 2016) argues that the testimony of transgender individuals demonstrate that femininity and masculinity are not only authentic facets of identity but can precede socialisation. This is a view shared by Chodorow (1995) who charges that whilst the theory of performativity considers cultural context, it does not consider the individual emotional and personal meanings, and fantasies, that are imbued with gender. Whilst some queer theorists may not agree with this position, Butler (2004) does acknowledge that the ability to have a livable life requires the acknowledgement of a stable identity. For the Trans activists, Kate Bornstein and Bear Bergman (2010, p. 21), queer theory has to work alongside queer experience to have any relevancy, otherwise 'queer theory is straight'.

For cis gendered people, whose embodied gender is rarely questioned, it is unsurprising that performativity as a concept is not seen to contest lived experience. Heteronormative identities, such as those which are white, middle class identities, are largely undisputed and as such performativity could be argued to present no difficulty or threat. It is, as Serano (2010) writes, uncomplicated for gender to be discussed in theoretical terms if you do not recognise the ways in which you are privileged by your gender identity. An example of gender privilege is argued to be evident in how cis gendered people

do not live their lives having to have to explain or defend their identity (Taylor, 2010).

Serano (2010, p. 86) argues that performativity is a theory which is requisite on there being an audience to witness such a manifestation of gender, and that the audience 'is let off the hook' by theorists. Namely, the perception of others, with its weight of prejudice, cisgenderism and expectation, is not even deliberated. How gender is 'read' by others, particularly those who have a heteronormative identity, is arguably part of the cultural matrix which makes gender manifest. It is a position which underlines the vast disparity between what is at stake for those who are transgender in living their lives. The critical gaze cast upon transgender people can be summed up by the phenomenon of 'passing' – the ability to be perceived as cis gender. Passing is distinct from acting and is the expression of gender in relation to complex situated gender categories (Anderson et al., 2020). Furthermore, Anderson et al. (2020) emphasise that the ability to pass is not just based on what some one looks like but through what they do to fit in. In understanding 'passing' as being a consequence of cisgenderism it can erroneously be seen to apply the notions of 'imitation' and 'original' to gender. That is, to return to Butler's (1990, p. 21) assertion that 'gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original', the process of judging if someone passes is in itself performative of cisgenderism.

Passing, that is the ability to conform to cis-normative notions of gender, is seemingly to be embedded in laws such as the US North Carolina 'Bathroom Bill'. The Bill which was approved in 2016 - and subsequently repealed in 2017 - required people to use the bathroom that matched the sex on their birth certificate. Such a law would have negligible impact on those who are cis gendered but for those who define as transgender or non-binary it was a law that fundamentally undermined their human rights. It targeted and stigmatised those transgender people who may not wish to have, or be able to afford, gender reassignment surgery, a process which would enable them to have their birth certificate legally changed to match their gender identity. The

Bill particularly, and arguably deliberately, discriminated against those who are transgender or non-binary and are not deemed to 'pass' or who may be non-binary and arguably segregated them from those transgender people who are deemed to 'pass'. In reflecting on this law, it is difficult not to draw similarities with the segregation that the black population of America faced in the previous century and the complex issues of assimilation. Writing about the themes of black identity, neurosis and recognition, Fanon (2008, p. 164) describes how the black man compares himself with the other whether he is 'less intelligent than I, blacker than I, less respectable than I'. Furthermore, Fanon (2008) describes how the black man of the Antilles who dreams of living in France, will master, in anticipation of his arrival in France, the French language in order to assimilate but will be mocked on his arrival for his accent and even attempting to escape his stereotype. It could be argued that the bathroom legislation was also an attempt to humiliate, to remind the transgender and non-binary communities that assimilation does not come on their terms. Such a law serves to heighten the stakes of assimilation in 'passing' for the transgender community. A consequence of the act, similar to the one Fanon describes, is the internalising of the idea of assimilation within the transgender community.

Smith (2010) in writing about her experience as a transgender woman relays an incident where a friend of hers asked that she disassociate herself from her to protect the friend from the assumption that she too is transgender. Smith (2010) concludes that if you do not fit in as transgender person, you are derided, and that the transgender community have learnt how to construct a hierarchy of acceptability. When an individual is unable to garner a positive reaction from others towards their being, shame can manifest (Sedgwick, 2009). Sedgwick (2009, p.51) writes how shame creates an 'uncontrollable relationality' that fosters a queer performativity. Yet whilst shame can be a site of resistance for queer identities (Halperin and Traub, 2009), arguably for transgender identities where passing equates with safety, such resistance can come at too great a cost.

However, those who are considered to 'pass' as cisgender can be deemed deceitful if their gender history is discovered (Lester, 2017). For example, a killer of a transgender person can in some states of America and Australia argue that they were provoked by the gender identity or sexuality of the victim in what is known as the 'panic defence' (Rose, 2016). In an opinion piece for The Times, the journalist Janice Turner (2017) describes the bathroom legislation as 'ugly, hateful' and writes that she is likely to have shared a changing room with a transgender woman, a fact with which she is comfortable. However, in the next sentence her tone changes, distinguishing a 'genuine' transgender woman from 'a man who just 'feels female' who can 'barge' in to a changing room. Turner appears to distinguish authentic transgender identity from fraudulent purely on the basis of ability to pass – that is to go unnoticed - and implies that it is not enough to 'feel' female to be admitted into a space, to do so is to violate that space. It is a view that suggests passing is contingent on conforming (Hardie, 2010). As Butler (1993, p.126) writes, there is always a cost in every identification, namely, a loss of other identifications due to a 'forcible approximation of a norm one never chooses'.

'Passing' presumes a binary definition of gender, namely a person who is deemed to pass successfully inhabits one gender with scant or no trace of the other. For those who define as non-binary, namely neither identifying as male nor female, the notion of passing should become obsolete however in reality becomes an ideology that undermines the reality of non-binary being. Lester (2017, p. 36) who defines as genderqueer and living outside the binary writes, 'being genderqueer can be a daily fight against being made invisible [...] what can be described can be communicated and made real'. Scott-Dixon (2006) writes about how transgender people are only intelligible to others when understood in a medical context as a patient to be cured, either to surrender their wish to transition or to undertake the medical transition from one gender to the other.

Medical discourse does not just contextualise transgender identities but also determines the forms in which they are rendered intelligible (Butler, 2004). Medical discourse such as the term 'gender dysphoria', used in the DSM-5 to define transgender identities arguably locates the issue within the individual rather than belonging to societies rigid adherence to a gender binary. However, compliance with such an understanding of identity is needed for transgender people to receive legal and medical recognition. Whilst there has been within the medical field a growing awareness of the range of gender identities and expressions (Murjan and Bouman, 2017) traditionally transgender identities have only been understood in binary terms. Historically, those wishing to medically transition have had to adhere to a script which includes such tropes of being 'trapped' in the wrong body (Serano, 2016). The reaction of those who do transition but do not express fulfilment post-surgery is often understood as regret by the medical profession and framed in such terms by the media. The regret is perceived to be rooted in the transgender identity rather than, as Lester (2017) points out, an unhappiness at the uncompromising and prescriptive medical approach that was necessary in order to have their transgender identity acknowledged.

Butler (1993) writes at length on the fate of the subject who is not deemed to comply with the gender binary, who is constituted through exclusion and treated as both abject whilst also understood to be a threat. Gender identity is understood to be naturalised through a historically revisable heteronormative matrix which includes medical and legal discourses (Butler, 1990). The law is arguably a mechanism for establishing and maintaining identities as such outliers or more, optimistically, a means of revising such positions. Yet, social and legal systems maintain that gender is binary (Clucas and Whittle, 2017). In 2016 the UK government undertook a review of transgender equality (House of Commons, 2016). This identified that the Gender Recognition Act of 2004 made no provision for non-binary people and simultaneously asserted that non-binary identities 'were beyond the scope of our inquiry' (House of Commons, 2016, p. 11). The inquiry which seemingly was an opportunity to

rattle the heteronormative matrix Butler (1990) wrote of, appeared to do no more than shore up and affirm binary understandings of gender and question further the legitimacy of non-binary identities.

In her memoir, *The Argonauts,* Maggie Nelson (2016) writes about her partner, Harry, who defines as trans. She reflects how for many people, including her partner, the notion of transitioning from one gender to another is not satisfactory and that their identity exists in neither one gender nor the other. Nelson (2016, p. 65) acknowledges that this is problematic for 'a culture frantic with resolution' and utilises Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'becoming' to illuminate this idea of identity, a theory which arguably elucidates the non-binary position. Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 276) write that the state of becoming is a process, neither an identification nor an attempt to progress between a series; they emphasise this point with the view that it is 'deplorable' to internalise the binary as it is to 'exacerbate' it. The figure of one who is in such a state of becoming is akin to Braidotti's (2011) post-human nomadic figure who is in a perpetual state of transformation. This figure, like that of the cyborg envisioned by Haraway (1991), positions gender as something that the individual can be liberated from (Wakeford, 1998). There is a danger, though, that by conflating theory with lived experience, such a figure and state of becoming may become romanticised with the complexities and dangers of daring to articulate and live such an identity going unacknowledged.

This is something that Grosz (1994) recognises when she clarifies that such becomings are not just a matter of choice but come at a significant risk to the subject's ability to integrate and function. This is an argument which is particularly relevant to trans people who define as non-binary. The trans activists Fox Fisher and Owl Stefanio, who both define as non-binary, appeared on the TV programme 'Good Morning Britain' (2017), to discuss non-binary identity. The host of the programme, Piers Morgan, reacted to the notion of non-binary identity with incredulity describing it as a 'hypothetical' identity and one that is a 'contagion'. This reaction contrasts with the

response to the celebrity Caitlyn Jenner, whose own narrative of her transition mirrored that of the medical discourse namely shifting from one gender to the other. Jenner's very public reveal of her post-transition self on the cover of Vanity Fair was heralded by the media and understood as being her farewell to her 'male persona' (TMZ, 2015). In other words, to transgress the notion of binary gender norms is to risk abjection and ridicule.

2.3. Occupational science, theory and lived experience

Occupational science came into being as a discipline in the 1980s and is concerned with what people do and the uniqueness and complexity in which people engage in activities (Hocking and Wright St Clair, 2011). Like the practice of occupational therapy, from which it originated, occupational science is concerned with how such an engagement in activities and environment relate to health and wellbeing. An interest of occupational science is the theory of occupational identity. This is the understanding that occupation is the primary way in which an individual both develops and expresses their identity and as such an inability to engage in such occupations impacts identity (Christiansen, 1999). Significantly occupational engagement is not seen as an abstract concept and acknowledges the influence upon it of external factors, such as culture, society and politics (Hocking and Wright St Clair, 2011). It is these forces which are understood to cause occupational injustices whereby individuals – often from marginalised communities – are unable to engage in meaningful and needed activities (Wilcock, 2006; Wolf et al. 2010). It could be argued then that it is a discipline that has common ground with queer theory, indeed, Hammell and Iwama (2012) discuss how the two disciplines are both concerned with the impact of social constructions on the lives of individual people.

In 2013, Beagan et al. wrote that research into the lives of those who define as transgender from the fields of occupational science was non-existent. Since then, reflecting the rise in awareness of transgender lives in culture and

society, research has been intermittently published within the occupational science discipline. Dowers et al. (2019) undertook a scoping review into the occupational experiences of transgender people which highlighted the ways in which social attitudes towards these communities, impact, shape and in some cases prevent their engagement in, and access to, important occupations. Whilst there is an increase in attention paid to transgender identities there is little regard for non-binary identities. Beagan et al. (2013) come close to appreciating a non-binary representation of gender in describing an 'other' kind of gender. However, such exploration of trans identities largely understands gender in binary terms and transition as an exclusive occurrence. For example, Avrech Bar et al. (2016) studied how transgender women in Israel engaged in activities which held meaning for them. The authors repeatedly refer to the 'gender transformation' of their participants (Avrech Bar et al., 2016). This not only suggests a binary comprehension of gender but also that transitioning is a one-off occurrence rather than, as it for many, an ongoing process and one which is fraught with negotiation.

Similarly, a scoping review into transgender identities in the workplace (Phoenix and Ghul 2016) which reviewed nine articles referred to participants' gender identity in binary terms. Schneider et al. (2019) undertook research into the occupational transitions of transgender people. Whilst acknowledging the breadth of identities that exist beyond the gender binary, participants it had binary definitions of gender (Schneider et al., 2019). Its conclusion that occupational transitions are inter-related with gender transitions, raises the question of in what way occupational transitions may occur for those who do not undertake a binary transition. More recently McCarthy et al. (2020) highlighted the transactional relationship between environment and occupation in the lives of four non-binary people. Findings indicated that non-binary people navigate binary environments either through avoidance of such spaces or through dressing or behaving in ways that aligned with, or subverted, binary norms (McCarthy et al., 2020).

Engagement with activities and occupations is central to the theory of performativity, namely, that gender is a non-verbal performance produced through the '*stylized repetition of acts'* (Butler, 1990, p.191). The relevance of the implied conceptualisation of gender as a verb, something that is done (Wood, 2018) has not escaped the attention of occupational science researchers (Liedberg and Hensing, 2011; Beagan et al., 2012; Dowers et al., 2019; Schneider 2019). Such research explores how those who identify as transgender engage with meaningful activities illustrates the relational aspect of performativity, that is, how the spectator plays a part in the validating of gender identity through recognition. This evokes Serano's (2016) position that the role of the audience cannot be ignored when considering the performance of gender. For example, Reed et al. (2010), in a phenomenological study into the lived experience of occupation, included a transgender woman as one of their twelve interviewees. The woman describes how going for a walk in her local community enabled her to interact with others and so have her identity acknowledged and accepted in a form of social recognition.

Given that occupational science is concerned with the relationship between social identity and occupation it is relevant to apply a phenomenological lens to the relationship between individuals, objects and gender. Phenomenology is concerned with experience, but specifically in 'terms of the things which matter to us, and constitute our lived world' (Smith et al., 2009, p. 11). Ahmed (2006) adopts a phenomenological approach to illustrate how bodies are orientated to objects, particularly those which are deemed irrelevant or go unnoticed and barely consciously registered. Intentionality is central to phenomenology; however, this does not refer to the intention to do an action but instead the understanding that we have a conscious relationship with an object about which we develop meaning (Edwards et al., 2014). Ahmed (2006) explores how queerness, in terms of gender and sexuality can disrupt such a social relation; this she names queer phenomenology. In describing the relationship between objects and person, Ahmed (2006) writes that when orientation between object and body works well, we are occupied. Such

semantics segue into occupational science's understanding of occupation and its links with health and wellbeing and occupational injustices which occurs when a person is alienated from or deprived of activities meaningful to them.

Ahmed (2006, p.52) develops this argument and, in a position resonant of performativity, writes how bodies take shape through contact with objects writing how 'gender is an effect of how bodies take up objects'. Thus, as articulated by Ahmed (2006), phenomenology appears to not only bridge the theoretical positions of queer theory and occupational science but brings to the fore the issue of gender. In her critique of the culture of happiness, Ahmed (2010) writes how in the pursuit of happiness people are orientated to certain objects and that these objects 'take up residence within our bodily horizon' (Ahmed, 2010, p.32). In other words, there becomes an association, if not a fusion, between self and object and there is an intentionality in that relationship that lies neither solely within the individual or the object. Such a conceptualisation of agency, the self and objects resonates strongly with the theoretical field of new materialism which challenges assumptions about the relationship between human and non-human material and is concerned with the materiality and agency of matter (Jagger, 2015).

The relational understanding of objects, bodies and gender has been explored within the field of occupational science. In 1993, the occupational therapist, Nicola Jessop wrote a case study of a transgender woman who was in the process of living in her chosen gender for the purpose of accessing medical intervention. Despite using dated terminology and demonstrating a less than nuanced understanding of gender, Jessop (1993) writes how occupational therapists are well placed to assess an individual's ability to live in their chosen gender, clearly articulating the relationship between gender and engagement in activities such as grooming. Whilst there is a general paucity in research, subsequent studies from the field of occupational science have also identified the link between objects, activities and gender expression for those who identify as trans (Beagan et al., 2012; Beagan et al., 2013; Beagan and

Hattie, 2015; Avrech Bar et al., 2016; Schneider, 2019). In particular, occupational science is concerned with transitions and how engagement in occupations can facilitate desired change (Beagan and Hattie, 2015).

Serano (2016), who defines as transgender, writes about her relationship with objects as she publicly transitioned gender. Specifically, she writes of the 'transformative property' of clothing to facilitate her appearance to others as female (Serano, 2016, p. 300). In discussing the relationship between transgender identities and objects it is important to distinguish between gender identity and gender expression. Gender identity is defined as the way a person labels their gender whilst gender expression is the manner in which a person expresses their gender (Roby and Randal, 2014). In confusing or combining the two terms there is the concern that transgender people will be reduced to the sum of their external interaction with objects. A consequence of this may be the stereotyping or judgement of what objects are deemed acceptable for a person to engage with based on their gender. Occupational identity surmises who one has been and who one can become in relation to engagement with objects and activities (Phelan and Kinsella, 2009) and there is arguably a lack of distinction within research in relation to how objects can serve both gender identity and gender expression.

The distinction between gender expression and gender identity appears, at times, to be conflated and it is the misappropriation of objects in relation to gender that exemplifies this. For example, Teen Vogue magazine drew considerable criticism from the trans and non-binary communities for an article which described the celebrity couple Zayn Malik and Gigi Hadid as gender fluid purely on the basis that they borrowed items of clothing (such as t-shirts) from each other (Heighton, 2017). This is an example where gender identity is crassly, and wrongly, reduced to loosely-gendered objects, yet, the misappropriation of objects to conflate gender expression and gender identity is arguably insidious in popular culture. It reflects Capuzza's (2016) assertion

that an increase in the portrayal of transgender identities does not signify an accurate portrayal of such lives.

The celebrated film, *The Danish Girl* (2015), depicts the life of the transgender artist Lili Elbe (as played by the actor Eddie Redmayne). In the film Lili's gender is signified solely through her interaction with objects, for example, the audience's first insight that Einar (Lili's male assigned name) has a non-normative gender identity is through his interaction with a pair of stockings which he is asked to wear by his artist wife when her model does not arrive for a sitting. As Einar's realisation regarding his gender identity develops so too, somewhat rapidly, does his engagement with objects associated with the female gender, concluding with Einar covertly wearing his wife's negligee. Little insight is provided regarding Einar's sense of innate gender identity and the film has been criticised for suggesting that Einar's modelling of the stockings prompted a gender identity crisis for him, culminating in his eventual transition (von Tunzellman, 2016).

Describing the depiction of Lilli as 'one of the most uncomfortable things I have been witness to', Lester (2017, p. 148) criticises the film's reliance on Redmayne's engagement with objects to portray a transgender identity. Furthermore, Ahmed (2006) writes how non-normative gender has the power to disorientate the observer. Yet, arguably in the film, the use of objects in relation to gender expression serves the purpose of orientating the audience to Einar's transition to Lili. In fact, the film appears to do its upmost not to put the audience in a state of disorientation and as such the 'queerness' of Lili's identity is somewhat diluted. This is apparent in how Einar's and subsequently Lili's sexual orientation is presented. Einar is unequivocally presented as being sexually attracted to his wife, however, when transitioning to Lili her sexuality is immediately re-orientated to men so sustaining a heterosexual identity for the protagonist. Further, Lili does not embark on any sexual relations, becoming attracted to unobtainable male figures, a homosexual painter and later her surgeon. Such presentation of transgender identities by cis gendered

people bares significance, it arguably reflects what wider society deems as an acceptable presentation of trans identities.

The orientation to objects and activities and gender identity is consistent in the research from the field of occupational science into transgender identities. In particular, the research suggests the overwhelming alienation people who are transgender experience from meaningful activities and objects. In a study into occupations of transgender women, Beagan et al. (2012) interviewed five transgender women about their occupations and identified the theme of occupational loss and adaptations as being evident in all interviewee accounts. Examples included a participant who was unable to swim in public pools, someone who was unable to attend church as they had been rejected by the community there and the loss of roles such as being a father and sexual and emotional relationships with partners. These findings resonated with those of Schneider et al. (2019) who like Beagan et al. (2012) also found that participants would engage in overtly gender stereotyped activities in an attempt to conceal their authentic gender identity. The authors of the research study describe this as occupational deprivation, occurring as a result of the enforcement of informal social mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion (Beagan et al., 2012), much like the matrix of discourses which shape the performance of gender (Butler, 1990). It is also arguably resonant of Ahmed's (2010) concept of the promise of happiness, namely by demonstrating an orientation to appropriate objects and activities the communal sense of happiness is untroubled.

Avrech Bar et al. (2016) quantitatively examined, through interview and self-report measures of occupational performance, the relationship between transgender identities and occupations by conceptualising this relationship as occupational performance. The 22 transgender women in the study, due to their limited occupational participation, were all found to have impeded occupational performance, particularly in relation to their lives pre-transition (Avrech Bar et al., 2016). The authors argue that their findings suggest that

because the transgender women were unable to participate in traditional girls' activities as children, there is no self-actualising as a woman and hence a hindering of their identity development (Avrech Bar et al., 2016). It seems that such a conclusion may imply that transgender women have been unable to develop fully into women because of the prohibition in engaging in meaningful activities as children. Not only does this not take into account that for some transgender people, the realisation of their identity occurs in later life but that some do undertake meaningful activities albeit in secret as indicated by Schneider et al. (2019). Schneider et al. (2019) highlighted how transgender individuals liked to engage in activities which accentuated their gender identity. Yet, research also indicates how transgender participants, following their transition, feel obliged to conform to societal expectations of their gender by participating in gender stereotyped activities (Avrech Bar et al., 2016; McCarthy et al., 2020). This is not an atypical experience for those who define as transgender, particularly those who define as non-binary. Following the disclosure of their non-binary identity, Rae Spoon writes about the pressure from their community, both queer and otherwise, to act like a man by engaging in activities such as changing oil in their car (Spoon and Coyote, 2014).

The relationship between gender identity and its expression through clothing and activities is one identified by the NHS (2016) service guidelines and protocol for gender dysphoria. Specifically, in order to be able to have hormones or surgery transgender people are expected to live as their 'chosen gender' for up to two years (NHS, 2016). There is a concern with this that health care professionals may police gender expression and act as gatekeepers to medical interventions based on societal expectations of appropriate gender expression (Pearce, 2018).

An article written for an occupational therapy journal by Pope et al. (2008) seemed to position occupational therapists as arbiters of gender identity in relation to transgender people. Pope et al. (2008) highlighted ethical issues of

informed choice and professional responsibility by presenting hypothetical case studies of clients whose choice of clothing they felt conflicted with social expectations. In this opinion piece, the authors presented a scenario of a transgender client who is deemed by the occupational therapist to be wearing inappropriate female clothing. The article posed the question of whether the therapist should remain client-centred by not raising the issue with the client or help the client understand that the choice in clothing was drawing attention (Pope et al., 2008). Whilst the article is not critical of the hypothetical client, its tone arguably highlights the concerns that have been raised by transgender individuals when engaging with health care professionals. Despite the case-study transitioning from male to female, Pope et al. (2008, p. 167) elect to call the individual by the male pronoun and the authors pejoratively state that the client did not 'understand the social, political and cultural contexts of being a woman'. This opinion piece demonstrates an ambivalent recognition of the client's gender and is reminiscent of how a figure of authority can simultaneously recognise and reprimand a subject's identity (Butler, 1993).

Pope et al.'s (2008) position raises a number of discussion points regarding the expression of gender and how others relate to non-normative gender representations. Firstly, the issue of dress is more than a sartorial point if it is considered that clothing can reflect the internalised roles that serve as a structure for 'looking out on the world and for engaging in occupation' (Forsyth and Kielhofner, 2011, p. 55). Thus, arguably, clothing is not just an expression of one's identity but, more so, a conduit for the occupational self. It could be construed that if transgender people are denied, or unsupported in, the choice of their clothing, they are in effect living a life which is the antithesis of what they perceive to be their authentic self. This appears to be all the more significant when it is considered that transgender people feel that health care professionals are unduly critical of, and attempt to 'police', their dress (Beagan et al., 2012; Pearce, 2018). Secondly, the article also unsettles the assertion that engagement in occupation can create a sense of belonging

(Taylor and Kay, 2013), bringing to the foreground the role the observer may play in enabling such belonging.

Pope et al. (2008) argued that their case study demonstrated, through her choice of clothing, a misjudgement of what it is to be female. This suggests that for someone who is transgender, their engagement with objects as a means of expressing identity may be undermined, viewed by others as a pastiche, or more critically still, a parody of cis gender. Ahmed (2006) writes that, in apprehending a familiar object as strange, the observer is forced to focus attention from the object to the process of perception itself and that queer identity can incite such a disorientation of perception. Arguably expression of gender, by those not determined to be cis gendered, can cause disconcertion in the observer and gender is understood for what it is, one severed from the notion of biology. Ahmed (2006) writes that when in a state of such disorientation, the observer attempts to fix their perspective by admonishing the observed; this is arguably apparent in Pope et al.'s (2008) article.

2.4 Place, objects and gender

Whether viewed through the lens of phenomenology or performativity, gender is understood as an effect of how the body 'performs' and the way it is orientated to objects (Butler, 1990; Ahmed, 2006). Such performativity and orientation, does not of course, occur in a vacuum. For, Grosz (1995) any exploration of corporeality must correlate with an exploration of space due to their reciprocity. This is not just a theoretical position, the trans activist Kate Bornstein (1994, p. 27) observes that the attribution of gender to someone can 'boil down to how we occupy space, both alone and with others'.

For occupational scientists, the environment and individuals are connected through engagement in activities (Law et al., 1999; Hammell and Iwama, 2012). This relationship of space, objects and bodies resonates with phenomenology, as Ahmed (2006) writes, orientation to objects is a spatial question and how

we interact with objects is dependent on how we occupy space. Ahmed (2006) explains that gender becomes naturalised as a property of bodies, objects and spaces, a relationship which sets bodies in a specific direction and that gives the appearance that it is the body that determines this trajectory. This is a position shared by the psychogeographer Colin Ellard (2015, p. 218), who writes that space 'envelopes us in feelings' and 'direct[s] our movements'. Ahmed (2010) elucidates the correlation of space, objects and orientation in her exploration of happiness and how we are orientated towards certain objects by the promise of happiness. She argues that spaces can be perceived to be happy by association with objects, namely, that objects that please or delight imbue the space in which they exist with happiness (Ahmed, 2010). Yet there is not parity regarding which bodies are allowed to inhabit collective spaces. Rodgers and O'Connor's (2017) research indicated how transgender men assigned female at birth were chastised when children for not engaging with dolls and dresses in the home and school environments. For those who are transgender or non-binary, the relationship between bodies, space and objects is more complex as arguably they are excluded even when they are orientated to something commonly perceived as both good and gender-neutral. This is evidenced in Beagen et al.'s (2012) research into the occupations of transgender women where one participant described being excluded from the environment of her church because of her gender identity.

Myslik (1996) describes how feminist geographers have demonstrated that gender relations are reflected in the organisation of space, specifically that most public spaces are male-dominated and heteronormative. Valentine (1996) argues that space is instilled with such normativity through the performativity of heteronormativity, for example the repeated displays of affection between heterosexual couples and heterosexuality conveyed in advertising, overheard conversations and music played in restaurants. Valentine (1996) observes that such normativity only becomes apparent when it is transgressed and cites the example of a female couple who were ejected from a supermarket for kissing. This is by no means a dated example; in 2016 a

gay male couple were expelled from a supermarket in London 'for touching inappropriately' (Gander, 2016).

Queer identities are relegated to the marginal and private spaces (Valentine, 1996), and it is this dichotomy between private and public spaces that is used to regulate, control and exclude some gender identities (Duncan, 1996). Valentine (1996) writes how Public Order laws, although not directly singling out queer identities, are used to criminalise displays of same sex affection and desire. The parallel to the North Carolina Bathroom Bill is striking; the Bill implicitly yet unequivocally targets transgender and non-binary identities through the demarcation of public space and notably it is the space rather than the gender identities which form the title of the Bill. Although there has yet to be any documented incidents of such cases, supporters of the North Carolina Bathroom Bill argue that it will serve to protect children from sexual predators in public restrooms. It is often the wellbeing of children that is cited when queer agency inhabits traditionally heteronormative institutions (Edelman, 2004). For example, the opponents of gay marriage argue that it undermines, if not threatens the notion of family values. Edelman (2004, p. 4) argues that in such situations the trope of the child is used as it is the 'emblem of futurity's unquestioned value' which queerness is pitted against.

Significantly, when the safety of children is cited it is arguably the gender-conforming child which is imagined. Rodgers and O'Conner (2017) describe how one participant in their research study recounted how when they were at school they were told to use a toilet in a nearby café rather than the bathrooms in the school environment. In spatial terms, North Carolina's law could be seen to be an attempt to negate transgender identity through its disruption of an orientation between body and space. It is not just a law that disenfranchises transgender people of a basic human right, but one designed to shame and puts them at risk of violence and arguably legitimises such violence. Lester (2017) writes how, as someone who identifies as genderqueer, the inability to safely access public toilets cuts off access to all public space.

Whilst no such law exists in the UK, segregation arguably occurs through social approbation. Through fear of violence or shaming, trans people avoid public toilets and describes the phenomenon of 'trans bladder syndrome' the need to last significant lengths of time without toileting (Lester, 2017). Such a practice is not without consequence; Lester (2017) describes becoming ill after drinking less than half a litre of water a day and how avoiding toilets, when needing to go, could often result in urinary tract infections.

Aoki (2010) writes that for a non-passing transgender person there is no safe space. In 2020 there were a reported 350 transgender people who were murdered worldwide, the majority being transgender women of colour (Wakefield, 2020). The home does not necessarily provide refuge from such hostile environments; the percentage of LGBT youth experiencing homelessness is three times greater than the percentage of the general LGBT youth population in the United States (Shelton, 2015). Furthermore, the stigma and discrimination faced by transgender youth is prevalent in supposedly safe spaces such as care homes and homeless shelters (Shelton, 2015; McCann and Sharek, 2016) and these spaces are fraught with real and perceived dangers (Shelton, 2015). Lack of access to these spaces not only deprives transgender youth of security but negatively impacts on their ability to undertake personal grooming and impacts on emotional well-being (Shelton, 2015).

This relationship between space and wellbeing was also identified in the occupational science research undertaken by Avrech Bar et al. (2016) who posited that occupational settings were a predictor of mental health for those who are transgender. Duncan (1996) writes how those who are marginalised will often congregate in spaces independent from the public sphere. Spaces, such as clubs and bars, which are designated for LGBTQ+ people, can provide spaces of safety and refuge (Hartless, 2019). However, such places are argued to have become commercialised and increasingly heteronormative and as such de-politicised (Duncan, 1996; Hartless, 2019). Hartless (2019; p. 1038) suggests

that such venues are no longer sites of resistance and instead re-conceptualises such spaces as ones being those which have the 'potential to be queered by its users'. Such an understanding of space symbolising queer sensibilities resonates with Halberstam's (2005) position that queer space locates subjectivities between embodiment, place and practice.

With transgender women of colour being disproportionately at risk of violence (Human Rights Campaign, 2020) it is clear that the intersecting and marginalised identities of race and gender effect where and how gender can safely be expressed. This is evident not just in the cultural depictions of transgender identities but also in their reception by the public. Arguably, the positive reception that *The Danish Girl* (2015) received was due to the sympathetic representation of the protagonist and that it was a film set in a context of cultural privilege, namely white, middle-upper class of pre-war Europe. Further, the character of Lilli is played by the celebrated, married and Eton-educated actor Eddie Redmayne, whose androgynous appearance does not challenge the audience. Indeed, Redmayne was nominated for an Academy Award for his portrayal. This is in contrast to *Paris is Burning* a documentary which depicts the African-American and Latino transgender ball culture of 1980s New York. It was a film which was critically acclaimed but perceived to have been overlooked for an Academy Award due to the marginalised community it depicted (Hildebrand, 2018). It could be argued that the differing receptions is indicative not only of increased acceptance and understanding of transgender identity but also of the differing race and socio-economical demographics depicted.

This disparity in the social status of the protagonists is evident in the manner in which they interact with their environment. In *The Danish Girl* (2015) Lili is able to express her gender identity publicly and in return have it validated; she is seen walking in markets, at parties and portraits of her hang in public spaces. The fact that she is white and deemed to 'pass' does not trouble her community or the audience in my view. The transgender participants of *Paris*

in Burning (1991) also wish to be 'undetectable' but the constant negotiation they have to undertake regarding their gender expression in order to remain safe and evade violence is palpable. A young Puerto Rican woman, Venus Xtravagaza, who is saving up for gender reassignment surgery, is murdered during the production of the film and it is speculated that this was a result of discovery at her transgender identity by her murderer.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has considered literature from diverse positions to reflect on how interaction with objects and space relates to gender identity for those who define as trans, non-binary or genderqueer. Theoretical discourse, namely that of queer theory, posits that this interaction, through performance, generates the effect of a gender identity (Butler, 1990). This is a position divergent from the narratives of many who define as trans who largely describe the innateness of their gender identity and the agency required to express such identity (Serano, 2016). Phenomenology and new materialism provide a means of bridging these perspectives in its understanding that gender is made manifest by one's interaction with objects and space (Ahmed, 2006). Phenomenology and new materialism emphasise intentionality rather than agency regarding one's interaction with the material world and this cannot be seen as distinct from the agency of matter and objects. This is a position which resonates with the language of occupation science, namely that transformations and identities can be forged through our interaction with space and objects which are meaningful to that individual (Phelan and Kinsella, 2009). There also appears to be a shared understanding between these theoretical frameworks that there are social structures and beliefs in place which admonish, prohibit and punish the expression of trans and non-binary identity through the withholding of access to places and objects which have a communal meaning. It is these theoretical positions, namely those of new materialism, queer theory and phenomenology, that will inform the data collection and analysis.

It is apparent from reviewing media representations of transgender and non-binary people that there is a conflation of the terms gender identity and gender expression. Not only does this confusion of terms conflate one's sense of self with ones actions, reducing identity to the sum of ones actions, but it also belies the fact that some transgender people are compelled to engage in activities to keep safe, that is to keep their gender identity concealed. This is significant when occupational identity, a fundamental idea of occupational science, is understood to be an amassing of experiences and routines (Kielhofner, 2008). Whilst there appears to be an increase in the amount of articles and memoirs written by those who define as trans and genderqueer it is worth noting that there is not parity of opportunity in whose voice gets heard. There is a lack of voices of those who are transgender and of colour and the research into the lives of those who are trans or non-binary appeared to pay little consideration into other demographics, such as age, race and economic status. It was clear from the literature that there is a significant distinction in how those who define non-binary, whose identity appears to be dependent upon the recognition of neither defining as wholly male nor female, may relate to objects and space and those who define within the gender binary and who may wish to 'pass', that is their trans identity being imperceptible. However, with the exception of McCarthy et al. (2020), this does not appear to be a distinction which occupational science research considers. This lack of research into a section of the transgender communities is a significant gap in knowledge and it is the aim of this research to address this by including participants who identify as non-binary. Furthermore, the literature, written by those who define as trans or non-binary, reviewed in this chapter has suggested that there is, potentially, different challenges and negotiations facing those who have a binary trans identity and those who define as non-binary with regards to their relationship with space and objects. In order to produce research which is contemporary and relevant to the transgender and non-binary communities it is important that such a distinction is explored.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the complex nature of narratives, how narratives are situated and co-constructed and discuss why this is such a pertinent concern when undertaking research with members of the transgender communities. Marginalised communities often have to navigate hostile discourses in order to articulate and defend their identities (Plummer, 1994) and, as such, methodologies which recognise both social discourse and personal narrative has been considered.

Queer theory is central to this research and, therefore as such, a methodology which acknowledges the fluid and fragmented nature of identity categories is necessary. This will be explored alongside how the new materialist theoretical field of inquiry informed methods of data collection and analysis. In recognising that research is influenced by, and data arises from, the intersubjective relationship between researcher and participant, the Relational-Centred research approach (Finlay and Evans, 2009) will be drawn upon. Namely, it is important to ensure that any approach recognises the import that reflexivity and collaboration with the participant in the production and analysis of knowledge. This chapter will first consider the epistemological position of the research, then explore narrative in relation to queer methodology and finally, outline the methodological procedure for the research.

3.2 Epistemological position

The research is located within the epistemological positions of feminist theory, social constructionism and queer theory. All three positions are linked by the common theoretical understanding that identity categories are socially

and culturally embedded and their respective theoretical positions present a trajectory in the understanding of the term 'identity'. Queer theory 'pushed' the notion posited by feminism and social constructionism that normative prescriptions of masculinity and femininity were socially constructed (Gamson and Moon, 2004, p.49) and contested the very notion of identity (Butler, 1990). This research adopts such a theoretical position but acknowledges, and aims to be responsive to, the fraught relationship that these theoretical positions may have with the lived experience of those who identify as transgender. To address this concern new materialist theory was called upon. This is a field of inquiry which acknowledges the political and social influence on the construction of identity but argues that this social constructionist position does not adequately address the embodied, material impact on human experience (Jagger, 2015).

Marinucci (2010) argues that that the re-evaluation of identity categories by feminist and queer theories can, rather than marking a liberation for those with non-normative gender identity, serve to undermine their embodied experience. Butler in a conversation with the TransAdvocate argues that social constructionism has been co-opted by some to argue that transgender identity is constructed by medical discourse (Williams, 2016) - a position at odds with the understanding that social constructionism acknowledges self-determinism and recognises that identity categories are utilised by people to make sense of their lives (Gergen and Davis, 1997). Queer is an identity category that it is perpetually unstable (Jagose, 1996) and it is in part this that causes this theoretical position to be viewed with suspicion by those who identify as transgender. Not only is it felt to be removed from lived experience it is argued to undermine the concept of self-determinism (Serano, 2010). Yet, proponents of Butler's theoretical position argue that her focus is on the lived experience of transgender people and the welfare of the marginalised (McCann, 2016). Butler herself has attempted to clarify these positions, arguing that to use social constructionism to police transgender lives is an oppressive use of the theory (Williams, 2014). Furthermore, she contests that

transgender people have the legal right to determine the linguistic terms of their lives (Williams, 2014). Marinucci (2010) supports this view, arguing that understanding gender categories as being, in part, socially constructed does not alter the impact of such categories. It is with such an understanding that this research is undertaken.

3.3 Queer Methodology

The understanding that queer identity, as presented by queer theory, exists outside the notion of recognition and self-identity (Jagose, 1998) makes such an epistemological position problematic for research into transgender identity. Not only is there misgiving of queer theory by some who define as transgender, there is unease with the scrutiny (Riggs, 2014) and misrepresentation of research undertaken by those outside of the transgender community (Holtby et al., 2015). Yet, the disruptive quality of queer is argued to lend itself to research methodologies in a manner queer theory cannot by aligning itself to the lived experience of those who define as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) (Brim and Ghaziani, 2016). Applied to methodological approaches, a queer approach questions what, in relation to identity, is normal (Rudy, 2000), specifically who and how someone's identity is acknowledged, and what is the cost of recognition to that subject.

There is no one research method that can be defined as 'queer', rather it is the fusing of methodologies with the aim of re-orientating the understanding of, and relationship, to subjectivities (Brim and Ghaziani, 2016; McCann, 2016). Plummer (2011) contests that queer methodology is arguably little more than the application of literary theory to the social sciences. Yet whilst it may not advance - in his opinion - qualitative inquiry, Plummer (2003) argues that, importantly, its concern with the fluid and reflexive relationship between researcher and participant, refashions qualitative methodological approaches. Furthermore, queer methods are understood to illuminate and provide a framework for theory, practice and lived experience (Brim and Ghaziani, 2016).

It is, in short, an approach that stands by the ideological position of queer theory but also understands that identity 'continues to exist, to shape our experience, to affect our life chances' (Crosby et al., 2012, p. 144).

This is arguably a pertinent position to take when researching LGBT identities specifically in relation to the potential of research to either negate or presume the identity of participants. Riach et al. (2016), reflecting on their research, note how one participant raised her discomfort with the researchers fixing her to a lesbian identity category through their research process. Awareness of assumptions or categorising is perhaps an even greater consideration when undertaking research with those who define as transgender. The notion of a gender binary is a contentious one; for some who undertake gender confirmation surgery, gender is understood in rigid binary terms (Green, 2004) and so would unequivocally define post-transition as male or female (Human Rights Campaign, 2017). Indeed, for many wishing to undertake the medical route, the Gender Recognition Act (2004) requires that they have a non-ambiguous understanding of binary gender identity (Stocks, 2015). However, the reality for many who define as transgender is more complex; Bornstein (1994) in describing her own gender identity writes that whilst, prior to transitioning, she was clear that she was not male, neither did she have a conviction that she was female.

It is argued that researchers may not recognise that when embarking on transitioning gender, transgender people may not pre-determine what form their physical manifestation will take, nor may they necessarily strive to conform to the gender binary (Green, 2004). Furthermore, in their research into the construction of identities, Taylor and Kay (2013) write how the act of talking about one's occupational engagement can create a sense of self. Hence, an interaction between participant and researcher could serve as an act of interpellation of gender identity and, as such, ethically demands a reflexive approach from the researcher. In adopting a queer methodological approach, such potential mechanisms of power are continuously questioned and

reflected upon through the examination of the relationality of researcher and participant (Brim and Ghaziani, 2016). It is a position resonant of the feminist epistemological position which advocates research starting from the position of the researcher examining their own experiences (Ellis and Bochner, 2000) and scrutinising the differing power relations between researcher and participant (McDonald, 2013).

3.4 New Materialism

The theoretical field of new materialism emerged in the 1990s and responded to the claim of social constructionism that identity is constructed solely with the social and cultural domains. New materialists do not ignore social influence but reframe it from social constructionism to social production (Fox and Alldred, 2015) and counter - as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argue - that there are materials outside of language that have bearing upon us. The theory of performativity, which posits that gender identity is constituted through reiterative speech acts (Butler, 1990), has been criticised within this field for presenting the body as a blank slate upon which culture inscribes itself (Bauer, 2018). Indeed, Butler has been singled out for not only ignoring agency (van Midde, 2014; Jagger, 2015) but also reducing all matter to culture (Ahmed, 2008) and with regards to the concept of performativity failing to look at entities which exist beyond the social and cultural (Jagger, 2015).

However, it is Barad's (2008) argument that makes the new materialist understanding of performativity distinct from other theoretical fields. Barad (2008, p. 821) writes how in relation to performativity that humans are neither untainted cause nor effect 'but part of the world in open-ended becoming'. This is a salient consideration given the unpredictable cultural, social and political discourses relating to transgender and non-binary people. For example, this thesis was written during a time of fierce debate regarding the Gender Recognition Act and the rights for transgender and non-binary people to enter public spaces such as bathrooms. Arguably, such aggressive debates

cannot be separated from the lived experience of being transgender or non-binary or even the writing of this thesis. New materialism in its conceptualisation of assemblages 'dissolves boundaries between the natural, cultural, mind and matter' (Fox and Alldred, 2015; p.400) and as such seemed a compelling theoretical approach to apply to the research's methodological approaches.

The concepts of being 'part of' and 'becoming' are arguably core to new materialism; that is human bodies and material should not be perceived as separate subjects and objects but instead are relational. Indeed, entities are considered not to be fixed rather to be in a constant process and as such should not be given immutable identities. Instead, they are understood in terms of their context, as it is this that the capacities of the entities are dependent upon (Feely, 2019). Barad (2008) argues that the human and the material - in which nature is foregrounded – should not be perceived as separate units within the relationship but as a dynamic intra-action; phenomena that is always in process. This process of becoming creates an affect (Renold, 2018) which should not be understood in terms of emotion but as an entity with capacity to affect and be affected (Feely, 2019). This concept of 'affect' marks a fundamental shift from traditional understandings of human agency as being located in the individual (Fox and Alldred, 2015).

The term 'assemblage' is applied to this dynamic relationship and is conceived as a functional yet chaotic network of connections that are in a constant state of flux (Fox and Alldred, 2015; Coffey, 2019). Assemblages, existing on the micro, meso and macro levels, bring together entities, which typically are considered separate, such as buildings, emotions, and legislations, but when brought together have the capacity to affect (Feely, 2019). The affects that flow within these assemblages are multiple and non-linear and are understood by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) as 'rhizomes', a root system in which there is no one way leading to the 'truth' but rather multiple entry ways (Loots et al.,

2013). Significantly, these rhizomatic lines are open up to becomings influenced and determined by context (Conley, 2000).

Arguably, this ontology of understanding objects as part of a dynamic phenomenon rather than as a distinct unit (Barad, 2008) lends itself to this thesis' concern with how individuals orientate themselves to, and are orientated by, the material world around them. Furthermore, this relational understanding of human bodies and the material resonates with occupational science's position that objects are implicated in our identity, including gender, and sense of self and, indeed, are perceived as part of one's self (Hocking, 2000). Indeed, Sellar (2009) argued that occupational science should utilise social assemblages to reconceptualise human agency in relation to occupations. The dynamic intra-action that Barad (2015) describes could be said to be implicit in occupational science's conception of humans as occupational beings doing and engaging in activities; through the being, namely experiencing existence through what we do and becoming in the process (Hocking, 2000).

These assemblages exist as territories and the affective flows within them either act to stabilise, 'territorialise', or de-stabilise, 'de-territorialise' relationships within the assemblages (Alldred and Fox, 2015). Furthermore, Fox and Alldred (2015) argue that affects exist singularly or as aggregates, with each form having specific impact on bodies and assemblages. Gender, is argued to be a classification that is produced through such aggregate affects (Fox and Alldred, 2015; Coffey, 2019) reflecting Deleuze's assertion that identity is not distinguishable from the material (Driscoll, 2000). As such, it is argued that new materialism can, as van Midde (2014) claims, open up an alternative understanding of transgender people's lived experience where gender is considered as dynamic intra-action with the material world. Given that this research is concerned with the individual's lived and embodied experience, the concept of a singular affect of a sole innocuous action such as touch is equally relevant. Whilst singular affects are considered to have no

aggregate capacity, they are understood to still have the potential de-territorialise (Fox and Alldred, 2015) and create opportunities for new ways of being. Deleuze describes these as lines of flight, a line with the sharpest slope (Deleuze and Parnet, 2007). This understanding of the intra-relationship of human body and the material, the micro and the macro is particularly pertinent to this thesis.

3.5 Insider / outsider position

There remains a firm assertion that those researchers deemed to be outsiders cannot undertake research on marginalised groups (Smith, 2012). This is a position that is advocated by Namaste (2009) who argues that research into transgender identity has largely been undertaken by those outside of the community and who, furthermore, have used the participants as a means for a broader theoretical exploration of gender. In contrast, Vincent (2018) reasons that cisgender (namely those whose gender identity corresponds to their birth sex) researchers can undertake research into transgender participants but need to be mindful of the ethical considerations; this is elaborated further in the in the section which addresses ethics. In addition, being situated as an outsider as a researcher could have advantages in that the participant may be less likely to assume a shared understanding and, as such, provide more expansive answers. For example, Riessman (2008) writes how as a white women she interviewed a participant based in India and remarks that had the interview been undertaken by someone of the same ethnicity, the participant may have taken for granted that knowledge was shared and so may have developed the account differently. Furthermore, it is argued that whilst an insider position may accelerate the acceptance of the researcher by their participants, such a researcher may struggle with role confusion between researcher and affiliate (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009).

As a researcher who does not identify as transgender, the ethical implications of being an outsider is an acutely pertinent concern. Nash (2010, p. 134)

explored the dilemma of the insider/outsider position and the challenges of undertaking research into transgender identities, questioning whether 'as a lesbian researcher in an increasingly 'queer' field am I queer enough?'. Adopting a queer perspective, does not provide resolution to these perspectives but rather allows them to be held in mind and provide awareness of such dilemmas and tensions. Arguably such a standpoint does not negate difference but illustrates how sameness is a fragile state (Nash, 2010). With such reasoning, Gorman Murray et al. (2010) posit that the insider/outsider boundary is tenuous if not a fallacy. There is, though, a danger that such a negation of the outsider position is an exercise in circumnavigating the issue of lack of parity in power between researcher and participant.

Whilst, arguably, queer methodology should not be understood as a means of primarily squaring power relations, it recognises the negotiation at play within subject positions in a research context. It is a theoretical position which prises open the category of 'identity', ensuring that its complexity and intersectionality is exposed and examined. In doing so such a process could, as Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p. 61) write, expose the 'space inbetween' the dichotomy of insider and outsider and thus enable a more nuanced consideration of intersecting identities. Arguably, this conceptualisation with its non-hierarchical positioning of identities is a rhizomic one (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Citing the disproportionate rates of, and lack of attention paid to, violence experienced by transgender women of colour, Namaste (2009) argues intersectionality is rarely afforded to transgender people in research. Thus, queer methodology enables not just the examination of overlaying identities but the systems of oppression that are particular to such identity positions.

3.6 Narrative as a queer methodology

Whilst it is argued that quantitative research can fall within the parameters of queer methodology (Haber, 2016), it is understood that queer methodology's

concern with discordant and fluid identity categories aligns it more so with qualitative inquiry. Indeed, qualitative approaches are considered an appropriate means of collecting data which is embedded in the subjective world of the participant (May, 1993) and provides a means of perceiving how human experience is culturally and socially grounded (Hiles and Cermack, 2010). As such, narrative analysis as an approach is in alignment with queer theory's understanding that identity is highly situated (King and Cronin, 2010). Furthermore, Riessman (1993) contests that narrative does not just reflect the individual's environment, but that culture speaks through the individual, a position which resonates with queer theory's understanding that the regimes of power which construe identity are affected through language (King and Cronin, 2010).

The understanding that narrative is socially grounded is a perspective that has been missing in discussions grounded in occupational science regarding identity (Asaba and Jackson, 2011). Given that this research is concerned with the engagement with activities and spaces, a principle concern of occupational science, it would be judicious to undertake a methodology which acknowledges that occupations are shaped by social circumstances. Thus, deepening perceptions of how the meaning of occupational engagement is expressed (Laliberte Rudman and Aldrich, 2017) and so contributing to knowledge in occupational science.

Particularly relevant to this thesis is the understanding that narratives provide a critical window through which to understand the social construction of gendered identities (Emerson and Frosh, 2004). The understanding that narratives represent the internalisation of dominant discourses infers that there is a performative element to narratives. That is, narratives produce two 'I' subject positions, the 'I' who does the narrating and the 'I' who is narrated (Hardin, 2001). In other words, when a story is told a preferred self is performed rather than revealed (Goffman, 1958), implying that whilst there may be a lack of autonomy in the representation of identity there is agency

employed in how preferred subject positions are negotiated and chosen (Hardin, 2001; Laliberte Rudman and Aldrich, 2017).

The attention that narrative analysis pays to how stories are performed and situated enables the researcher to also attend to the intersectionality of identity, acknowledging the complexity of identity and also ensuring that transgender participants are not seen solely as their gender identity (Vincent, 2018). As Riessman (2008, p. 37) writes, understanding narratives as an exercise of daily living focuses attention away from '"who I am" to questions of "when, where, and how I am."' Thus, to perceive that narratives are performed is to understand not that identities are inauthentic but rather that they are socially situated. In other words, to conceptualise through a new materialist lens, narratives cannot be severed from the material world but understood to interact with it.

3.6.1 Co-construction of interviews

The sociologist, Ken Plummer (1994, p. 20) writes that narratives should be understood as ever-changing symbolic interactions in which we invent identities for ourselves and others, locating 'ourselves in imagined maps'. Plummer (1994) identifies three agents in the production of narratives: the producers of stories who complexly perform narratives, coaxers, coachers or coercers who possess the power to provoke stories from people and lastly consumers, the audience who make sense of what is being said. Narratives are never fixed; they reverberate within these three positions which influence where and what can be told (Plummer, 1994) and as such are not ahistorical or without context (Hardin, 2003).

Interviews are argued to be a suitable method to access narratives (Silverman, 2010), providing a means for the researcher to perceive phenomena (Tanggaard, 2009). Yet the phenomena cannot be understood to be produced solely by the narrator as the researcher interprets rather than documents such narrative. Furthermore, the questions chosen by the researcher will be socially

situated and, given that the narrator aims to convey believability rather than truth (Hiles and Cermack, 2010), narratives will inevitably be influenced by such discourses. Nor are narratives the sum of the spoken word, with significance lying in what is not said (Riessman, 1993) and even silences being co-constructed (Tanggaard, 2009). To apply a new materialist lens to the relationship between researcher and participant, Schadler (2019, p. 219) posits that researchers are part of the intra-action of the research phenomenon writing that 'researchers don't do research, they enact research'.

Riessman (2008) suggests that the increased attention on narratives reflects a postmodern preoccupation with how we construct and perform our identities and how they will be accepted or contested. However, this has arguably always been a concern for marginalised identities who have always been attuned to the need to present identity in a particular way and have an awareness of the risk that narratives can carry in relation to their audience. Plummer (1994) illustrates this point by describing how emotions associated with narratives, such as shame or pride for lesbian and gay people is determined by what spaces are open to them to tell their stories; a pertinent consideration for the transgender communities. Spaces, in this context could seemingly be aligned with the new materialist understanding of both physical entities and non-material influences such as laws and social attitudes.

Riach et al. (2016) advocate for a Butler-inspired methodology, an approach that is rooted in queer theory and which recognises how gender performance is located within biographical narration. Butler's (2005) ethical exploration of identities forms the basis for Riach et al. (2016) methodological approach. Butler (2005) describes how the performative nature of narratives establishes subjectivity and how marginalised subjectivities are precarious as they rely on the recognition of others. Thus, to be recognised as a credible subject, one must conform to a normative narrative; an imperative heightened when one is a subject of research deemed to be undertaken by an outsider. This theoretical

position is important when the degree of marginalisation experienced by those who define as transgender is considered.

Transgender people, to ensure 'their psychic survival [...] in a world that is resolutely hostile', can employ certain language to elicit acknowledgement and sympathy from the researcher (Green, 2004, p. 192). This is not to negate the authenticity of narratives but to acknowledge the performative possibility of such narratives. Riach et al. (2016) argue that the term 'data collection' presumes that narrative exists pre-articulation and advocate, instead, for the term 'data gathering'. It is a position that also acknowledges the role of the researcher in producing the data, namely that data does not exist within the paradigms of the participants' meaning (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) but also within the interaction between researcher and participant.

If it is understood that narratives can be a precarious means of achieving recognition for those with marginalised identities (Butler, 2005), this method does present an ethical concern. In addition to the risk of misrecognition, the process of being interviewed may undo the identity that participants strive to maintain (Riach et al., 2016). To mitigate against this, Riach et al. (2016, p. 2077) advocate for an 'anti-narrative' research to counter the performativity through critical reflection on the conditions of recognition. In other words, reflexivity is a means of both researcher and participant understanding the influence of narrative on subjectivities and respective power dynamics.

Such a call for reflexivity to examine differing power relations is established in feminist methodologies (McDonald, 2013) and is a means to mitigate against privileged position of the researcher, which Reed and Speedy (2011) argue can lead to the epistemologically violent act of misrepresenting the research subject. Thus, a methodology that recognises and encourages reflexivity on the part of the researcher to determine how their own identity and interaction with the participant could influence the creation of data appears necessary. In discussing research relations, Wray-Bliss (2003, p. 311) contests that attention

needs to be paid to the joint agency of researcher and researched in creating 'problematic subject positions'. Specifically, he warns that it is too simplistic to present participants as passive victims and such a view risks reinforcing, rather than challenging, the participant's subordination (Wray-Bliss, 2003). Whilst, then, it is important to ensure that participants do not feel compelled to contribute to the research process beyond which they feel comfortable, adopting an approach which provides the opportunity for participants to participate in data analysis could serve as a way of mitigating against the risk of misrecognition (Elliott, 2005).

3.6.2 Narrative and discourses

Mishler (1991) asserts that as interviews are speech events, methodological approaches which consider the influence of discourse need to be employed when undertaking narrative research. As such, it is prudent to not only understand and analyse what is being told but locate which discourses may be shaping and influencing narratives and the intention behind their use (Riessman, 2008). Hardin (2003), adopting a Foucauldian understanding of discourse, illustrates this assertion with highlighting the discourses around anorexia, identifying how medicine, psychology and feminism discourses influence individuals' articulation of their accounts. Whilst it is not possible to identify every 'voice' in the discourse, Asaba and Jackson (2011) contend that major discourses should be made explicit.

Hardin (2001) writes that each discourse has its own interpretation of behaviours and how it is important to identify, as far as possible, the matrix of discourses within which narratives reside. Once identified, breaches between stories and discourses, represented by the fractures between the real and ideal, self and society can be identified (Riessman, 1993). This is an important consideration for transgender communities for whom the intelligibility of identity can be dependent upon the dominant medical, legal and cultural discourses. Discourses determine identity categories and such classifications influence how a person thinks and acts in the world (Hardin, 2001). For

example, it could be argued that someone who is legally recognised as transsexual would have a different agency to someone who is non-binary, an identity which has no legal recognition. Thus, it is important when considering narratives to employ a reflexive openness and analyse how individuals construct subjectivities in relation to dominant discourses (Emerson and Frosh, 2004). In doing so it is possible to understand the interplay between individual lives and dominant discourses, whether narratives align or diverge from discourses (Laliberte Rudman, 2015). To not scrutinise this relationship leaves normative discourses untroubled and so arguably reinforces such discourses and perceptions of identity (King and Cronin, 2010). For example, in not adhering to legislative and medical discourses of identity non-binary identities can be labelled as abnormal and may have to navigate and monitor the discourses they use to fall within normative discourses (Hardin, 2001) or conversely adopt discourses of subcultures (Asaba and Jackson, 2011).

3.6.3 Narrative, story and form

There is ambiguity surrounding the meaning of the term 'narrative' (Paley and Eva, 2005) particularly in relation to 'stories', with these two terms being used interchangeably (Webster and Mertova, 2007; Riessman, 2008). Within narrative analysis, narratives are broadly aligned with traditional understanding of stories, namely that they represent events, experiences and emotions (Riessman, 2008). There is also lack of clarity regarding the form narratives can take; within social linguistics 'narrative' refers to a discrete unit of discourse, a single answer by an interviewee which is logically and temporally organised (Mishler, 1991; Riessman, 2008). In contrast, there are methodologies such as the more ethnographic narrative inquiry where a narrative can reside across multiple interviews, documents and observations (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Whether the format is a distinct answer or extracted from various mediums, narratives become stories when there is causation (Paley and Eva, 2005), a consequential linking of events or ideas (Riessman, 2008). As such not all talk and text is considered to be narrative,

for example those reports which lack sequenced storyline, setting and specific characters (Riessman, 2008).

Stories are rarely presented in interviews as being neatly boundaried with a beginning, middle and end and therefore, determining what constitutes a story is an interpretative process (Riessman, 2008). Emerson and Frosh (2004, p. 34) describe how narrative themes tend not to occur in discrete paragraphs but across sections, 'looping back' throughout interviews. The non-linear nature of stories (Hardin, 2001) resonates with the notion of a queer temporality which resists normative milestones embedded in discourses which are associated with the life course, such as those around the family and reproduction (Halberstam, 2005). There is a need to be vigilant therefore not to presume to apply traditional understandings of biography to LGBT communities and furthermore, to question normative notions of how stories may be sequenced.

Queer temporalities can be lived with vigilance due to hostile environments and as such have emphasis on the here and now (Halberstam, 2005). One only has to consider the low life expectancy of working-class transgender women of colour to exemplify this point. However, such queer temporality is not just about compression of time but also the 'potentiality of life unscripted by conventions of family, inheritance and child rearing' (Halberstam, 2005, p. 2). This is apparent not just in the sociocultural context but also biologically; for example, those undergoing a medical intervention in their transition would, due to the administering of hormones in adulthood, experience somatic changes akin to puberty (Seal, 2017). To align with new materialist concepts, it could be argued that queer temporalities are rhizomic in that they are non-linear and not aligned with normative understandings of the life course.

In addition, notions of 'past' in relation to pre-transitioning for some may be laden with complexities and emotion when it is considered the past may constitute a discordant gender identity and dissonant signifiers such as name,

home and even memories. As such alternative temporalities - both in terms of form and content - may be employed in the narratives of participants that lie outside traditional understanding of narrated life course. Thus, it is important to use a methodology which recognises that narratives manifest not just in what is told, but how this is told.

Riessman (2012) outlines three broad categories in narratives: life stories, discrete stories set around setting and plot and thirdly, referring to large sections of talk that develop over the course of several interviews. This research recognised both the 'short story' or discrete accounts and, as the research involved a series of interviews, also the 'big story', longer accounts that may occur over two or three interviews. Riesman (2008) writes how Labov provides a framework to help structure the narratives which consists of six structural elements, namely: the abstract orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution and a coda (whereby the story is ended and brought back to the present). This method of framing narratives resonates with Hiles and Cermack's (2010) assertion that narrative analysis brings order to the chaos of lived experience. Whilst this is a procedurally astute position, keeping true to the ethos of queer methodology that identity is in constant commotion, it seems prudent not to tame, but analyse its manifestation.

To achieve this, the intentionality of the speaker must be interrogated by examining the function of the story as well as its form (Riessman, 2008). The choice of language used by the narrator reflects how they position, and re-position themselves in ways that might not be apparent in the content of their story (Riessman, 2012). For example, the use and choice of verbs arguably reflects an agency whilst an exploration of the grammatical structure of what is said may imply a guardedness or vulnerability (Riessman, 2012). As this research is mindful of the co-construction of narratives, it is important that any framework used considers the role of the interviewer.

A purely thematic methodology was rejected on the grounds that the focus is content and excludes the wider social context (Riessman, 2008) which is argued to reduce the complexity of the data (Hardin, 2001). Further, a purely thematic approach that identifies and clusters commonalities in accounts could not only overlook the individual meanings of accounts but also lead to deductive rather than inductive readings of the data (Riessman, 2008; Hardin, 2001). Similarly, conversational analysis is argued to be overly descriptive, failing to contemplate how wider issues may influence narratives (King and Cronin, 2010). Neither did a purely dialogical reading of narratives whereby agency is negated and narrators are not understood to be the final authors of their accounts (Riessman, 2008) align with the epistemological position of the research.

Biographic-Narrative Interpretative Method (BNIM) (Wengraf 2001; Wengraf 2006) was considered, which understands narrative expression to represent both conscious concerns of the narrator and more unconscious social, cultural and individual processes. This approach analyses both the biography of the participant as disclosed by them and additionally the structure of their narrative, examining not just what happened but also, the way in which it was experienced by the participant (Wengraf, 2001). However, BNIM's framing of biography as a linear chronology was considered at odds with this thesis' observation regarding the potential non-normative chronology of queer temporalities (Halberstam, 2005). In addition, Wengraf (2001) advocates for the use of an external panel of researchers to examine the presented biographical life events of participants as part of the data analysis process, and it was felt that this could arguably accentuate the level of scrutiny that transgender participants are understood to feel by outsider researchers (Vincent, 2018).

However, there are elements of the BNIM approach that this research has adopted. Namely, the attention, as outlined by Riessman (2008), to both the form and content as being the foci. Wengraf (2001; 2006) writes how the

researcher can 'zoom in' and 'zoom out' to explore the macro and micro meanings of the stories. This approach resonates with the new materialist understanding that, in identifying mechanisms that operate within assemblages (Schadler, 2019), researchers should attend to exploring the micro and macro politics of assemblages (Fox and Alldred, 2015).

This research's methodological approach is also influenced by Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI), a method that is considered to be ideally suited to participants who are asked to share aspects of their life that are vulnerable to social approbation (Garfield et al., 2010). Akin to this, Wengraf (2006) also understands the participant as being defended which may be expressed in narrative form as ambivalence. Further, the approach acknowledges the complex relationship between researcher and subject, specifically the co-production of data through unconscious dynamics and, as such, reflexivity from the researcher is central to this approach (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013). This approach is reminiscent of queer methodology in that it challenges the assumption that research participants have either a transparent self or account (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013).

3.7 New materialist approach

As discussed, this research was concerned with the narratives of participants and drew upon differing narrative approaches and inquiry. In analysing narratives, the research methodology was shaped by the new materialist field of inquiry and called upon methodologies as described by Fox and Alldred (2015), Feely (2019) and Schadler (2019). A key reason in the use of this new materialist method is its concern with the discursive and the material forces to enable the exploration of social phenomenon (Feely, 2019). Furthermore, its focus on objects, activities and spaces and the relationship of these to one another (Schadler, 2019) is closely aligned with the objectives of this research. Thus, arguably presenting an opportunity for this research to explore not just human action but also, give equal weight to the potential capacities of objects,

places and spaces to affect gender expression. This is reflected in methods of data collection which, alongside interviews, includes materials such as artefacts and film (Fox and Alldred, 2015). Such methods provide a potential means to gather and generate data which exists beyond the narrative, an important consideration when it is considered how marginalised groups may be guarded in what they verbally disclose. Further, in analysing the assemblage the purpose is not just to describe the assemblage but how a problematic assemblage may be altered (Feely, 2019) and, it could be countered, to also understand better the constitution of a positive assemblage in relation to gender expression.

One of the key tenets of new materialist research is that the process of research is in itself an assemblage. Although considered not to be spontaneous in structure, the machinery of research and corresponding epistemology and process involve affected flows namely the data collection – such as the coding of data - and analysis (Fox and Alldred, 2015) and even so far as the software used to store the data (Schadler, 2019). In order to fulfil the objectives of a materialist inquiry Fox and Alldred (2015) posit that a research assemblage should expose the relations and affects within assemblages being explored. Specifically, they propose that the design should be focused i) on attending to assemblages, and affective flows within, of the human and inanimate rather than on individual bodies; ii) explore how the material and cultural (both on micro and macro levels) are drawn upon by these affects; and iii) explore the aggregation, territorialisation and de-territorialisation of these assemblages (Fox and Alldred, 2015). The approaches undertaken to achieve this are addressed and threaded through the proceeding sections.

3.8 Quality of research and ethical procedure

This section addresses how the research the steps taken to ensure that the research was ethical and the procedures undertaken to employ a trustworthy approach.

3.8.1 Quality

In undertaking a constructionist approach to the research, the position that truth can be located and secured is challenged (Silverman, 2010). Rather, the validation of the research resides in the justifying of inferences from data and how this relates to the theorisation employed (Mishler, 1991; Wengraf, 2001). As such, Riessman (1993) argues that research which utilises narrative analysis makes claims for trustworthiness rather than truth. Such claims of trustworthiness must be supported by evidence (Mishler, 1991; Riessman, 1993), which would indicate a transparency of process (Hiles and Cermack, 2010) and provide evidence of dependability of data (Webster and Mertova, 2007). However, it is not simply a question of providing evidence; reliability is also to be found in approaches which consider that stories are not static but contingent on interpretation and sociocultural contexts (Riessman, 1993). To address this, this research aimed to ensure that interpretation is inductive by using unstructured interviews. An explanation of, and justification of the interpretative process were made transparent through the use of a research journal. Silverman (2010), argues that the systematic process of documenting these processes helps to support claims of trustworthiness; namely, notes made immediately after the interview, a record of problems and ideas that arose at each stage of the interviews and a documentation of analysis and interpretation (Silverman, 2010).

Triangulation as a process of combining different means of methods or analysing data is commonly used in qualitative research (Silverman, 2010). However, it is argued that triangulation is not applicable to storytelling-based research as it is not possible to locate a real state of affairs (Webster and Mertova, 2007). Furthermore, Silverman (2010) contest that obtaining a true fix on reality is not possible with any constructionist approach. Arguably, including participants in the analysis of data – as this research did - is a process of triangulation. Namely, the provision of transcripts to participants and inviting them to discuss findings can be seen as contributing to the

inclusivity of the research as well as the validity (Finlay and Evans, 2009). Whilst it is ethically sound to provide participants with the opportunity to refute or agree with interpretations, such respondent validity could be understood to attribute a privileged status to their interpretation (Silverman, 2010). The ethical principles of research drives the enabling of participants to be co-producers of data. Discussions with participants were documented and any changes, discordant interpretations were captured in my research journal.

3.8.2 Ethics

Ethical approval was granted by the College of Health and Life Sciences Research and Ethics Committee at Brunel University London in February 2017 (see Appendix A.1). Given that transgender people are marginalised and are a community that face violence and discrimination and are potentially at risk of exploitation, there are specific ethical considerations that this study will address. An advisory group of four individuals (see Appendix A.2 for the Advisory Group protocol) who define as transgender or non-binary was recruited via social media to help ensure that the research did not exploit participants and addressed the need raised by Namaste (2009) of ensuring its relevance to the transgender community. The members of the group all are, or have been, involved in academia through work or studies and volunteered due to an interest in the research area.

As an outsider to the research population, it felt important to exercise what Vincent (2018) refers to as an ethics of care, namely, that my personal values were key in assessing the meaning that the work has. This process of articulating my values to the group was invaluable in terms of conveying the credibility of my research and addressing any anxiety pertaining to being an outsider researcher. This was a process I repeated with those participants who asked in our initial contact why, as someone who is cis gender, I was interested in their lives. The group played a key role in advising on recruitment and research design (see Appendix A.3 for an example of data presented to the group) and a particular concern shared by myself and the

group was that no excessive burden was placed upon potential and actual participants. For example, it was important to make clear at all stages of the research that participants should not feel obliged to participate in all stages of the interview process.

After an expression of interest in participating in the research, participants were sent an information sheet outlining the study and were provided with sufficient time – two weeks - to read it before the subsequent contact (see Appendix A.4). Once this had been sent and participants confirmed that they would like to proceed with the research, a consent form was provided (see Appendix A.5) to the participants which were returned signed. On the initial meeting, the information sheet and consent form were discussed and any questions addressed. All participants were aware that they could withdraw consent at any time, a critical point given that some participants may consider their gender identity as being in transition and as such may subsequently not wish to have this transition documented. This was reiterated verbally at each meeting. At the beginning of each interview, participants were asked if there were any 'no go' areas and this was respected. The unstructured format of the interview schedule meant that the participants could generally guide the direction of the interview and the open-ended questions were designed to give control to the participants regarding what they chose or chose not to include (Emerson and Frosh, 2004).

Transcripts were sent to participants and they were asked whether there was any material that they wished to be deleted or amended, those who responded did not wish to make suggestions or amended. The undertaking of multiple interviews with each participant has helped ensure that participants were able to comment on and clarify meaning from the interviews. Participants were sent a copy of the findings chapter and conversations discussing these were held either over the phone or by email. Participants were not paid for the interviews, but travel costs were remunerated. Contact details of participants

were kept separately from the interview material and locked away. All data was password protected.

3.9 The Research Participants

The recruitment process was open to anyone over the age of 18 years, English speaking and based in the UK, who defined as transgender, non-binary or genderqueer. Much consideration was given to the terminology used in referring to transgender identities and the understanding that what is observed is dependent on what is measured (Brim and Ghaziani, 2016) informed the choice of wording used. This was due to the acknowledgement that transgender is an umbrella term (Stonewall, 2018) encompassing an array of identities, and that conversely transgender is not an identity adopted by all non-gender conforming people. For example, gender may be experienced in the same way yet one person may define as trans and another as non-binary (Davidson, 2007). Additionally, some people may experience themselves in non-binary ways but not identify as such (Richards et al., 2017). Furthermore, the term 'transgender' is critiqued for conceptualising gender in binary terms and for conflating diverse gender identities (Forrest-Stuart, 2016). As such the terms 'non-binary' and 'genderqueer' were included.

The term genderqueer is considered to be a term that embraces non-conforming gender identities (Pearce, 2018). However, I was mindful that these categories, whilst broad, could not possibly, as Brim and Guaziani (2016) describe, align with all lived experience. For example, when recruiting for the advisory group, using similar identity categories, someone expressed their interest in participating however did not feel that it was entirely appropriate for them as although they had transitioned gender they considered themselves to be male, not transgender.

Prior to the recruitment stage, wording of the adverts was discussed with the advisory group and the terms 'transgender, non-binary and genderqueer' were

agreed upon. Whilst these terms are arguably expansive, relating to those who view their identity in binary terms and those who perceive gender in more fluid terms, there will be those who do not feel that such terms resonate with their identity. As such it is acknowledged that there may be bias in that the study group will exclude those who are unaware of such terminology or do not feel that it captures their identity.

It was acknowledged that it can be challenging to recruit participants who have a marginalised gender identity for a multitude of reasons, including reluctance to disclose private information and fear of scrutiny and judgement (Institute of Medicine, 2011). As such, snowball sampling and respondent-driven sampling was undertaken, approaches which are understood to be appropriate when participants can be difficult to contact (Whittaker and Williamson, 2011) or belong to rare populations (Institute of Medicine, 2011).

To counter any attrition during the research process, five participants were recruited. This is considered to be a suitable size for this type of research where accounting for experiences rather than generalisability is the concern and depth of analysis is intended (Emerson and Frosh, 2004). Interviews were transcribed and as Riessman (1993) advocates, the process of transcription served as an initial form of analysis. Whilst transcribing the initial interviews, it was apparent that a depth and range of data had been collected which indicated that a sufficient sample size had been reached.

Guidance was sought from the advisory group regarding where to advertise and posters were placed in LGBT venues and societies and, so as not to exclude those who may not visit such venues, adverts (see appendix A.6) were also placed in more generic venues such as libraries, book shops and cafes. I delivered a number of talks and presentations at a number of universities and conferences during the recruitment phase, outlining the research and call for participants. Vincent (2018), in discussing the ethics of cisgender researchers recruiting transgender participants, advises that in order to respect

transgender spaces and resources not to attend events that one would not attend if not recruiting participants. This point was discussed with the advisory group and it was suggested by them that they could circulate adverts in such situations or, if appropriate, that I could attend at their invitation.

With ethical approval, a website was created which introduced the research and myself (this can be found at www.rebeccaswensonblog.wordpress.com) and included the research advert. This was circulated on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter by myself, the advisory group and contacts. Using social media to recruit participants helped ensure that recruitment efforts were not limited to London, and this was reflected in those who volunteered to participate. The purpose in using a range of channels to recruit participants was not only to ensure that a suitable size of sample was recruited but that a range of ages and backgrounds were also recruited.

3.10 Interview process

The interview process was informed by Wengraf's (2006) Biographical-Narrative Interpretative Method (BNIM) in which he advises that three interviews are undertaken. This approach was selected to enable the capturing of a depth of data necessary to address the research question and in order to work alongside the participant and enable the co-production of data (Finlay and Evans, 2009). It is advised that the initial interview is two to three hours long (Wengraf, 2006) however, in order to ensure that the interview did not daunt or become arduous for the participant, and in order to develop rapport with participants, there was no pre-set time which determined the length of the interview. The length of the interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes. The initial interview was semi-structured and the following two largely unstructured. This is in accordance with BNIM and was informed by Mishler's (1991) assertion that in not recognising interviews as discourse there is a misconception that in order to provide participants with the same stimulus standardised questions are necessary. In addition, new materialist ontology

encourages the re-framing and re-defining of the boundaries of analytical research in order to enable becomings to emerge that may remain unsighted with traditional research methods (Schadler, 2019). This Schadler (2019) writes can be achieved through the use of new approaches to interviews that expose the assemblages contained within and around narratives and it such non-traditional approaches that this research has employed.

3.10.1 Initial interview and use of photography

Once potential participants had made contact expressing their interest in the research, an email was sent to them providing more information about myself and the research, along with the participant information sheet. One participant requested a telephone conversation to find out more and to discuss their interest. When participants confirmed that they wanted to proceed with the research an initial meeting was arranged and it was discussed with participants that, should they agree, a further two interviews would take place. These interviews occurred in meeting rooms at three different universities near the participants' homes or in a LGBT charity meeting room; all meeting rooms were private and accessible. A journal was kept in which my observations and feelings prior to, during and after the interview were recorded (an example of which can be found on p. 105). Entries such as these as well as providing an opportunity for reflexivity (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), also – when considered within the context of new materialism, illuminate the relations within an assemblage and the affective flows that exist within it (Schadler, 2019).

The interviews were undertaken by myself and were semi-structured, in line with BNIM methodology which advocates the use of a single narrative question (Wengraf, 2006) at the start of the interview to elicit narrative accounts from participants. In addition, it was felt that by not having predetermined questions the interview schedule avoided pre-empting data into codable themes (Riessman, 2012). This also served the ethical purpose of helping ensure that participants felt comfortable in controlling what they

wanted to disclose. The question was kept suitably broad (Earthy and Cronin, 2008) to elicit narratives regarding identity, which was 'Can you tell me about yourself?'. Such broad, open-ended questions are understood to help prompt exploration regarding the interviewees' relation to space and objects (Schadler, 2019). Follow up open-ended questions were then used as required to elicit further information and narratives. Interviews lasted between 45 to 90 minutes and with participants' consent were audio recorded, a process understood to be 'essential' to ensure the re-listening to interviews can be undertaken (Riessman,1993; Emerson and Frosh, 2004; Wengraf, 2006).

At this initial interview, participants were asked to bring a photograph as a means not only of stimulating and prompting free discussion (Riessman, 1993) but also as a way of eliciting participants' perspectives of their relationship to objects and places vital not only to the research question but also to the new materialist ontology of exploring assemblages (Fox and Alldred, 2015; Schadler, 2019). Participants were asked to photograph, using their smart phones or other devices, objects or places that were significant to them and they were then asked for their reasons as to why they selected the particular image (see Appendix B.2 for transcript extracts). All but one of the participants brought a photograph to the interview. Gregor et al. (2014) discuss how the use of photography in research can stimulate discussion as the participant is able to discuss thoughts associated with the photograph with minimal interaction from the researcher. In effect, the participants themselves become part of the data analysis process, reflecting the new materialist ethos of redefining research tools (Schadler, 2019).

Maniam et al. (2016) document participants' descriptions of how photography is more abstract than traditional interview techniques and as such participants felt more able to share stories personal to them. Using photovoice methodology, Maniam et al. (2016) undertook a research project with young people in early psychosis, asking them to take photographs that captured their experiences and perceptions of mental illness. Photovoice is a method

designed to engage people from a marginalised community, who tend to be stereotyped and discriminated against, and enable them to express and narrate their life stories (Maniam et al., 2016).

The London-based exhibition, the 'Museum of Transology', was a collection of over 120 objects and associated narratives donated by people who defined as trans. It demonstrated how narratives can be located within seemingly innocuous objects either actual or photographed (the exhibition has an associated Instagram page). For example, a train ticket, donated to the exhibition, had the written narrative of 'This was the ticket I used to meet my Canadian girlfriend, the first time seeing her in person as her boyfriend instead of her girlfriend' (Museum of Transology, 2017). As well as enabling participants to express their association with the objects, it was hoped that using photographs taken by participants of meaningful objects would enable the phenomenological exploration of the participant's orientation to an object. Whilst it was anticipated that participants will take photographs of objects that hold some meaning and familiarity to them, a photograph remains a 'narrowly selective transparency' (Sontag, 1977, p. 6). Such degree of disconnect may, as Ahmed (2006) describes, enable the participant to perceive the object in phenomenological terms. Namely, the participant in perceiving the object in a context other than its usual one may cause the participant to switch attention from the object to the process of perception itself (Ahmed, 2006).

Holtby et al. (2015) argue that the use of photography is an appropriate data gathering tool when working with marginalised communities for whom the issue of visibility is a pressing concern. Holtby et al. (2015, p. 318) write how being seen was not 'an uncomplicated desire' for the young trans participants of their research. Undertaking a photovoice study, the researchers asked participants to take photographs of their experiences of being trans youth and then subsequently asked participants questions such as 'What is seen here?' (Holtby et al., 2015). As Sontag (1977) writes, photography can validate ones

being in the world, alleviating the sense of disorientation that can be experienced in an overwhelming environment. However, Holtby et al. (2015) saliently write how people in positions of power can presume that those from marginalised communities want to tell their story when in fact such disclosure can put them at risk. As such, any use of photography must consider the potential for causing harm alongside any benefits to the participant and the research and as such participants were asked not to include anything identifiable in the photograph although one participant brought a photograph of them with their family. The use of photography can cause concern for participants, namely that their photographs may be judged or misinterpreted by others (Maniam et al., 2016; Holtby et al., 2015). Considering this I decided ahead of the interviews that a condition of the photographs being sent to me was that they would not be published in the final thesis and that it would be the narratives prompted by the photographs which would be considered data, rather than the photographs themselves. Reflecting on this later, I realise that this decision reflected my initial anxieties regarding exposing participants to scrutiny and potentially exploiting my position as researcher. Had I instead asked participants whether they would consent to their inclusion in this thesis, that actually this would have embedded participants within the research assemblage.

3.10.2 Follow up interviews

Once interviews were transcribed, participants were contacted and asked if they would like to meet again to discuss the initial interview. A week prior to the meeting, the transcripts were sent to participants with the invitation of discussing the transcript by telephone in advance if they so wished. This process also enabled participants to review their consent, with all choosing to continue with the research. Whilst Eli agreed to a follow up interview we were unable to arrange a subsequent interview. Due to the staggered nature of the recruitment, some follow up interviews occurred when initial interviews were being undertaken with more newly recruited participants.

This process followed the one suggested by Wengraf (2006) whereby the initial interview is informed by open-ended questions and the second interview enables follow up questions to be asked to elicit and clarify further narrative accounts. Whilst it is suggested that the second interview happen within four weeks from the initial interview (Wengraf, 2006), they typically happened four to eight weeks after the initial interview to allow time for the interviews to be transcribed. In addition, participants' commitments meant that interviews had to be arranged at a time convenient to them. Transcription is considered to be an important initial stage in the analysis of data (Kvale, 1996) and as such this enabled me to gain initial insights into the narratives to develop in the second interview.

A follow up interview is considered advantageous to both interviewer and participant enabling the development of rapport and trust, providing opportunity for clarification and reflection (Emerson and Frosh, 2004; Earthy and Cronin, 2008). Whilst it could be argued that follow up interviews demand further effort and time from participants, it is also reasoned to be less exhausting (Earthy and Cronin, 2008) as the onus is not placed on the initial meeting to garner all the data. Kvale (1996, p. 190) also advocates that a follow up interview serves as a 'self-correcting interview' as participants can comment on the researcher's interpretation as well as elaborate on their original statements. As Wengraf (2006) advises, the basis of the questions for this interview were narrative-pointed and asked only about topics raised by the participant. These generated new narratives and also provided opportunity to the participants to draw upon and develop earlier narratives.

The meetings took place in meeting rooms, apart from one where the participant requested that the meeting took place in their local café. As such the second interview felt like an important stage, enabling participants to clarify meaning, expand upon narratives and discuss my interpretations of the data; as such, these interviews sometimes felt more conversational in style. Interviews were recorded and transcribed as they were for the initial interview.

The follow-up meeting also provided an opportunity to discuss with participants whether they wished to participate in the third and final stage of the interview process, the walking interview. The following chapter will discuss participants' responses to my interpretation.

3.10.3 The walking interview

In keeping with the BNIM approach (Wengraf, 2006) the third interview was the final interview and intended to connect narrative with place as well as providing closure for both myself and the participant in the interview process. Wengraf (2006) suggests that the third interview is less focused on narrative and can attend to non-narrative questions. The third interview was a walking interview whereby participants were invited to choose a route to walk with the researcher whilst the interview is conducted.

This style of interview aligns with the intention of the research to explore the relationship between the environment and individual in relation to the expression of gender identity (Fox and Alldred, 2015; Schadler, 2019). Ivinson and Renold (2013) drawing upon new materialist methodologies, used walking tours as a data collection tool in their research into school girls' agency and bodies. They wrote how alongside seated interviews this method provided insight into how young people appropriated and created local spaces, a concern very much shared with this research. It was anticipated that walking interviews could themselves become an assemblage - in which components such as the weather, landscapes, shops, pedestrians and traffic interact – from which gender expression could emerge.

Phenomenologically it is argued that when there is orientation between an object and body, we are occupied (Ahmed, 2006). However, this orientation cannot exist out of context and as such the space in which this phenomenon occurs must be taken into consideration. Geographers Merriman et al. (2008) distinguish the meanings of the terms 'space' and 'place' by how they relate to the individual and how they are occupied within them. Namely, they argue

that ‘space’ denotes a disconnection and absence whilst ‘place’ signifies a presence, something ‘that’s yours’ (Merriman et al., 2008, p.203). Arguably it is one’s orientation to the environment through engagement with objects that manifests such a sense of place.

Just as objects are bound to the notion of place, social constructionist theory posits that place plays a significant role in the forming and influencing of human identity (Anderson, 2004). However, as Coverley (2010) writes, the act of engaging with the environment such as walking, can be for certain groups of people a subversive act. This is arguably true for members of the transgender communities whose presence in public spaces may cause disconcertion or disorientation. When in such a state of disorientation, the observer attempts to fix their perspective by admonishing the observed (Ahmed, 2006). All too often such admonishment manifests in the form of violence. However, engaging with public spaces can also serve to affirm one’s identity through the responses received from others.

As with the use of photography in research, it is argued that walking whilst being interviewed not only connects the individual to their environment but the physiological process of walking also helps prompt memories and associations (Anderson, 2004), which is also in line with FANI. Evans and Jones (2010) write how walking interviews generate rich data as participants’ responses are prompted by their associations to the environment rather than focused on providing the right answer. In discussing how the urban environment influences the emotions of the individual, Coverley (2010, p. 14) writes how the act of wandering combines the movement across the topography of the city with ‘a vertical descent into its past’. Similarly, walking interviews - whilst arguably eliciting memories and associations - produce a spatial discourse which is structured geographically rather than historically (Evans and Jones, 2010). Latham (2003), a human geographer, argues that research methods which focus on the individual’s relationship to place can elicit accounts of embodiment.

Anderson (2004) argues that places are not passive in the formation of identity but instead structure this process, allowing as Latham (2003) writes for research to be reframed as a performative practice and allowing novel insights into cultures of experiences. Not only do walking interviews enable the researcher to accompany the participant as they go about their daily routine building rapport between researcher and participant (Carpiano, 2009), but also some participants may find it easier to verbalise feelings when not in a traditional interview setting (Evans and Jones, 2011). Conversely, the rhythm of walking allows for natural breaks in the conversation which can later be picked up again, something Evans and Jones (2011) argue benefits the less experienced interviewer. Participants picked the route that they wished to walk, this is understood to not only provide insight into their understanding and experience of that place, and perhaps other places, but also empowers them within the research process (Evans and Jones, 2011)

During the walks data was captured through unstructured interviews and observation, data collection methods that Anderson (2004) writes allow for rich and empathic insights. Walking interviews enable also the collection of quantitative data with regards to the mapping of routes taken (Evans and Jones, 2011). However, this research used qualitative data solely collected from the interview but was understood in relation to the route taken. For example, statements were linked to the place in which they were articulated. This was achieved by audio-recording the conversation with the participant wearing a microphone whilst simultaneously monitoring the route. The average length of walk was just over 50 minutes and there was no relationship between adverse weather conditions and the length of walk. Carpiano (2009) observes how his use of the walking interview was a process that was enjoyed by participants, however, it is clear that this is a process that may not be a positive and possible experience for all. It was made clear to participants that the walking interview was optional and indeed one participant declined to

walk during the final interview due to an injury and instead opted to meet in a café.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the intricacies of narrative, such as its positioning alongside discourse and how its production and interpretation is socially situated both by the narrator and by the researcher. These complexities do not represent obstacles to its use or dilute its effectiveness as an analytic tool, rather an alignment with queer methodology's tenet that identity is fluid and fragmented. Through the use of reflexivity, it was intended that transparency was provided not so much to mitigate against co-construction and unfixable notions of truth but instead to illuminate these elements. The chapter has presented how new materialism could serve as a paradigm to not just conceptualise the relationship between material, mind and culture (Fox and Alldred, 2015) but also inform data collection and analysis. The proceeding chapter details the undertaking of the analysis of data.

Chapter 4: Analysis of data

4.1 Introduction

This chapter details the data analysis process including describing the transcribing process and how participants were included in the data analysis process. It describes the three-stage analysis process informed by Alldred and Fox (2015) and Feely (2019). Extracts from my research journal are included here and an audit of the analysis is provided in appendices B and C.

4.2 Transcription

Following completion of the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed by myself (see Appendix B.3 for a transcript extract). I documented any responses to listening to the audio recording in my research journal. It seemed as though the process of listening slowly and with consistent pauses prompted and facilitated a reflective process as the below extract from my research journal suggest:

> *[Fred] seemed so at ease with his identity but there was a sense of having to be vigilant of others – e.g. with schoolchildren. This left me sad when transcribing and was surprised at this as a much more intense reaction than when actually listening to him speak.*

Not only does this illustrate the reflective nature of transcribing but it also highlights how the researcher is embedded within the research assemblage. This process represented the first stage of listening to the interviews, this was repeated to check for inaccuracies and errors. Prior to undertaking analysis of the data (this ranged from six to twelve months after completion of the interviews), I then re-listened to the original recordings to re-familiarise with the context of the recording. I documented any further observations in my research journal recordings were then re-listened to for a third time prior to the analysis stage.

The transcription itself marked the initial stage in analysis of the data and represented the 're-enactment' stage of the research, a process which Schadler (2019) encourages as it enables the researcher to redo and re-examine occurring processes within the interview. It is posited that the method of transcription depends on the theoretical perspective of the research and is in itself an interpretive practice, 'fixing' dialogue in what can ever only be a partial representation (Riessman, 2008). Alongside this, notes from my research journal were drawn upon to help develop an understanding of these embedded processes and materialities experienced both by myself and articulated by the participant and the relations within these (Schadler, 2019). For example, my notes made during the transcribing of Dee's initial interview reflect on the structure and pace of the interview:

> *Very linear narrative structure [...] part of learnt script? Am I being unfair, judgemental? Sentences start with 'Then this happened', sometimes the voice becomes quiet and hesitant, then narrative is resumed e.g. 'so I got a job'.*

When this was undertaken with the walking interviews, key points in the interview alongside my own observations were charted on the map (see Appendix C.1). This process helped enable an exploration of the spatial alongside other materialities. As this research considers that narrative is co-constructed, the interactional context of the interview was included (Riessman, 2008), for example, the interviewer's speech and utterances. A serious analysis of speech requires the transcription of the linguistic and paralinguistic features that naturally occur in speech (Mishler, 1991). Consequently, non-lexical expressions such as 'mmm' were included, break offs (indicated as "-") where speech stopped or changed tack were also documented. In addition, in order not to neglect important information or emotional variances, pauses, laughter and emphasis of words were also highlighted (Riessman, 1993).

Transcripts were then line numbered and two additional columns added, one for coding and the other for documenting my thoughts whilst transcribing. As Wengraf (2001) writes, an important part of the transcribing process was documenting my subjective perceptions of the interview, such as my thoughts, feelings and conjectures on the points being discussed. These comments, written in a journal and in the side column of the transcriptions form, in addition, to the interview itself the hard data (Wengraf, 2001). Given new materialism's recognition that the researcher becomes part of the assemblage that they study and so affects the story (Feely, 2019) this seemed a particularly valuable exercise. My notes not only documented my response to the interview but also the physical and material components of the interview. To illustrate this the following is an extract from my notes following my initial interview with Fred:

> *Was particularly anxious about choice of meeting room – cold white room with glass wall (in the interview Fred described this as 'clinical'). Toyed with option of moving to building with more classroom style rooms but then run the risk of students interrupting and large size of room being intimidating.*

Extracts such as these informed the analysis of the assemblage, in this case the physicality of the room affecting my engagement in the interview and Fred's response to the interview context.

During the initial transcribing stage any identifiable information was removed. This included names of friends and relatives, home location and specifying workplace setting. An ethical concern was that in doing so valuable context relevant to the assemblage would be erased. To mitigate against this any relevant but potentially identifiable was presented in broad terms, for example stating a participant worked in a 'health care setting' or lived in a 'rural south west location'. Vincent (2018) posits that transgender participants raise unique situations in relation to anonymity in research given that many transgender people use a name different to that assigned to them at birth, so

that their name may be identifiable to those they are 'out' to and provide anonymity to those unaware of their trans identity, such as family or work colleagues. As such Vincent (2018) suggests that researchers consider the risk and benefits on a case-by-case basis. This was considered for the reasons outlined and as a potential way to ensure agency to participants. However, it was decided that pseudonyms would be used for all participants, selected by or agreed with participants, given the potential sensitivity of the data and that participants may, post-publication of the thesis and possible reports, change their minds.

4.3 Participant involvement

In line with relational-centred research (Finlay and Evans, 2009) participants' own contribution to the production of knowledge was facilitated and acknowledged. Participants were provided with a copy of the transcripts following the interview, this did not only ensure that participants were involved at each stage but helped inform discussion at subsequent interviews. Participants were also offered to read a copy of their relevant findings chapter and were provided with an explanation of the method of data analysis (see appendix C.3) and this was followed up with me calling them for their thoughts. This was not for the purpose of 'member-checking' whereby participants check the validity of my interpretation of findings (Creswell and Creswell, 2018) but rather to allay any potential anxieties that they may have regarding how they had been presented.

This is a particularly pertinent concern for a community who has been objectified and 'othered' in research (Yost and Smith, 2014) and have had little control over how they are presented. Participants were also involved in the analysis of data during the interview, namely through the discussion regarding the meaning of the photographs they brought to the interview. Use of artefacts such as photography are in line with new materialist research ethics and more broadly, queer methodologies, as they enable participants to be

involved not just in the data collection but also the analysis of data (Schadler, 2019).

4.4 New Materialist data analysis

The advisory group were involved in the discussion regarding suitable approaches of data analysis. It was agreed that an analysis which recognises the agency of the participant whilst also acknowledging that narratives are socially situated and embedded in discourse and materiality would be apt. As such new materialist ontology, which is not concerned with the authenticity of narratives but rather the materiality of the world and lived experience (Fox and Alldred, 2015), informed the data analysis. It was felt that an approach which reflected the psychosocial nature of narratives but was not embedded in psychoanalytical practice would be unsuitable as it has been critiqued as being reminiscent of practices which have traditionally objectified and pathologised transgender participants (Vincent, 2018). As the interviews with participants were staggered, data was produced in a cyclical fashion, meaning that each individual's data elements was analysed in relation to each other, and as is typical of narrative analysis, analysis and interpretation of data was done on an ongoing and iterative basis (Riessman, 1993; Kvale, 1996). Data was stored and managed in the password protected software NVivo.

The analysis of data was informed by the process as outlined by Alldred and Fox (2015) and Feely (2019), described below. The research question and objectives guided the focus of the analysis, namely:

- To examine how objects, space and embodied knowledge relate to the formation and expression of identity for those who define as transgender, genderqueer or non-binary.
- To explore how themes, associated with transgender, genderqueer and non-binary identities, such as agency, social stigma and environment, are embodied and / or enacted through engagement with occupations

Transcripts were read, stored in the software NVivo and coded by hand and managed to firstly identify components of the gender expression assemblage; secondly to identify how the components of the respective assemblages worked together to create affects and capacities; the final stage of the analysis was to understand the micropolitics of the assemblage which are understood to exist as territories which either act to stabilise, 'territorialise', a state (such as gender) or de-stabilise, 'de-territorialise' and allow new ways of being and becoming (Alldred and Fox, 2015; Sellar, 2009). This process was undertaken with each participant and their respective interviews in turn. At all stages, findings were discussed with both the advisory group and my two supervisors, who at the initial stages of this process analysed extracts of data which were then subsequently discussed between the three of us.

4.4.1 Stage 1: Identifying the assemblage

The first stage in the reading of transcripts was to identify the varied and disparate components of the material and discursive phenomena that could be seen to constitute and affect the specific phenomena (Feely, 2019) which for this research is the gender expression assemblage. Fox and Alldred (2015) expand that this is attending to assemblages of the human, non-human, animate and inanimate. This involved identifying components within the participants' accounts and components that influenced the interview itself that could be said to be part of the gender expression assemblage. When components were identified the corresponding line number was attributed to them and context provided alongside my thoughts and observations (see appendix C.2 for an example).

Components within the interview narratives ranged from the material to the discursive and were all considered to influence the participants' gender expression. These could be comprehensive in scope such as the workplace but within these physical spaces existed more distinct components such as workplace policies that determined dress codes or the physical layout of the spaces such as having binary staff toilets. Extrinsic to the content of the

narratives were components which also could be argued to be part of the assemblage. For example, the setting in which the interview was undertaken, whether this be a formal meeting room or a walking interview in a setting chosen by the participant did not just influence what was told but how it was conveyed. These components of the assemblage were documented and their relationship and subsequent capacities and affects explored.

4.4.2 Stage 2: Affective flows and capacities

The second stage, closely aligned to the previous stage, was to identify how the components of the assemblages worked together to create capacities and affects that influenced gender expression. As Fox and Alldred (2015) explain to critically explore an assemblage focuses attention from what things are to what it is they do. This involved examining the transcripts to understand how components of the assemblage affected each other to produce capacities relating to gender expression. For example, school play grounds, bullying of class mates and parental pressure could affect an embodied sense of shame which subsequently affected capacities to enact chosen gender expression.

This was achieved by grouping together, in a table, instances of assemblage components, such as the home, seeing how they linked to other components of the assemblage such as the internet and charting the capacities and affects produced in relation to gender expression. For example, using the internet covertly within the family home had the capacity to counter feelings of isolation and connect to transgender communities instilling sensations of liberation. See Appendix C.4 for an example of such a table and charting of capacities and affects. This was done for each interview and then compared across all interviews with each participant and then across all participants.

4.4.3 Stage 3: Territorialisation and de-territorialisation

The final stage of the analysis was to understand the micropolitics of the assemblage which are understood to exist as territories which either act to stabilise, 'territorialise', a gender expression or de-stabilise, 'de-territorialise'

and allow new ways of being and becoming (Sellar, 2009; Alldred and Fox, 2015). For example, within an assemblage, legislation may interact with a specific environment (such as public changing rooms) to consolidate and fix binary understandings of gender or conversely may provide new opportunities for enacting gender. Instances of re-territorialisation were also looked for, namely where points of de-territorialisation regarding gender expression were re-cast and, so re-established, in terms of normative binary gender. Aggregative and singular affects were considered, these being – respectively - organising affects upon multiple bodies or sole outcomes upon individual bodies which can create new capacities to act (Fox and Alldred, 2015). In order to identify these processes, the mind maps outlined in step 2 were analysed alongside the transcripts. This enabled the identifying of participants' own assertions of lines of flight, new ways of expressing gender, (such as Dee dressing in female clothes for the first time) and more subtle, aggregative forms of territorialisation or de-territorialisation such as the physicality and policies within a workplace.

Once this had been undertaken for each participant, data from the 16 interviews were then coded, not with the reductive aim of producing categorising themes but to help identify commonalities across the assemblages. These, along with a reflection of the researcher assemblage are presented in Discussion chapter.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed an analysis of data informed by new materialism and as outlined by Alldred and Fox (2015) and Feely (2019). It was a process which was mindful of the importance of reflexivity on the part of myself and the involvement of participants in the analysis and understanding this process as placing research within the assemblage. It was a systematic process which followed the three stages of analysis described earlier, yet it was not a wholly

linear one as there was an ongoing revision of transcripts and notes from my research journal in understanding data within new materialist ontology. In applying a new materialism framework of analysis gender is understood as an aggregative affect (Fox and Alldred, 2015; Coffey, 2019) of capacities within assemblages and this analysis has enabled the consideration of not just what enables gender expression but how this is affected.

The following chapter will present the findings with each participant's assemblage, capacities and affects and processes of territorialisation and de-territorialisation presented separately.

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the data analysis. Each participant is addressed individually and findings relating to the assemblage, capacity, affect and processes of territorialisation and de-territorialisation are explored. Alongside this, I draw upon the materiality of the research process with the inclusion of journal extracts, locating the research within the assemblage.

5.2 Fred

> *So if I go somewhere that doesn't have [pause] a non-gender specific toilet then [pause] yeah I'm basically terrified [...] am I being seen? Where shall I go? Are people going to say anything?*

5.2.1 Introduction

Fred was one of the first people to respond to the recruitment ad that I circulated via Twitter and the first person I interviewed. Before meeting we had corresponded by email and when Fred had agreed to meet with me I asked him to bring a photograph of a meaningful space or object to the first interview. This he emailed to me ahead of our meeting, it both struck me as a signifier of trust and intent to participate and its image of a solitary tree intrigued me. Like all the participants, Fred was generous with his time and participated in three interviews, the last being the walking interview. The three interviews were marked by his perceptive, thoughtful and precise answers, sincere but with humour, and his concern for social justice was evident not just in how he talked about his work but how it shaped his narrative across the interviews. Fred described how being non-binary trans masculine, whilst part of his lived experience, was not necessarily a foregrounded part of his identity.

The initial interview with Fred was the only interview with all participants which took place in a meeting room at my place of work. My notes from that interview outline how not only was I, unsurprisingly, a little nervous about what was the first interview of my research, but how I was anxious to make Fred feel comfortable, perceiving myself to be not just a researcher but also a host. This was exacerbated by the sterile and corporate environment of the meeting room. In contrast, the second interview which happened two months later, which was in a café chosen by Fred. Here we sat on stools at a bench that looked out of the café front and we talked in a far more relaxed, conversational manner. The meeting held a significance to me beyond the interview itself as it happened a few days after a significant bereavement (the loss of a parent). Listening back to the interview neither my voice nor the tempo of the interview exposed any grief but I am aware of how - for me - it hung there on the periphery of our meeting and even now almost two years on cannot be extricated from the interview.

5.2.2 Assemblage

Over the three interviews it became apparent that the gender-expression assemblage was comprised of material and discourse components: the home and broader legacy of social housing, the workplace and its context in the voluntary sector, legislation, public toilets, leisure settings – namely the gym and pubs, choirs, medical discourse, friendships and societal beliefs regarding aging. The settings of the interviews, the meeting room, the café and the streets we walked became part of the assemblage.

Fred's home was central to the initial interview, not just the home itself – a flat he shares with his partner - but fundamental to this with regards to his gender expression was the history of the flats, having originally been built as social housing. The importance of the home extended beyond the block itself to the communal gardens, as reflected by the photograph Fred brought with him of a tree in the gardens. When asked of the significance of the photograph, Fred

described it as an '*iconic spot*' surrounded by blocks of flats. The tree is arguably symbolic of the communal nature of the housing and the philosophy of social housing something of fundamental importance to Fred. Having resided in the flat for a number of years, Fred described it as being a '*fixed space'*, providing him with a sense '*of continuity*' which not just provided him with security in a city where affordable housing is elusive, but became the only place that he '*can be myself*'. The physical layout of the flats and the context created to some degree a communal effect, personified through Fred's friendship with his former neighbour who had recently moved into a care home. Fred described her as '*an important part of my life*' and for whom many years prior to her move, Fred acted as a '*quasi carer'*. Fred described the estate as '*pretty neighbourly'* citing an example of how the block communicates using the virtual medium of a WhatsApp group. Such communication systems can create a community of sorts, but not one that necessarily fosters recognition as he was later to explain.

In talking about the communal garden, Fred described the flowers and birds which inhabited there and in doing so created a place for him which provided reprieve from the workplace. There was, however, a sense that there were implicit and material boundaries to the tranquillity the garden provided:

> I would say that in the garden I'm always a bit wary. I wouldn't say that I'm myself in the garden. Er, just because I'm surrounded by many, many other people's homes. I don't know everybody that might be looking out of the window. I don't obviously, I don't know the kids in the nursery school, um, so I wouldn't say that I am fully relaxed in the garden but nevertheless it is a space that I love using

Fred spoke of a car park behind the tree of his photograph, where, his '*right to be in the garden*' would be questioned by other residents. The peripheral unease extended to the nursery school in the grounds; Fred described how the children demonstrate a '*curiosity*' around him but one where '*you can't predict how they'll read you. You can't predict what they'll say*'. Fred described the awkwardness around this but felt that it wasn't invasive '*because it's their*

space as well'. This arguably exemplifies how the ethos of social housing, of such importance to Fred, and the physicality of the block of flats that is both private but exposed, creates opportunity for, but also unpredictability in response to Fred's gender expression.

The social and political values vested in the home environment was also apparent in Fred's work in which he works in the voluntary sector in a field concerned with social equality and justice. This Fred describes as a '*progressive field'* in terms of attitudes of colleagues and he describes how '*interacting with people from work is just fantastic, almost always'*. The qualifying statement of '*almost always*' exposes the complexities faced by Fred at work. As a trainer who works across multiple sites nationwide meeting with members of the public Fred can experience unpredictable reactions to his gender expression, as he does within the grounds of his home. Fred discussed how the members of the public he interacted with typically faced multiple social injustices and as such although '*the initial interaction may be awkward*' his gender was irrelevant '*as they need advice'*. Fred relayed instances of misgendering, such as meeting a client after talking on the telephone and the client not believing that he is the same person. He described how this can leave him with '*a really unpleasant feeling'*:

> I'm not sure how you would describe the feeling. It's not quite aggravation [quiet voice] sometimes it is, sometimes it is aggravating. Um [pause] and it's not quite grief or sad reaction as well. I think that emotions, I think that the way it makes me feel is sad but could equally be angry about it as well if I chose to be.

In addition, Fred described being misgendered by others and subsequently correcting them as *'heading off on the wrong foot with people'*. This suggests the re-orientation he has to provide to people with regards to assumptions about his gender. Fred told me how he attempted to mitigate against such situations as '*softening*' the difference with regards to his gender identity in '*order to make myself more acceptable to people*'.

Whilst Fred had a positive relationship with his colleagues his role means that he is expected to travel and meet people with whom he is expected to have '*an instant colleague relationship [...] for that day*'. Delivering training at different sites means that Fred is '*going into other people's spaces*'. The implication of this is that Fred is the outsider within the workplace, but also like the garden has stepped over the parameter into the unknown in relation to his gender expression. Fred spoke of how he has to ask himself '*is my gender presentation going to be an issue?*'. This uncertainty extends to the physicality of the spaces, specifically the toilets within the work settings. Fred spoke of toilets in all three interviews and with a degree of wariness, almost self-consciousness telling me when the subject was raised '*I feel like a cliché now!*'. However, Fred described the experience of navigating binary toilets in this context as a '*big issue*':

> So if I go somewhere that doesn't have [pause] a non-gender specific toilet then [pause] yeah I'm basically terrified. And this is happening at least once week, because at least once a week I have to go to a workplace that I don't know to train people. So, yesterday there was a non-gender specific accessible toilet. Fantastic, I don't care how much you have to wait to go that's fine. Other places there's that decision to be made about which one you use, am I being seen? Where shall I go? Are people going to say anything?

The uncertainty Fred has in entering these work spaces whether there will be a gender neutral toilet and the ultimate lack of them is not insignificant. Namely that whilst there is, however challenging, the opportunity to navigate potential hostility or curiosity with colleagues and clients, the uncompromising physicality of toilet spaces are sites where no such negotiation is possible. As such he is exposed to potential hostilities.

Whilst work was central to Fred's life, and a multifaceted part of the assemblage, Fred also discussed other locations he had to navigate such as going to the gym, and meeting with family and friends in places such as the pub near his home and visiting his close friend in her care home. When asked

about LGBTQ+ spaces, Fred stated that these are places that he does not tend to go to as they are '*not part of my identity'*. Fred described how the local pub was a venue he was more likely to go to with friends and family with whom he could express his gender identity freely. Whilst Fred felt '*safe enough*' in the pub this was still a site where he had to negotiate his gender expression, through once more, the use of toilets. He described how the pub has a traditional background of masculinity, one which has a latent threat to it in relation to his gender expression. Significantly, such masculinity is not solely a reflection of the customers but rather as Fred explained the social and cultural components of showing sports on television. Fred spoke of how the gendering of the toilets extended beyond the signage and presence of absence of urinals but also the baby changing facilities only being available in the women's toilet.

Fred's friendship with his former neighbour was central to the interviews and he described how the relationship had an almost familial nature to it, describing it as '*one of those relationships one doesn't choose, it just comes about*'. Whilst living next door to his friend, Fred described how he was very mindful of her safety being '*hyper-vigilant if there was a noise*'. Since moving to a care home, Fred feels that his responsibility is much less as she is in a safe space with full time carers present. Whilst this move has provided respite, it has opened a new site within the assemblage where Fred has to negotiate his identity. Fred told me how he '*couldn't possibly come out to her because she'd be so upset and she might not understand it*' and in fact his friend perceives an assumed shared gender as enabling Fred to assist her with her personal care and make-up.

> I can't predict how they will identify me but they often will say things like 'oh you're a man' um, that's, that's the most common response but [friend's name] because she wants me to have an identity that means she, I can help her go to the toilet and all the rest of it

This does not for Fred constitute a point of conflict regarding his gender expression as the institutional environment of the care home, so distinct from that which they shared at home, overrode any concerns, namely:

> if I'm helping [friend's name] with something intimate – what I'm normally thinking about is actually health and safety factors, 'should I be doing this when there are people who are insured to do it, when I'm not insured?' rather than anything else to do with gender.

My research journal documents how the interview was a respite from the strangeness of grief and I left the interview completely absorbed in Fred's conversation, a reflection of Fred's gentle and engaging manner. In considering myself, as researcher, as part of the research assemblage so must I acknowledge that this grief was also a distinct component of the research assemblage. The third and final interview happened at the end of the year, nine months after our first meeting. It was the walking interview and we met in a café in a part of London. Seasonably, we drank a hot chocolate before heading out on our walk through the busy streets filled with buskers and Christmas shoppers. The following extract from my journal documents this meeting:

> *We met at a café and had a drink together. Strange I'm ~~shopping~~ used to turning on the tape recorder ~~before met~~ as soon as we meet however it was nice to have a pre-interview chat – talked about how life had been since last interview. I was very aware that the last time we had met was only a few days after V. had died and when I think of that interview that's what I think about but also I think about how gentle that interview was. ~~It was more~~ (Gosh I'm tired – evident by numbers of crossing out).*

The extract above foregrounds the materiality of our meeting, namely meeting for a drink in a busy city café along with customers who were seemingly

Christmas shoppers. The sociability of having a drink together diverged from the formality expected of interviews, signified by the absence of the tape recorder. Further, still the extract research highlights my own role within the research assemblage foregrounding how, for me, grief was embedded within our interactions and how this inevitably shaped our interviews and my interpretation of them. The materiality of the journal itself is apparent, my handwritten entry being peppered with crossing outs, revealing and documenting my tiredness in a way that electronic notes could not. Grief although unspoken was etched in the journal.

5.2.3 Capacities and Affects

The outlined assemblage components created flows of affect, which for Fred were manifest in feelings of privilege and luck, being threatened and safety and the experience of emotional labour. Fred spoke of his fear when using binary toilets and this was not based on a hypothetical possibility but rather is vested from experience, having been on the receiving end of '*nasty language*' in public toilets and having in the past been physically attacked. Fred talked of work and home in terms of good fortune, describing having a social housing flat as a '*massive privilege*' and how he was '*lucky*' to work in '*a relatively progressive field*'. Arguably, the unpredictability of responses in relation to his gender expression and his awareness of the potential for abuse manifested such feelings of luck. In addition, it could be posited that this also comes from a political and social context of diminishing opportunity to access social housing and a being part of a voluntary sector that has waning public funding. These are by their very nature collective and equalitarian spaces which accommodate people with – as Fred repeatedly highlighted – far less rights and choices than himself. Yet, arguably such sense of privilege counters in Fred a particular negotiation of his gender expression. With colleagues Fred stated that it was '*essential*' he was out to them, significantly because he was concerned how potential misunderstandings could make them feel. With clients however, Fred tended to '*err on the side of 'oh it doesn't matter my job is*

to help this person it doesn't matter how they perceive me'. Fred elaborated further:

> I'm there [pause] to help them. Um, they are paying for me to be there so [pause]. I always start to think about is it necessary to assert my identity, does this help to get the goal of increased knowledge? [pause] Sometimes it might be [quiet voice] sometimes it's just not worth it.

This is arguably a distinct ethical consideration from the corporate sector where work efficacy is measured by profit. Rather than considering at what cost to himself such lack of recognition causes, Fred's concern was regarding to what cost to his clients such a recognition would come at. In effect it seems as if Fred had to undertake the labour of deliberation around disclosure of his gender identity in order to spare his clients the endeavour of understanding and recognising his gender.

The emotional labour that Fred undertakes regarding his gender expression instils in him a capacity to strategise his engagement in spaces, particularly those he described as being on the '*borderline*' in terms of accepting his gender expression. An example Fred cited was when he was invited to undertake training in a charity which solely supports women and where the staff are all female-identified. Fred explained how that the staff were '*completely accepting*' of him, however this was the result of him speaking to the organiser in advance and telling her '*this is how I identify, this is my gender presentation is there going to be an issue?*'. Such strategic planning regarding accessing spaces extends beyond the workplace to his engagement with leisure spaces such as the gym. Fred explained how accessing the changing rooms at the gym required forward planning. He explained:

> So, I go to the local gym and that has a completely gendered changing areas there's no options given at all and the way that I currently cope with that is that I very rarely go by myself, so I go with somebody else. We both use the same changing room, strength in numbers, nobody challenges us we just get on with it. But going by myself I would, I would feel much more self-conscious.

Fred explained that there is a gender divide within the gym itself, with women tending to participate in classes and the weights area being dominated by men. Significantly, in the gym itself Fred experiences '*total acceptance*' from the other gym-goers as they are attending solely to their activity. Similarly, Fred's ability to engage with, or at the least feel comfortable in, public spaces such as cafes, theatres and galleries are affected by the potential negotiation with public toilets situated within them. Fred stated:

> Knowing that there is a gender-neutral toilet is a massive issue in feeling welcome and comfortable and just not having to worry about that aspect of things. So, I'm always really excited when there's a gender-neutral toilet! And it's, sometimes it can be just completely unexpected, sometimes they just have one toilet!

Fred touched upon briefly an incident when he was younger when he was attacked and when, as part of the final interview, we were in the early evening, walking down a busy street of commuters and Christmas shoppers Fred again returned to the subject of safety. Namely, Fred explored how, getting older, he has less interactions from strangers regarding his gender. He explained:

> Age does give you an invisibility, age means gender doesn't, just doesn't seem to matter as much although I know that's not true for everybody, some people feel very strongly about the identity of being an older woman but for me actually it made it much easier to feel genderqueer and not, not as strange in that.

Ageing, in allaying the scrutiny by others seemed to enable a relaxation regarding his gender identity, suggesting that validation of identity was not dependent on recognition by others.

5.2.4 Territorialisation and De-territorialisation

There were explicit and covert instances of territorialisation and, less so, de-territorialisation of gender expression and one of the most apparent sites of such micropolitics was the public toilet. Fred described how, in terms of safety and comfort, gender neutral toilets provided respite and did not require him

to deliberate in which gendered toilet he would be safer. The aggregate effect of the public toilet foregrounded Fred's gender identity, he stated that '*it's probably the one thing that makes me aware of being trans or non-binary. The rest of the time it's not a big part of my identity*'. It is inviting to speculate that the disruption of the gender binary of public toilets could create de-territorialisation with regards to gender expression. However, to do so would be to ignore the threat of abuse from others which affirms these as spaces of territorialisation rather than as possibilities of new ways of being. This was of significant issue for Fred in relation to work, that whilst he may work within a progressive field the immutable significance of binary toilets remained.

Toilets were not the only point of territorialisation in an otherwise enlightened workplace sector. Given the vulnerability of some of the client-groups Fred worked with he had to regularly produce his vetting certificate, a form that requires statement of gender identity, as part of a background check of his credentials. Fred also explained that following a training session, participants are expected to complete an evaluation form, presumably as part of a formal organisational quality assurance procedure, and within these forms he can be misgendered throughout leaving him feeling '*really bad*' as a result. Such intra-action between the training participants and a formal method of monitoring quality arguably serves to territorialise and stabilise gender expectations within the workplace.

Territorialisation of capacities in relation to gender expression extended beyond the formal sector of the workplace to, perhaps the more surprising, LGBTQ+ environment. Fred described how singing was an important activity to him but that LGBTQ+ choirs wasn't '*the right kind of space for me*'. He elaborated that this was because he did not '*identify very strongly'* with being trans or non-binary but more so, even with this context of diversity, it is a place where '*voices get gendered'* namely:

> Even if you say, sing Alto or Tenor even though um, technically anyone of any gender identity can sing both of those voices in practice it's really siloed [...] so if I get asked in an email to sing as something else 'oh are you a male or female Alto?'

The LGBT choir provided a safe space which arguably had the potential to de-territorialise gendered assumptions. However, the aggregative territorialisation of the heteronormative histories associated with the choral tradition arguably over-rode such potential to provide new ways of conceptualising choral music beyond the binaries of gender. This territorialisation of gender expression resonated with an encounter Fred described with a close female friend. Fred described how when he'd told his friend that he was considering taking hormones, his friend responded by telling him that '*it would be easier for me to accept your gender if you had a lower voice*'. This statement has the double bind of demonstrating both how his trans masculine non-binary identity challenges people's understanding of gender whilst simultaneously illuminating how medical intervention can territorialise acceptable forms of gender expression. Fred explained how this topic of discussion served as a point of divergence with his friend but ultimately created '*common ground*'. He elaborated that his friend in dealing with the menopause was able to reflect on her own physiology and as such they had many '*points of comparison*'. Arguably, the pharmaceutical commodification of hormones has in this instance served as a de-territorialisation providing for Fred and his friend different points of connection.

There were comparably fewer points of de-territorialisation and this arguably reflected the risk involved for Fred to challenge the expectations of binary gender expression. One such opportunity arose in the unexpected context of the institution of marriage. There is a degree of irony here as traditionally marriage can be understood to uphold, that is territorialise, societal norms with regards to heteronormative relationships. Whilst Fred explained how he and his partner, who defines as non-binary, experience '*married person privilege*' (citing areas such as housing rights) this status also provides a

vehicle in which to challenge assumptions. In particular, Fred explained how this as '*justification from the state that allows me to say 'yeah I'm married, but I'm married to this person and this is how they identify*'. In other words, through correcting the heteronormative assumptions underpinning marriage comes recognition of Fred and his partner's gender identities.

The 'walking interview' represented the final interview with Fred and undoubtably came at a point in the process when a rapport had developed between us. However, the format of the interview enabled an adjustment to the set-up of traditional interviews whereby the researcher arranges the venue of the interview. Fred not only picked the route, and one that was significant to him, and in doing so implicitly asked of me to trust him as he led the way as the following extract illustrates:

Rebecca:	So you said about heading east
Fred:	Yes, yeah. [noise of traffic throughout]
Rebecca:	Now the thing with walking interviews is, by the way I'm completely clueless about where we're going
Fred:	I'm just going to walk [laughs]
Rebecca :	I'll just follow you
Fred:	You don't need to worry about where we're going [laughs].

This was an unexpected de-territorialisation which occurred within the interview process itself, namely between myself as the researcher and Fred as the participant. Fred led the route and the conversation resulted from an interaction between us, the environment and the people and traffic within it. The below is a map of the route we took annotated with my recollections of what we spoke of:

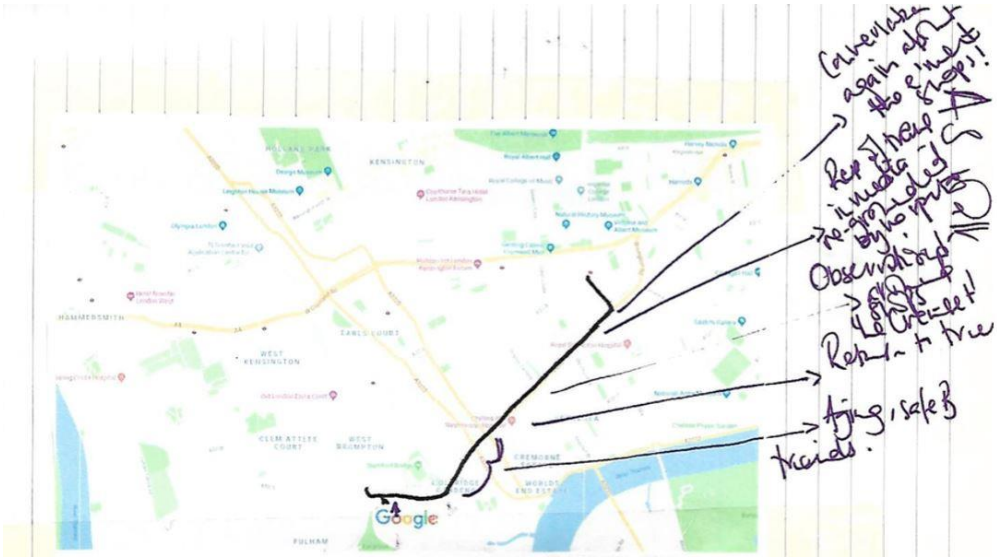


Figure 2: Route of walking interview

The linearity of the walking route is juxtaposed with the eclectic annotations, 'rep[resentation] of trans in the media' sitting alongside 'Le Creuset' (a point in the conversation where we were interrupted by our observation on the exclusiveness of the high-end shops around us). Looking at the map it looks not just figuratively rhizomic but seemingly captures the rhizome-like nature of our discourse – a distinct attribute of the walking interview.

5.2.5 Conclusion

The workplace and home were two places of importance to Fred and places where he could express his gender identity. However, there was the sense in both environments that within the borders of these spaces there was an impinging curiosity and at times unsolicited enquiry regarding his gender expression. Fred's account touched upon the subject of intersectionality in relation to gender expression, raising how as he has grown older a degree of invisibility has been afforded to him with regards to his gender identity, reflecting of course societal views of aging. Fred's narrative highlighted how the workplace, often envisioned as one static site, was in his case multiple environments across the country which were often only visited once. As such he had to repeatedly come out to transient colleagues and this endeavour was also apparent in the degree of strategising he had to undertake when engaging

with valued places and activities such as accessing the gym. Both the environment, its design and physicality such as public toilets and changing rooms, alongside the attitudes of others in them influenced his engagement with the respective activities.

5.3 Max

'It's back to that performative thing. As long as I can perform, as long as I can present in a certain way I feel that I can access spaces'

5.3.1 Introduction

Max told me that they embarked on the interviews at a time that they were trying to make sense of their identity and were on '*a journey of discovery'*, having relatively recently come out, to themselves and their partner as non-binary. Probably the most striking element of the interviews was Max's determination to live their life authentically. This was not only articulated by them across all three interviews but was evident in their self-discovery and transformation that was manifest in their seeking a new job and ways in which they expressed their gender identity.

I first met Max in a meeting room at an LGBT+ centre in London, I remember it was an unusually warm day for April and in spite of our best endeavours the radiator continued to heat the room alongside the sunshine pouring through the locked windows. The second time we met was in the summer in another LGBT+ centre, this time in a meeting room in the windowless basement. Slightly cooler this time but devoid of sunlight, Max took my choice of meeting rooms with good humour. Max picked our final meeting place for the 'walking interview' which was a park close to where they had just had a work meeting. It was December, nine months after we had first met, and the sun was bright and the sky a cloudless blue, a stark difference to the stuffy and airless meeting rooms of previous interviews. The recording of our interview documents how our conversation was punctuated by our sightings of helicopters, dogs and even parakeets. As with all the participants, Max and I communicated via email but Max was the only participant who wanted to speak to me before the interviews. It was an important phone call and Max's questions to me about the nature and purpose of the interviews were gently

inquisitive and reflected the thoughtfulness which arched across their narratives.

5.3.2 Assemblage

The gender expression assemblage that emerged through the interviews comprised of work, clothing, nature, the home, childhood and education, recreation, the internet, heterosexism, legislation and disclosure. Work was a consistent point of discussion and at the initial interview Max had left their long-term workplace, started a new job and then around the time of the final interview had embarked on a new career. These changes in their workplace were prompted in part by Max's quest to find a work environment that enabled an authentic expression of their gender identity.

At our first meeting Max told me how they had just started work in the public sector, where Max described there was a '*bizarre context'* of formality and culture immersed in tradition that served to underline the gender binary of expected behaviour. Max spoke of how they had started the new job, having left a workplace of near 20 years where they had *'an amazing career'* in order to enter a workplace where they believed that they could be more themselves. However, in the initial interview Max spoke about how whilst they could start afresh, it was still not an environment in which they could be out as non-binary:

> I don't feel I can present authentically in the workspace and that bothers me [...] it's something that I think about a lot and I haven't quite figured out how to resolve what to do about it, or that I want to do anything about it

Whilst Max felt that this workplace acknowledged transgender staff '*as long as you're binary'*, namely that there '*is little space for compromise and grey area [...] there is no space for ambiguity'.* As far as Max knew they were the only non-binary member of staff and by the time we had met for the second interview Max was reflecting that they would need to move to a new work

setting '*where I can be me more [...] it just, for me it doesn't feel like a safe environment*'.

The interviews that we undertook together tracked not just chronologically Max's journey to find a stimulating and inclusive workplace, but also seemed themselves to be a significant part of the assemblage that intra-acted with the workplace. Namely, Max discussed how, through these interviews, they had been reflecting on being more open, in work and life generally, about their gender identity:

> [...] it's one of those things I started to think about because of these conversations and sort of looking at your area of research [...] and just by associating these thoughts with what I've been doing and experiencing suddenly I think 'oh that makes sense'

At the time of the final interview, Max was just about to start a new post in a start-up company, a liberal setting of which contrasted with the establishment in which they had previously worked. Max told me:

> They seem to embrace inclusivity. These are, there are new players. One of the first things that they say to you er, is that we have no dress code, you just turn up being you, being you know your best sort of version of you!

However, for Max such rhetoric needed to be evidenced before they would be comfortable expressing their gender identity as non-binary. Max explained it this way:

> Although this job feels like a different space and people say they're accepting you don't *know* that, just because people say that you, you have, you have to test it

For Max it seemed finding the balance between testing acceptance and feeling safe was a challenge to achieve and misjudging it could either cause them to feel exposed or rendered invisible.

There were two distinct environments in which Max felt that they could be themselves. When asked about these Max responded that their home was such a place *'in the absence of people seeing and judging'.* Max shared their home with their partner who they felt *'is very understanding of me'* and described this as a *'very powerful thing'.* It would seem that being situated in a place where they could be themselves required both absence of judgement from unknown people and validation from those who are known and trusted. At the start of the interview Max revealed the photograph that I had asked all participants to bring of a space or activity that held meaning for them. Max brought a striking photograph of a beach and a sea. They described it as:

> It's a picture of a beach but it's a beautiful beach and there's nobody on it

The absence of people in the photograph was significant to Max and they described it as *'a conflicted space'* because it was both *'awe-inspiring'* yet - when populated - *'it's not a space that I feel [...] you can be other than binary'.* Max grew up near the beach and daytime in the summer holidays were spent away from parents with friends there, as a teenager and aware of a difference in their identity they refused for two years to go to the beach which was *'a big deal'.* However, without people and when alone, Max reported that the landscape was liberating *'you can be lost in this landscape cos you don't have to worry about anything'.*

The environment, specifically the rural, natural spaces, and childhood presented a complex intra-action for Max in relation to their gender. Max spoke of how they were asked what they wanted to be when they grew up, they envisioned working on the family small-holding. However, it was something they were, as Max described, *'excluded from'.* Whilst Max felt that this wasn't a *'gender thing'* more to do with their parents' educational aspiration for them, their exclusion from this rural space and familial occupation served to foreground their assigned gender identity and so heighten a sense of difference.

I asked Max if there were any other spaces or activities that they participated in where they felt either enabled to express their gender identity or where they felt safe to be themselves. The closest experience Max could describe was when they went to the theatre or a concert. They explained:

> There is um a moment there when you can get absorbed in the experience and forget about the people, no one's looking at you, they're all focused on - you know - whatever it is they're watching and you can get immersed in that and forget that people are there.

Seemingly, the darkness and physicality of the auditorium, alongside the performance that is occurring, provides a sanctuary from the scrutiny otherwise experienced in crowded settings. More so, arguably venues such as theatres are forums of creativity generating possibility and different ways of being for those who attend and engage.

Max touched upon the internet and the role that it had played in the expression of their gender identity. As with other participants, the internet had provided the means of locating and accessing information about non-binary identities. However, unlike other participants, Max described how the internet had also impinged upon and was detrimental to the expression of their gender identity. Max described how due to the transphobia and '*moral panic'* being expressed via the internet how they avoided social media platforms such as Twitter. The impact upon Max of online transphobia had caused '*more than anything [...] me to regress in my private sphere*'.

Around the time of our second and third interview was the public consultation around the proposed reforms of the Gender Recognition Act (2004) which proposed allowing non-binary people legal recognition alongside binary trans identities. This once more highlighted both the positive and negative impact of the internet upon the lives of those who are trans or non-binary. Whilst

participating in providing feedback on the proposed legislation Max said how it '*scared me a little but because I couldn't detach myself from the worst case scenario [...] you know what is the worst thing that could be written [about trans people] sort of thing.'* It seems that the internet whilst providing a source of information provides a platform where public opinion pervades the private realm.

5.3.3 Capacities and Affects

The issue of visibility framed all three interviews with Max, that is the capacity to be visible provided Max with a sense of agency '*having control within'* whereas becoming hyper-visible was an affect that seemed to sit external to them. Max told me how as a child they '*wanted to be invisible'* and hearing this it struck me how this seemed to be aspirational in the same way some children speak of wanting to be a fireman or an astronaut. Listening to Max it was clear that invisibility was not a passive state but something of which they were at times in pursuit; Max described how, for them, the motivation *'has always been to be invisible'* and that this was about '*developing coping strategies'.* It was apparent listening to Max how invisibility equated with appearing heteronormative and this was in itself a necessary strategy to be safe. Max described it as a product of performativity:

> I'm held back in my job because I'm constantly minding how am I [pause] presenting, how am I being read? Do I sit? How do I hold myself? How do I – it's that constant not wanting to attract attention just not, people not to be reading into me in ways that I can't control.

For Max this was a question of being in control of how people read their gender identity and as they explained '*not giving oneself away'.* This comment could be understood at face value namely keeping hidden their gender identity and not revealing it to others. However, it takes on a more literal meaning when understood in the context of how Max conceptualised their gender in relation to others. Specifically, Max likened the discord between their authentic sense of self and how they were mis-perceived by others to the

concept of '*proprioception*' which relates to the awareness of the positioning of one's body in space. Max told me how this is heightened when their gender is read by others in ways beyond their control. Namely, that Max does not think about their gender identity until gender '*is suddenly imposed upon me'* and assumptions are made about them. Max elaborated:

> It's back to that thing of different versions of me that I can't control and it *definitely* is that case that it's that interaction, it's not something that's intrinsic and it is nothing to do with the physical me [...] but um, it's much more about how people see you, perceive you, treat you and wanting to present in a way that elicits the response you want

Understood in this context Max's comment about '*not giving oneself away'* seems to relate to not allowing others to control the perception of their self and their being in the world. Max described being in control of how they presented within the work context presenting in heteronormative ways was a '*survival strategy'*. They elaborated '*It's back to that performative thing. As long as I can perform, as long as I can present in a certain way I feel that I can access spaces'*. Max described how they felt if they presented more as trans or non-binary that this would close down spaces to them that they currently access '*by stealth'*. Max perceived this as a form of privilege that they '*exploit'* in order to access such spaces. In response to this I noted in my journal '*Being safe is not a privilege!*'. In hindsight I wondered if this comment was a reflection of my own cis privilege in that, what Max was revealing was that they do not take for granted being safe, and are only too aware of the mechanics that render an individual safe or otherwise. I raised this in our second interview and queried if what they described was a strategy by which to keep safe, rather than a privilege that implied advantages that were neither earnt nor acknowledged. This seemed a particularly pertinent point given Max asserted that coming out to people caused for them a '*fear of what is that going to result in [...] I don't know how they're going to react, I don't know how they're going to think'*.

It seemed from what Max described that the performance of heteronormative gender expression at work afforded them an invisibility but came at a personal cost, namely an understandable disconnect from the work environment. Max engaged in work that did not resonate with their personal values in order to fit in and so remain safe. As Max explained:

> If you work in an environment or a context that in some ways is at odds with or jars with your personal values then you can do that, absolutely, you can do it for so long but at some point it will get unbearable

Max spoke about how their job and its environment were '*not a good fit'* to the point that it felt unsafe. Whereas in the initial interview there was a sense that Max was feeling somewhat trapped, in the second interview this feeling of unease in the workplace was perceived as a *'motivator for change'* that was driving them to look for a new post – something that they had achieved by the final interview. This capacity for change was particularly apparent in the second and third interview. Max framed this in terms of authenticity and a striving for honesty in the workplace. Max explained the challenges of 'coming out' to colleagues with whom they had established a working and, in some cases, social connection:

> In my previous job, I'd been there for a long time and I didn't really want to leave the job, I loved the work, I love the people, miss the people. You know I moved away for the new job [...] um it was a tough choice

Max talked in terms of '*pushing'* themselves and this extended to components of their life beyond the workplace. In the second interview Max explained that they had changed their hair style and was wearing clothing that did not align with binary gender expectations as a positive expression of their gender identity. Max told me '*it's made me feel really good, it's made me feel exposed you know sort of it's challenging in some spaces but um, overall it's been really positive'*. Max described how allowing this exploration of self was beneficially '*impacting me on my general wellbeing and frame of mind'*. Spaces were not

inherently accommodating or enabling of this expression of gender, for example Max did not access LGBTQ+ spaces in order to do this. Rather, it was through inhabiting everyday spaces and '*behaving differently in these spaces'* that a queer agency was enacted.

5.3.4 Territorialisation and De-territorialisation

During the first two interviews Max they described how the workplace was an environment that demanded a binary presentation of gender identity. This appeared to operate as an aggregative territorialisation of gender expression and this was no more evident than in the expected dress code of employees. Max explained how more senior staff were expected to attend a formal dinner where men and women are expected to adhere to a strict dress code down where even the '*tailoring of it is mandated'.* Max explained that they did not object to the tradition but rather *'being forced to play a part in it'.* This extended to other work spaces and in informal contexts such as work Christmas parties. Max described how there would be an unspoken dress code at such work social events and to break it would be to '*stand out'*. To conform however came at a more intrinsic, personal cost and Max explained how it would mean presenting so inauthentically it would be as though they're '*wearing fancy dress'.* Max described how the workplace, colleagues' expectations and clothing created gendered spaces:

> [Colleagues] don't use the word 'normal', you know what I mean there's another word but just looking the way 'we think you should, you ought to'. So yeah, those sorts of spaces are troublesome, full of conflict. But as I said I think those are just gendered spaces, that I feel uncomfortable with because I don't feel there's a space for me in them.

The gendering of spaces through clothing was also evident in how Max spoke of the beach that they visited as a teenager. As with the formal and informal clothing codes of the workplace the beach also enforced a conforming to the gender binary whether they adhered to, or rebelled against it, which left Max feeling exposed:

> It's not a space that I feel, for example, that you can be than other than a binary model of what bodies look like and how people behave and that kind of thing and it's also very [pause] um a very naked environment and I mean that in a sense of you know, a lot of how you present to the world or how you control the way people read you through what you wear

Territorialisation of gender expression was manifest in ways that were more unexpected, namely Max spoke of how gender-neutral bathrooms enforced for them another rigid gender construct. They told me:

> I think choice is important. We seem to have got hung up over this thing about everything needs to be neutral – it doesn't need to be neutral it just needs to be inclusive, diverse range of facilities that meets the needs of people who need them [...] we already have a construct we don't need to invent a new one. We just need to be more creative.

For Max the concept of gender neutral is '*another label*' and more so is one that is '*politicised*' and that '*they don't actually tell any truth about who we are or who we will be*'. However, this is not an academic or theoretical position, Max explained how having toilets that were labelled in terms of the utilities they offered (such as urinals) rather than by gender was necessary '*in order for me to feel safe*'. The enforcement of a binary gender expression extended beyond the workplace to social and meaningful activities such as dancing. Max told me how dancing, an activity that they enjoy, served to enforce a gender binary rather than enabling self-expression:

> There's no space for me because the first thing they do is [...] 'men that side, women that side um you learn these steps, you learn these steps'. So immediately there's this thing of 'ok there's no space for me here'

Max expanded upon this and stated that being expected to take on a binary gender role is a '*horrible space to be in*'. Significantly, this is not because Max does not necessarily want to take this gendered role but because of how they

will be read by others engaging in the activity. Namely, for Max to engage in this role would make potential dance partners feel '*awkward*' and that it '*talks to things about consent*'.

Max talked about how as a child they were prevented from undertaking activities that were deemed unsuitable for their assigned gender. Such restrictions on childhood engagement in activities are arguably not untypical, however Max explained how such territorialisation of gender and how this could be expressed impacted on their internal territorialisation of their gender expression in adulthood:

> And I think, because you know, I carry all this, this baggage with me from the past where I felt I was precluded from doing things and I didn't want to express the interest because I didn't want to attract the attention. I wanted to blend in so I would internalise it, do stuff when I was not visible to anyone else. But, if people were visible I'd completely try and be as neutrally – you know just so nobody could see me so I can be as invisible as I could.

The imposition of gender binaries was arguably restrictive for Max and at odds with the creativity that is associated with childhood play. For example, Max spoke about how as a child when they would be asked about what they would like to be when older they envisioned themselves as a gender opposite to the one that they were assigned. It could be argued that childhood imagination provided a point of de-territorialisation, a line of flight from the normative future gender expectation enforced upon them. It seems from Max's account that identifying as non-binary opened up similar possibilities in adulthood. As they told me: '*we have his capacity to change and challenge ourselves and develop and grow! That is wonderful!*'. For Max, it appears that gender identity is in a perpetual state of becoming rather than a fixed entity that could be expressed in any one way.

The issue of safety arguably tempered opportunities for de-territorialisation and the associated new ways of being. However, although few, there were

instances of this in Max's narrative, specifically when Max discussed how they came across the non-binary identity category. Max told me that they happened across an article on intersex and non-binary identities and how it was as though '*a lightbulb goes off [...] an eye-opening moment'*. The internet seemed to provide a medium through which enabled Max to comprehend new ways of being. Max seems to present this in terms of an epiphany, however this arguably represents less an inner enlightenment and more an intra-action between the components of the assemblage, namely Max, the internet, the privacy of their home and the fact of the existence of a wider non-binary community. There was an unexpected moment of de-territorialisation within the research assemblage as a consequence of the third and final walking interview. The interview took place in a small central park which was sparsely populated with a few other people, mainly dog walkers, and away from traffic. We had spotted and commented on the large number of parakeets in the park but it was with surprise when listening back to the audio recording our voices became secondary to the volume of parakeet chatter. As the researcher, it was a moment of disruption and disorientation within – albeit fleetingly – the social and material components of the research assemblage.

5.3.5 Conclusion

Max's gender identity seemed not to be a static state but rather a dynamic site of possibilities and of becoming. However, the workplace, which was a significant part of the assemblage, territorialised a societal binary understanding of gender and in doing so curtailed such opportunities for gender expression. Such an environment seemed to afford little recognition of anything other than a binary gender expression and as such could, at times, leave Max feeling acutely aware of their own gender and so hyper-visible. Invisibility seemed to provide sanctuary from this and was not a passive state but one that was required and achieved through performing a heteronormative gender expression. Whilst this brought with it protection from a potentially hostile gaze this, for Max, tempered their ability to be both authentic in their gender expression and creative in their work. Max's account

demonstrated how space is not a neutral vacuum but has an agency of its own informed by component such as its physicality, culture and history. Yet, whilst Max's account demonstrates how such spaces can compel a binary gender expression, they also illuminate how they can also present sites of resistance to gender expectations.

5.4 Sam

'when you're non-binary, you break the game!'

5.4.1 Introduction

I first met with Sam during their final year at university and our third and final interview was when they had started their first job post-graduation. Sam was in their early 20s when we met and defined as non-binary or gender-fluid, as they said '*depending on what day of the week it is'.* A large part of our discussions focused on the fluidity of their gender identity and what I remember most is the language they used to describe their identity, the agility and ingenuity was both striking and engaging. Creativity was a concept that flowed through all the interviews, whether that was their love of graphic novels or role-playing games (where players assume the identity of a fictional character in imagined settings). Our conversations around this activity was interwoven with discussions around gender and self-determination of expression. Sam, like the other participants, had a curiosity about the research and would ask each time we met how I was progressing and how my interviews with other participants were going.

I first met Sam at a room at their university, then later at an LGBT+ centre in London. The final interview was originally planned to be a walking interview, however due to Sam experiencing a slight injury earlier, we instead met in a café near to Sam's home they had recently moved into with a friend.

5.4.2 Assemblage

The gender expression assemblage ranged from the physical to the conceptual. Alongside the physical spaces (university campus, home, galleries, workplace) were clothes, make-up and creative components such as role-playing games, friends who engaged with them in this and the virtual world. The concept of time was a significant part of the assemblage and the framework of their gender expression. In describing their non-binary identity, Sam described time

as being a *'fourth dimension [...] that's big for me as someone who would normally say that I'm gender fluid, it's like I just, just feel different all the time'*. They expanded:

> Sometimes I feel very, very feminine to the point where I think I'm probably trans female and then sometimes I don't care at all and I sort of default back to the masculine space

Time for Sam was not only a fluid landscape upon which their gender identity flowed but acted as, they described, a non-linear *'roadmap'* which both traced and shaped identity and gender expression. Sam explained:

> I think it's important to remember how people's identity, identities are sort of formed by experience and it's not just where you are now that matters it's the entire road that led you there and I think that all contributes to an identity, people sometimes forget that

The shifting sense of identity was expressed by Sam through their use of make-up, clothing and activities. For Sam this engagement with, what they saw as, feminine objects was a fundamental part of their being which the non-binary label reflected. Namely, wearing clothing such as dresses, associated with a female gender identity enacted a fluidity in gender expression. They stated, *'I always have the urge to do feminine things and it's like this is an identity that encompasses that'*. This felt like an important distinction, namely that engaging in feminine activities was an expression of self which the non-binary label reflected rather than informed.

Whether Sam expressed their identity through make-up and nail varnish depended on the place that they were in. For example, the liberal campus of the university that Sam attended provided some freedom to do this as did their own home to which they had moved by the final interview. Sam told me how *'at my house I can be myself and there's no persona to it, it's just me and*

that's fine and anyone who comes to that house you know is just going to see me and that's fine'. This was in contrast to their familial home of their grandfather where they can only be *'part of my myself there'.* Sam discussed how as a child, living with their religious grandparents, they were not allowed items or decorations in colours that were deemed to be feminine. As a child they had female school friends and '*I always wanted to do things that they did and I wasn't allowed to'.* Sam told me that there were opportunities when they could dress up or play games such as *'playing hairdresser or something'.* Engagement in play provided some opportunity for expression of self however, this did not have the emotional and creative freedom for Sam that is associated with childhood play. Furthermore, Sam's comment '*I'm sure I caused a lot of pain doing it'* suggests a sense of responsibility towards their grandparents, rather than liberation for deviating from gender expectations.

It was clear that role-playing games (RPG) was a key activity for Sam, as they explained RPG is '*a very major thing to talk about'.* Such engagement with fantasy has been important to Sam since childhood when they used to watch cartoons and play video games. Sam described it as:

> a different space where people are free to express themselves and especially with RPGs especially you're explicitly playing a different person from yourself

The space that Sam described refers to a literal place where such RPG groups meet up, for Sam this could be home or a basement room at the university campus or a specific space such as a comic convention. However, more vitally RPG provided a figurative space where like-minded individuals could meet and explore aspects of identity such as gender. Sam described such groups as communities, specifically:

> there's been a space where that we've actually been able to grow. It's, it's a small thing that, based around small communities and, if you start, you can either start your own and see it as your community and start, you know bring people into it

> then it starts growing and it turns out if you have sort of small, outcast communities a lot of them tend to be other outcast communities

The outsider status of these communities seemed to derive from the non-normative identities of those who belonged to them. Sam explained that some members of their group defined as lesbian, gay, transgender or non-binary. Indeed, they told me how the comic conventions which typically attract thousands of attendees had *'lots and lots of people who you know, are LGBT'* in attendance. Sam explained how these provide a *'safe space'* for people to explore aspects of their identity. It seemed that the safety came in part from the requisite creativity of RPG which necessitates participants to imagine alternative identities and landscapes. For example, Sam explained how they could take on characters who could teleport items, a bird person or a person made of fire and as such taking on genderless characters, or characters not of the gender of the person playing them is '*neither the primary concern'* nor '*the weirdest thing going on!'.* Furthermore, the communities Sam spoke about were considered outsiders within the wider RPG communities there being an *'old guard'* within the RPG community who could be *'horrendous'* in terms of sexism, homophobia and transphobia.

Whilst RPG provided a forum for LGBT+ friends to meet, Sam did not feel that LGBT+ specific venues played any role in facilitating their gender expression explaining it '*was not a place I want to be'.* Sam talked about how the local gay bar catered not for a queer identity but instead a night for heterosexual people who '*expect a "gay night"'.* We spoke about a local LGBT+ community group and Sam stated that they *'did not feel uplifted by* it'. This was because of the group's lack of understanding around non-binary identities and the '*assumption that I was on my way to becoming binary trans'.* Sam felt that there was more space for them in 'neutral' venues where they could meet with friends and like-minded individuals. Sam explained:

> I mean my experience would be to go to a regular pub because it's easier [...] there was one place, it wasn't a gay place or anything but it was just relaxed and a lot of

> gay people ended up there. So it had this sort of intra-community reputation but not externally and that is what we wanted. It was, we need, we know each other and we're going to this place

For Sam, the pub like the format of the RPG culture provided a symbolic and actual space for an '*intra-community*' of friends to gather and take form. In a similar vein Sam explained how art communities, both actual and virtual, also provided a space that they felt they could comfortably express their identity. Sam singled out how it was the '*creativity', 'expression'* and '*openness'* that resonated with a queer identity. Referring to both art and RPG Sam stated:

> because that is why you have got different experiences to share and second of all you're already on the outside and so you're making it the outsider's space and together you can make a *big* [emphasis] outsider's space until it becomes a sort of a home and again that's how I feel about fantasies, RPGs, especially with people like me. You can get a bunch of us together and we're all putting our outsider experiences into this outside fantasy or sci-fi and then we can make it our home with that it's all these weird experiences that have come together and I think all these things, all these things are why it's attractive to us. It's escapism in a different way I think.

The gathering of outsiders seems to fashion a fluidity that extends beyond the inert physicality of the space. The freedom of expression art provided was manifest in physical and virtual spaces, namely in galleries and in an online art forum. With galleries it was not so much the art within them that engendered these environments but the social convention, namely visitors following etiquette are '*obviously taught to be quiet*'. The importance of the online art forum however hinged on its interactive creativity, the ability for people to express themselves and its ability for people to connect – *'it's much more of a social thing'.*

By the third interview Sam had graduated and had started a job in a busy healthcare setting. When we met for the last time in a café Sam spoke at length about the demands of the job and their adjustment to it. As well as

adapting to the role itself Sam spoke about how they felt that like an *'outsider'* in the setting. This seemed to be a key distinction from being amongst other outsiders. Here, Sam experienced outsider status in solitude which accentuated their sense of difference. They told me

> I just kind of wish that I fit in more. I don't know how I'm supposed to do that. I always feel like a square peg. I, I mean that's my life, I've always felt like a square peg more like you know a dodecahedron peg. I don't know you could probably force me in there but I wouldn't feel particularly comfortable but I don't know. I don't know if it's just the environment that's getting to me or if it's just having to work so hard so much around people who don't necessarily have the time for me but I have to interact with a lot.

Sam described how the workplace did not feel like a place for friendships and furthermore they felt that they needed *'to maintain a persona'*. They told me how they were drawn to trainee staff or those from overseas as '*they're also the outsiders'*. Sam felt that it was easier to come out to colleagues as gay rather than as non-binary as *'no one really cares'* as '*it's not a big deal'*. The reticence to disclose their gender identity did not only appear to come about because of the lack of understanding from colleagues but also because of the uncertainty about how people would respond. In talking about their job interview, Sam told me:

> Yeah, I think, I think if I - I think if I'd of said out of the gates 'I am not male' to my boss when I was being hired or during my first few weeks probably I'd have been, it would have been fine, but I don't know if I would have been hired at the original – I don't mean it in a like discriminatory way. It's just as in, it's awkward.

Sam describes how such a disclosure would have been '*awkward'* rather than discriminatory however, paradoxically, feels that they would not have got the post had they disclosed their gender identity.

5.4.3 Affects and capacities

Comics and RPG were components of the assemblage that above all others served to create in Sam a capacity for authentic gender expression. They told me how a number of comics and graphic novels in this genre *'overlays'* queer identity with being a monster and how '*you know I like monsters, I like non-human entities a lot more than humans when it comes to fiction'*. They elaborated:

> it's like well if we're not really considered human we might as well go straight to being monsters where we're already rejected but we can make our own sort of thing

Comic books and Sam's engagement with them could be seen to affect recognition with those cast as outside human (if human is considered in heteronormative terms) representation. Such an affect could be seen to create a capacity to feel affinity with non-normative figures and embody a queer sensibility. Sam discussed at length how RPG attracted *'a lot of different people'* and how such people formed '*outcast communities'*. Sam's description of these communities portrayed an active formation of spaces by LGBT+ people whose creative abilities come from having been exiled, arguably through lack of recognition, from normative environments. They explained:

> So, that's why I kind of like it because I find that people – not inherently more creative, like LGBT people aren't inherently more creative but because they've already had to change the rules on some level they're already having to change things and create new things in spaces left behind. That, that happens both in you know, when it comes to RPG rules [...] oh we've changed this thing we've stopped taking these tropes for granted we're going to change them because we're inherently changing the rules we have to create and adapt and make something new

The creativity that RPG engendered in Sam was in contrast with the capacity that engaging in the university campus affected. They told me how they would express their gender through make-up and clothing, whilst feeling safe, they would have to defend and explain their identity to other students. That is,

whereas RPG provided for Sam the capacity to creatively engage with gender expression, the campus environment affected a resilience on their part to assert their identity. As Sam told me:

> I was more um aggressively open, not in the sense of flamboyancy but in the sense of I refuse to be invalidated when I, I express myself. Especially when I was, er if someone asks me any sort of question about gender I would just be direct about it. [...] I can always, I suppose feel safe. Not, not safe for myself but sort of emotionally vulnerable I suppose by the actions of, but usually it's fine and with the campus in general I don't really find myself, like, at risk it's just the constant [sighs] and I just sort of gave up this year so.

As Sam explained their decision to stop outwardly expressing their gender came not from a fear of violence or rebuke but through the exhaustion of explaining and justifying their being to others. This experience was evident later in the workplace also, Sam told me how they had to '*do a lot of explaining of the facts'* and how it has got to the point that they *'really can't be bothered'*. However, such refusal to engage in such conversations does come at a cost to Sam. Much like they felt that they could no longer express their gender on campus, Sam told me how people not knowing or understanding their gender identity is '*discarding things about me that I hold personally important'*.

5.4.4 Territorialisation and de-territorialisation

Sam described how their university had a reputation as being '*pretty liberal'* and told me how there would often be an outward celebration of diversity with LGBT+ flags and posters supporting women's rights. However, whilst diverse gender expression was institutionally accepted, it was arguably kept in-check through comments and questions, the underlying assumptions of which re-enforce binary understandings of gender. Sam told me how there had *'been a bit of harassment*' on campus and how when they would dress in a more feminine way '*I really sort of put myself out there I got comments'* to the point that they stopped expressing their gender in this way. In contrast to the open-minded campus, Sam's post-graduation workplace environment did not

encourage such diversity of gender expression. Listening to Sam it seemed that there were a number of territorialisation processes within the workplace regarding gender expression. The mandatory uniform that staff were expected to wear differentiated female and male workers and had an aggregative gendered effect. As Sam explained:

> female admin staff have the uniform but male don't. They have to wear like shirt and trousers and stuff like that. But it's not uniform per se. But it's kind of awkward I'm the only one who goes around with a regular shirt [...] it's very alienating. It's not even comfortable either. I mean I'm comfortable enough in my trousers but with like my shirt but can I have a tunic?

It was not just the gendered uniform of shirt and trousers that Sam felt invalidated their identity but also that staff who were perceived as male were expected to pay for their clothes as opposed to women who were provided with the tunic. Due to the cost Sam described how '*I'm just wearing a cheap shirt'*. Sam told me:

> I am the one who is wearing the cheap shirt, not looking very - wanting the tunic or the dress. It's so weird to be like 'I really want the dress!', it looks way more comfortable.

As an administrative worker in the workplace setting Sam was paid a minimum wage that arguably left them with marginal options to express themselves. For example, Sam told me how '*I can't actually afford to get into my union'*. Sam also told me how they were working overtime, 48-50 hours a week. In effect this became territorialising, the demands of work – particularly one which is low paid – limited Sam's capacity to engage in the creative and expressive activity of role-playing games. The RPG group itself still held importance to Sam, however it now served more as a '*support group'* of friends who found themselves in similar work situations rather than as a creative forum. Sam explained that '*it's not that it's dead, it's not that it's old passion that's died out or anything, it's just that we [RPG group] need to put it on hold while we get everything else in order*'.

Comic books and role-playing games provided opportunities of de-territorialisation for Sam through identification with characters who arguably have queer, namely non-normative, sensibilities. Sam discussed how monsters and childhood cartoons, such as She-Ra, were points of attraction for them, seemingly showing them other possible ways of being. The RPG community and fantasy games however seemed to provide Sam with an activity that enabled them to express their gender beyond the normatively regulated gender roles. For Sam, RPG initiated a starting point of expressing their gender in a new and different way. It seemed listening to Sam that their understanding of what it meant to be non-binary could be enacted freely within the environment of RPG:

> when you're non-binary, sort of, especially when you're non-binary not just, we're not some enlightened people [laughs] it's just that we have different experience and especially when you're non-binary and especially when you're trans as well you just have this different idea of what constitutes gender signifiers and things and that makes it, when you're around your own sort of people [laughs] in a way it's a lot easier.

Sam explained how the fantasy world it provides is '*a good space for marginalised people in general to expand into'*. Throughout the interviews, Sam spoke about the space that RPG created in terms akin to the expansion of the universe, namely that it did not expand into a pre-existing place but rather in of itself was a state of perpetual becoming. In other words, the creativity that RPG enabled allowed new ways of being. Sam described how in relation to RPG '*when you're non-binary, you break the game!'* with regards to creating and inhabiting characters who are either genderless or are not of the same gender as the person playing them. They elaborated:

> you can break the rules, you know you're all just playing make belief at the end of the day with basic rules so if you just agree that doesn't make sense, that's silly whatever, yeah that's great. You know you start breaking down especially the more stereotypical fantasy stuff then you get more creative by, by er, not by

> design but like [pause] in, by just subverting it already you're having to be more creative so it tends to lead to more creative situations anyway.

Fantasy games such as RPG offered lines of flight from societal understandings of the body which territorialise gender identities:

> I feel like people have um, a very cis gender approach to things they [pause] they experience gender in a very structured way where this equals this and a lot, a lot of transgender [pause] sort of ideas I suppose pivot on the idea of 'no that's not true' [...] you have to deconstruct a lot of those assumptions before you start building back up cos I mean you can be female without you know being traditionally female or traditionally male

Not only did it provide a safe environment for the expression of gender, but it fostered an environment where conventions around gender could be dismantled and reconfigured.

> you're creating by the inherent fact of you're, you're taking away things that were used as building blocks for a long time you know a lot of them are well worn and tired. You can really make some new things, new interesting things. I think especially when it comes to like fantasy, fantasy and sci-fi you know they go hand in hand a lot of the time because they're, they are not our world and when you start taking for granted you know cis, het norms and stuff like that [...] When you stop taking that for granted then you start thinking outside the box a lot more and you can start making things a lot more alien, more different, more fantastical.

The dismantling of the building blocks of gender through non-binary gender expression and their re-assembling underlines the creative rather than imitative process of gender expression that the genre and discourse of fantasy enables.

5.4.5 Conclusion

The role of fantasy was prominent for Sam and within the gender expression assemblage affected Sam's capacity to enact their gender identity. It provided Sam with a new way of being that could be articulated and enacted outside of

a heteronormative narrative. To understand this genre as 'make belief' would be to traditionally understand it as being the antonym of reality and as such imply an inauthenticity. However, there was nothing spurious in this process rather it enabled for them an incontestable and authentic way of being, one which defied the inertness of categorisation. Furthermore, the activity of role-playing games engendered belonging with others who also defied normative ways of being. Outsider-ship in this context provided a collective identity, distinct from the separateness affected by other spaces such as the workplace. It seemed instead that the workplace with its territorialisation of binary gender that affected within Sam a 'persona' they felt compelled to present one that seemed inauthentic to their sense of self.

5.5 Eli

'I found it really difficult to be alone [pause] at any point [...] I found a way to be happy in my own company which I never had before and I think it's a lot down to just kind of being able to be who I am and accepting that and having other people accept that'

5.5.1 Introduction

I met Eli for the first and only time on the morning that he received a much-awaited letter from the Gender Identity Clinic inviting him to his first appointment - a monumental day! The relief and gratitude I felt to all participants for showing up to that initial interview was amplified that day. Eli who defines as trans masculine, was the youngest of the participants that I interviewed and his greeting was energetic and warm which did not belie his evident maturity. When we met, he told me how he would check the post-room at the university campus he lived on each day for the letter and would have to be buoyed by his friends when discovering an empty post box. Then on the morning it did arrive, Eli not only met with me but was able to engage so fully and openly with me throughout the interview. The receipt of the letter seemed to be a pivotal moment and as such it was then understandable that as his journey progressed he drifted from the interview process. In subsequent email exchanges Eli wrote how he was committed to further interviews but attempts to arrange a time to meet faded to silence. It is persuasive to speculate that Eli wished to focus on his engagement with the Gender Identity Clinic without the distraction or scrutiny that participating in this research may entail.

Although we only met once it is with clarity that I can recall our meeting. As with my second meeting with Fred, I met with Eli a couple of days after experiencing a significant bereavement. My notes from that day simply state in relation to this that I was in a '*dull mood for obvious reasons'* and I was worried if this had tempered my ability to ask the '*right questions*'. I remember

also feeling a little fraught as Eli, by his own admission, did not frequently respond to emails and the arrangements for our meeting had been left quite vague and from our communication I had only the haziest sense of who he was. I was concerned about this, as with other participants I had a feeling for their voice and being, and my relief in meeting him was summed up in the note I jotted down after meeting Eli, that he was '*prompt, happy and real'*. Re-reading those words now they seem to have particular significance. Throughout the interview Eli had told me how he felt seen and validated on the campus and his realness reflected the authenticity of his gender expression which was a joy to both him and those who saw him.

5.5.2 Assemblage

The assemblage of Eli's gender expression comprises of his familial home, his new home on the university campus, creative arts, clothing and make-up, the internet, institutional policies, acquaintances, friends and family. I interviewed Eli a few months after he had left home and moved to a campus-based university and these places were foregrounded in our conversation. More so, evident within these places were an intra-action which were fundamental to his understanding of his gender and how it was expressed. His familial home where he had grown up was in a small town where '*there's not a lot to keep you occupied'* and '*everyone knows everyone'*. This home seemed to represent a site of tension for Eli, it was still home to his family who he was close to, in particular his younger siblings (significantly he had chosen to bring a photograph of them to the interview) but was a place where his gender identity was not acknowledged and his '*dead name'* and incorrect pronouns used. This was in contrast to his new home on the university campus. Eli's description of his feelings towards these two places suggested the tautness of their pull upon him:

> It's like a lot of, one of my friends er, she [pause] she basically counts down the days till she can go home again whereas I'm like 'oh I don't want to go home!' [laughs].

> And when I'm home I'm like 'ah I want to go back now!' so it's almost like I've got it backwards.

The '*backwards'* sensation could be understood as a shift in his spatial orientation towards a new home, from family house to campus accommodation. Indeed, Eli referred to campus as '*my space now'.* It appears that the campus offers him the security and belonging of a home and it is a place that he is able to introduce himself with his preferred name and his pronouns are largely respected. Furthermore, Eli has a supportive group of friends '*in terms of going through the transition and everything and when I told them I got my appointment, everyone was so happy'.*

His admission to university was gained through his attendance of, and engagement with, college which arguably free from the confines of school he gained the required qualifications. This was a site which provided more than academic opportunity being a space where he was able to access the internet and explore his gender identity:

> I personally grew up um, not knowing anything really, well I knew there was gay, straight, I knew that people didn't really - well in terms of my family didn't really want you to be gay they'd always say 'it's ok, if you are we still love you'. But I feel like they were saying that cos they kind of had to. [...] so I had no idea in terms of gender and it wasn't until college even that I was on the internet and actually finding about these things I was 'oh transgender is a thing, that's what I am' [laughs].

Whilst this was not explored in any depth during the interview, the college environment appeared to be a critical part of the assemblage as it enabled him to undertake exams which allowed his admission to university. Identifying and coming out as transgender through interacting with these components brought into the assemblage institutional elements. Whilst Eli has within the context of the university campus his name and pronouns respected this is not reflected by the institutional components there. Eli described how his '*dead name is still on, like, documents and my passport'.* As well as these

environments (home, campus, virtual and institutional), it was apparent that objects such as art and books were part of his gender assemblage. Eli described how he would get *'enraptured'* by art work in books and how drawing was an important part of his identity.

5.5.3 Capacities and affects

The intra-action between family home and university campus created specific and distinct capacities and affects. When discussing his family home it became apparent that this was a conflicted site, home to his siblings of whom Eli stated *'I know they miss me a lot and I miss them quite a bit'.* However, home was not an easy place to return to as he explained:

> it's a small town so everyone knows everyone and so they all kind of know me as who I was and I feel like it would be hard for them to kind of [pause] get over that, to app- well not appreciate, acknowledge who I am um, so kind of I have to get, whenever I go back home I have to kind of get used to responding to my dead name and everything which is, it does bring me down quite a lot um, it's probably why I don't like being there for so long. Um, I find that, I find that quite sad.

Eli explained that being misgendered had left him *'horribly depressed for a long period of time'.* This was in contrast to his experience on campus, where introducing himself to new potential friends with his preferred name and pronouns was described as a liberating experience. He told me:

> when you meet someone for the first time and say 'hi my name is [states name]' no one's going to be like 'are you sure?' or like no one's going to question it

The way in which Eli spoke about the campus was reminiscent of his account of how he developed his understanding of and alignment with transgender identities. The internet re-interpreted his feelings from thinking that he was *'probably the only one who feels this way'* to the liberating re-orientation towards his identity, *'oh that's who I am'*. The university campus being a liberal setting, away from his familial home and with no association to his past,

affected Eli with the capacity to present himself authentically and within this environment his gender identity was recognised and validated. In contrast, within his family home articulating his identity affected the phenomenon of 'coming out' whereby he had to right incorrect perceptions about his gender identity. Eli recounted coming out as trans to his mother:

> I had to work up a lot of courage to even come out and even then I couldn't look at her, just looked straight – cos I was lying down when I, just looks straight at the ceiling and, even then when I did she didn't have any questions, like [pause] it quite shocked me because I basically came out by saying that I was going to a Gender Identity Clinic in London and my mum was like 'why?' I was like 'because I'm transgender' and she was like 'aha London is a bit far isn't it?' and that's all she said. I was like, I was really thrown just because I didn't know like how to work with that. I was expecting some kind of questions perhaps tears or like anything but other than that she didn't say anything.

Here, it seems that Eli's mother refused to recognise the content of his message, that he is transgender. The materiality and physicality of the home arguably affected shame, namely Eli cannot look at his mother staring at the ceiling from the sofa that he is lying on. Similarly, Eli's mother having been told about his referral to the Gender Identity Clinic, attends not to the process of transition such a referral will enable but rather to the geographical location of the clinic in relation to their home. This could perhaps have reflected concern for her child; apprehension regarding the medical pathway of the clinic and reactions of others to Eli's transition. Eli described similar experiences of disconnection when coming out to friends and acquaintances whose responses were '*I don't get it*'. In these instances, Eli spoke of the challenges of articulating something so fundamental to his sense of self. Eli's comment that '*it's hard to articulate*' suggests that he feels that the onus is on him as the interlocutor to find the words to explain rather than the addressee to try and engage and acknowledge.

Eli described how viewing art, reading comic books, listening to music and drawing were inspirational in terms of his identity. There appeared to be a symbiotic intra-action within these activities and his gender expression, Eli explained how coming out and being accepted as transgender at university his engagement with these activities changed. Namely, he told me how, now, he was able to get lost (*'enraptured'*) within the activities of reading and drawing alone something he wasn't previously able to do:

> I found it really difficult to be alone [pause] at any point [...] I found a way to be happy in my own company which I never had before and I think it's a lot down to just kind of being able to be who I am and accepting that and having other people accept that [...] I didn't have too many friends back home so when I do go [home] I'm basically just in the company of my family and sometimes it's just nice to get out of the house and just do whatever I want, I often go to a local coffee shop and just listen to music and draw for several hours.

For Eli (like Max), arguably the ability to present authentically in his felt gender and so be at ease in his own company facilitated a shift in his intra-action with the material world including the physical environment such as public spaces and objects and the ensuing activities that results from engagement with these. Such alignment of self, space and objects seemed to affect a capacity for creativity within what was once experienced as hostile terrain.

5.5.4 Territorialisation and de-territorialisation

Eli described how institutions had territorialised his gender identity as female through official documentation such as his birth certificate and passport. These are, of course, documents which are typically used as proof of identity to gain access into other spaces so have a cascading territorialisation effect. Indeed, I was mindful that Eli's university email address was attributed to his '*dead name',* something that he was currently challenging with the institution. The misgendering that Eli was experiencing was having a cumulative effect upon him, he told me '*being called the wrong pronoun or being dead-named the*

whole time [...] kind of takes it toll'. In other words, the persistent misgendering was having an aggregate territorialisation effect.

For Eli such territorialisation of gender expression was apparent culturally, specifically within films a medium which Eli was passionate about. He discussed how representation of transgender lives was critical and validating. However, he emphasised the importance of casting transgender actors in trans roles and cited the example of Eddie Redmayne a cis actor playing a transgender character in *The Danish Girl.* For Eli this undermined the lived experience of transgender people telling me '*I feel like you can't properly portray a trans person's struggle unless you've experienced it'.*

It seemed that Eli's starting university and moving to the campus away from his familial home provided a metaphorical and actual line of flight for him in the expression of his gender identity. The new space, which became his home, and meeting of new people provided for him the opportunity to express his gender identity on his own terms which included the way he dressed.

> Yeah, it's very frustrating because [pause] my gender identity isn't expressed through how I present it's like, cos some days I'll dress like masculine, well however masculine is presented. But then some days I'll just want to wear a dress and be done with it [laughs]. So, I want that to be ok, like I just want to wear a dress or a skirt or something and still be seen as a boy.

In this sense Eli's choice of clothing had a de-territorialising effect, namely expression did not correlate with identity and this was not done to hide his gender identity but rather to present a new possibility of enacting masculinity. However, Eli emphasised how such presentation disorientated others, in particular his mother. He told me:

> I think she has trouble with, cos I'm feminine in myself, I'm not a masculine boy by any means and I'm ok with that, like I'm completely gender-non-conforming um, and

> so she probably finds it hard be like “oh you do this you know, you dress like this, you wear nail polish and do this. So how can I call you a boy or anything?”

This account highlights how for Eli, and other gender non-conforming people, gender identity is territorialised through performative indicators of clothing such as clothing. Furthermore, it highlights how instances of de-territorialisation are met with resistance and faced with a re-territorialisation, in this case a refusal to recognise his masculinity.

5.5.5 Conclusion

The phrase ‘journey’ is one used frequently within discourse surrounding transition, yet it feels apt to use this term when writing about my interview with Eli. It would be dismissive of his past experience to write that I met him at the start of his transition, more apt to say that it was a point where new possibilities in relation to his gender expression were beginning to manifest. The intra-action with his new home at university and the creativity of the campus was instrumental to this and for Eli the notion of family home and its connotation of belonging and security represented a tension in his gender expression. His childhood house which remained home to his family to whom he was close, served to territorialise his gender identity as female the through relations with his parents and his limited ability to access creative activities and friends in the wider environment. In contrast his new home at university was a site that validated his identity through recognition by others and in enabling access to activities that facilitated his authentic gender expression.

5.6 Dee

> You can't because you can't – you're afraid to give things away, you're afraid to, you're afraid to acknowledge yourself too. […] There's a secret side to you, a hidden part of you.

5.6.1 Introduction

Dee, like the other participants heard of the research through my recruitment advert on Twitter. From our first meeting it was clear that Dee was a woman deeply concerned with social justice, her transgender identity quite secondary, a process she went through rather than a tenet of her being. When I remember Dee, I remember her greeting me warmly each of the three times we met and her love of walking which I had the pleasure of sharing with her on the final 'walking interview'.

She was the second participant I had interviewed, and we met the first time at a room in her university in the north of England and when listening back to the interview recording the occasional tide of students in the background can be heard in the background. Dee was in her final year of studying for her degree. I was mindful of the pressure she would be under academically and that this point in her studies represented a transitionary point in her life. Yet, in spite of this Dee was generous with her time, a quality I learnt, that was evident in the close friendships she spoke about with such regard. This initial interview, of around 90 minutes, was the longest of all three of the interviews and in fact of any of the participants' interviews. What marked it, though as quite so different was that Dee's accounts was prompted by just one question I asked at the start of the interview, '[will] you tell me a bit about yourself?'. In what followed, Dee narrated an account of her life starting as a child at school in the late 1970s to the current day. It was a generous and open narrative, yet I could not help notice that it was a controlled one in that Dee resisted any questions on my part that would deviate her from the account she wanted to tell, this was her story, only to be told on her terms.

We next met nine months later this time though at a café near her home. There was a significantly different balance to this interview, in terms of tone, pace and content. Undoubtedly, we had developed some trust in the first interview and there was something companionable about meeting in a busy café, drinking coffee and eating cake together. I had noted at that time how the dictaphone discretely hidden under a napkin, made us almost conspiratorial. This was by far a more relaxed, free-flowing and conversational interview. Although this interview was far shorter, Dee responded spontaneously to the questions I posed and was reflective of her past, speculative about her future and revealing of points of vulnerabilities in her life. These aspects continued in the third and final *walking interview*. The joy she experienced in walking was evident when we met and she chose to take me on a favourite walk of hers alongside a canal; Dee's enthusiasm for, and pride in, her environment was a privilege to share. Listening back to the interview recording it was impossible not to smile at the background noises – canal barges chugging, birds squawking and dogs barking – that laced across our discussion. At this point, Dee was close to finishing her degree and I remember how she lay out the possibilities open to her in terms of work and a new home.

5.6.2 Assemblage

The analysis of the three interviews with Dee reveals a gender expression assemblage that bridged the material to the discursive and comprised of the outdoors, buildings (predominantly the home), the virtual world, institutions (specifically the work place and education), medical discourse and friendships.

The home signified milestones in the traditional, heteronormative life course - namely childhood, gaining of independence and a marital, familial home. Far more so, however, it was a space which both constrained, and provided opportunities for, Dee's gender expression. As a child growing up in the 1970s the home she shared with her family reflected the rigid gender conformity of

that era, however in early adulthood it was a place that, with the help of her mother, Dee could covertly dress in feminine clothes. Until the point of her transition which, liberated her to express her gender freely, the home – whether living alone, with colleagues, or her wife and her children - was a restrictive space that had only provided furtive chances to dress in feminine clothes.

Her school which she attended in the 1970s was a restrictive and intimidating place for a child who was perceived as an effeminate boy and had undiagnosed dyslexia, leading her to be '*ostracised*' by her peers. Dee was put in a remedial class which rather than providing a refuge and place of nurture was '*home for the bullies*' who tormented her. The oppression extended beyond the school building, into the home, the impossibility of meeting academic expectations seemingly synonymous with her inability to conform to gender expectations. Dee talked of trying to win her father's approval through her schoolwork.

> So I'd spend hours, sitting there looking at this thing, just going through this thing endlessly, endlessly, endlessly breaking down in tears a lot of the time but never being able to produce the thing he wanted me to [...].

Leaving school with no qualifications limited Dee's job opportunities and she found work in a factory which Dee described as being a '*sex segregated world where women did the sowing and the men did everything else*'. Dee's account emphasised the gender binary of the factory:

> The rigid structure meant that the men had their tea breaks and the women had their tea breaks and there was very little interaction between us, and that of course that was driving me in the wrong way and it was feeling very alien. I didn't know why but it did feel alien.

Significantly, the factory's enforced gender conformity and segregation only served to heighten the dissonance Dee was experiencing in relation to her gender identity. As an adult, Dee entered further and higher education

achieving a degree which led to a successful career in the corporate sector. However, the gender segregation Dee encountered in the factory was as apparent in this setting where '*all the managers were men*' and the '*women had to call men "mister" and men called women by their first names*'. As Dee's career developed, her perceived identity as a male corporate worker became more established and it was at this point she decided to see a '*sex and relationship*' counsellor. The counsellor Dee described seems to be embedded within the corporate sensibilities, namely reputation bound with shows of wealth and attainment, and certainly would have been beyond Dee's means without her income. The influence that the counsellor had upon Dee in terms of her gender was stark suggesting that she was a transvestite. Rather than providing a space to explore her identity, the counsellor reinforced the heteronormative lifestyle that the corporate sector demanded of her.

> I got listening to her more and she started putting ideas into my head that all I needed to do was to was settle down, find a nice woman [...] and I believed in this because I wanted to be this fantastic figure I'm supposed to become

Whilst Dee knew that this was fundamentally incongruous to her identity, arguably such a construct presented an appealing, although ultimately unobtainable version of herself that resonated with her corporate identity. Such enforced views by the medical profession extended to her GP. Dee told me how in spite of the recently published gender pathway which outlined the referral process to Gender Identity Clinics she was told by the GP that her transition was going to be treated '*our way*'. This translated as Dee being referred to a mental health service with long waiting lists rather than route recommended by the protocol.

5.6.3 Capacities and affects

Dee's return to education in her 30s presented a profound and transformative point in her life. Its genesis lay not in the formal educational institution but in the unorthodox and radical setting of a pub:

> I had become er, assistant pub manager and I was living in the pub, we'd had a lock-in, it was very late there was nothing on television. I was totally bored and I started watching the Open University, cos there was nothing else on in those days that late [pause] and I was watching it and because I'd struggled all the way through my life academically I didn't believe I had it, that academic level of ability and I was watching it and I could make sense of it, see how that fits together and that does and that does 'wait a minute so the answer will be' – and bob the answer was. And it was like a light bulb moment, my whole life in that moment changed as I realised I wasn't thick.

This is arguably the result of an affective flow of the pub, her role as a cleaner, the television and Open University, producing a powerful capacity in Dee. Namely, the assemblage of the pub – outside of the working hours, the television programme which Dee could watch unobserved and unscrutinised established a capacity to realise her potential.

Prior to transitioning, Dee returned to further education and then ultimately higher education, the qualifications from which facilitated a lucrative corporate career. This enabled Dee to live independently and whilst her income meant she could afford a place where she could dress in clothes of her choice, this remained a secret activity. It was clear talking with Dee that her gender expression was entwined with her career, whilst it facilitated her ability to express her gender safely at home it also determined the parameters of expression. It provided the financial security and means to live independently but such security was contingent upon her presenting an unequivocal masculinity:

Dee: So, I got a job in the city and moved into temporary accommodation. Found I didn't like [name of city] but I was earning good wage and it was, it was a starting point and I was earning good money. Um, then I found a house, a flat, I found my first house [names city] and I was able to, not, that was a big restriction I wanted to decorate it in my colours and my themes but I couldn't cos of the person I knew I had to present to the world and I couldn't do that.

Rebecca: So even with the decorating?

Dee: Even with my own private environment, that was really personal to me, couldn't reflect me. It was such a dilemma when you're in that position [...] You can't because you can't – you're afraid to give things away, you're afraid to, you're afraid to acknowledge yourself too. You're doing it but you're doing it [pause] there's something wrong with you. There's a secret side to you, a hidden part of you.

Her marriage helped consolidate a masculine gender affect but diminished the private domain she had available to her to dress in female attire. Dee lived not just with her wife but also with her step-children where she was not just expected to take on the role of husband but also step-father. Unable to conform to this role she termed '*normal dad*' and living with adolescent boys who held her in disregard, she described home life as '*toxic*'.

For Dee, the marital home not only confined her gender expression, with her dressing in clothing of choice rarely and always with vigilance but also heightened the discord she felt regarding masculinity. The familial shared space prevented gender expression and perpetuated social gender roles as it did when she was a child. This time, however, with some financial security she was able to leave home and through work relocate abroad. This new environment, away from her home, family and formal work setting provided Dee with confidence to be '*cross-dressing all the time*'. It was whilst living abroad, unfettered from work and colleagues that she was able to not only express her gender through her home, '*a nice soft feminine environment*' but also wear female clothing in public.

Whilst now able to present her authentic gender identity including within her home, safety remains a significant consideration for her as the home cannot be extracted from the social and cultural context of the assemblage. When we last met Dee discussed how she was thinking of moving to a new town because of a potential job and in doing so she needs to ask herself '*is it a place that would be welcoming for me*?'. She discussed how '*that initial shout in the*

street [...] can escalate with situations where there are young hotheads' and as such there was a need to be strategic in terms of securing a safe place to live.

Work presented a paradox in terms of Dee's gender expression; it provided financial independence which created the capacity for self-determination with regards to female identity in the private realm, but it also imposed external expectations of masculine behaviour. Whilst feeling acutely disassociated from this masculine role, Dee found herself adopting this role in order to conceal her gender identity:

> So I'm inside this environment and I slotting into this role and because I'm trying to hide myself and actually accentuating that, so I'm actually more, I'm trying to be more dictatorial, less co-operative, more and more and more corporate driven, old fashioned - because that's what I thought I had to be [...] to get through this, because people would sense that there was this weakness so that's what I did.

The relation between work, home and marriage arguably created an affective flow that which both produced capacities, such as getting a mortgage, which empowered Dee in terms of income yet simultaneously impelled her to feeling bound to the workplace. Throughout the interviews Dee described her career as being a perpetual '*pathway*' from which she could not deviate undertaking '*evermore complex jobs, evermore higher salaries, evermore [pause]*'. Corporate success was contingent upon her presenting as a man and not expressing her authentic gender identity, whilst simultaneously her engagement in this career created the effect of a reputable masculine gender identity.

> I'm still following this path to be a respectable and have a high-powered job at the end of it all and the jobs I was applying for are manager this or manager that, senior manager this, senior manager that

In listening to Dee describe her pathway, a tension was apparent, namely that she was successfully advancing along it but as she did she perceived her ability to deviate from it diminish. Work encompassed Dee's life and she talked of

'*burning out*', furthermore her leisure activities, such as bungee jumping and white-water rafting, were chosen to bolster the masculine image she felt compelled to convey. I asked Dee if she did something that enabled her to escape the corporate world and identity. Dee responded by talking about how walking provided some respite:

> I was doing a lot of, a lot of walking, very long-distance walks. When I was walking I could be myself and in my head be the person I wanted to be but only in my head. So, walking was a real, an escape.

However, it was an activity that was in many ways bound to the locale of her work. Dee provided a striking example of when she worked overseas, in an oppressively patriarchal society:

> It was lovely, well, sort of lovely - a concrete jungle which again is not great [...] and walking in the [area] where you've got a major road running beside you and a high rise building above you and it's very, very, very linear. It's seven and a half kilometres in total and that's it, you've done your seven and a half kilometres and then you walk back again, get in the car and go home and have a shower [laughs].

The walk is an actual manifestation of a corporate landscape and a metaphorical representation of the undeviating, convey-belt like career path she found herself upon. At this point in her life Dee described how rather than engaging in walking as a restorative activity she undertook it to exhaust herself mentally and in effect limit her ability to enact capacities. She spoke about how 'hiding herself' at work resulted in the need to keep '*pushing herself*' physically outside of work. Since transitioning, walking has remained an important activity for Dee yet its meaning and significance for her has shifted, the focus being on '*enjoying the environment, just enjoying the exercise*'. Dee elaborated:

> I don't think that there's quite the same level of escapism to it. I know walking is still a fair bit of release and relaxation it's less of a problem, 'cos I'm not trying [pause] I

> don't, in my earliest days, when I was first transitioning, I was having to try hard or I felt I used to try hard but now I don't it's natural – well it's always been natural, I just didn't feel it that way and now I am, it's just natural

Here, Dee in discussing walking and its meaning to her since transitioning repeatedly uses the term '*natural*'. It is unclear whether Dee is talking about the process of walking or referring to her gender expression. However, it could be posited that she is referring to both, more so that they are one and the same; walking facilitates her authentic gender expression.

The affective flow between the albeit limited privacy of the home, the ability to use and access to computers and her education in later life established a capacity in Dee to drive forward her own understanding and ultimately facilitation of her gender expression. This she did through using the internet, which provided access to similar and sympathetic communities. It enabled gender expression for Dee by acting as a 'safe' conduit between the home environment and queer spaces in order to buy clothes and access information in a way that protected her from social approbation. Skype liberated Dee from having to find a counsellor who was local to her and she was able to access a professional who was supportive and informed. Perhaps, most significantly the internet provided Dee with a moment of epiphany about her gender identity not unlike the experience she described in the pub:

> And I logged in and I found like-minded people who would talk to me and explain things and I got on to the chat rooms and I just lapped up all the information and gradually absorbed it all so that I realised that I wasn't a, I was transgender I wasn't a transvestite. I knew I couldn't go on any further as I was, I knew I had to do something and I had to address everything, I had to sort my life out, I had to sort me out and I had to sort out my job and my environment.

It has been discussed how material components affected Dee's gender expression, but also apparent from the interviews was the influence that discourse had upon her gender expression. Dee's encounters with her first

therapist and her GP not only determined how she accessed medical intervention but also shaped her ability to express her gender. Such encounters could be said to have shaped her initial interview with me, namely how she discussed and disclosed events in her life and specifically her gender identity in a guarded and somewhat linear narrative. It was striking how since her transition, change of career and home have affected Dee's capacities to act. Namely, Dee spoke of how as she '*has grown to be more myself, I've become [laughs] more of a feminist*'. She described how she has long felt a sense of injustice at how women are treated but since transitioning she has '*lived' it*. Undoubtedly, Dee's ability to express and embody her gender freely also had established and informed capacities to act politically; volunteering for marginalised communities, joining political bodies and representing transgender communities.

5.6.4 Territorialisation and de-territorialisation

It was clear how Dee's gender expression was affected by territorialisation and de-territorialisation within the gender assemblage. This held different meaning however pre and post her transition. In other words, Dee's gender expression when growing up was determined by aggregate affects, namely territorialisation manifest in discourses, institutions and physical environments that act to categorise bodies. In particular, the affective flow of the workplace, education and medical discourse served to territorialise and shape Dee's gender expression pre-transition compelling her into an inflexible binary definition of gender and a male identity within that. Such territorialisation came into effect arguably as soon as Dee started to express her gender in ways that did not conform to masculine expectations such as being placed in a remedial class as she was not meeting the academic level expected of her. Sharing this classroom with the 'school bullies' can be seen as much an act of containing, controlling and segregating Dee's feminine gender expression as to address her educational needs.

However, once living as woman this same process which kept her assigned male gender in check acted to stabilise her identity once more within the binary but this time as a woman. Once living as a woman, it could be posited from Dee's account that there was a re-territorialisation of capacities which affirmed her female gender identity. Friendship was of great importance to Dee, and she spoke with great fondness of her group of female friends many of whom she met on a social networking site for women. She describes them as a '*mad bunch of girls who go off and do all sort of social activities*' which include going to the theatre, dinner and holidays together. Not only did they '*welcome*' her to the group, in doing so ratified, by the nature of the group, her female identity. More so, the group established capacities for these social activities. Alongside, this the medical transition she underwent enabled her to undertake leisure activities she previously was unable to do such as swimming, '*it was great I could walk into the women's changing room, get changed put my swimming costume on, go out and swim and nobody batted an eyelid*'. Dee's transition enabled her and emboldened her to undertake this activity and in doing the activity and entering a female changing room, her gender was territorialised and fixed firmly as female.

In spite of this, it was apparent that there was institutional territorialisation that did not recognise Dee's gender identity or framed it within the parameters of transition. The student loan company refuse to acknowledge Dee's name and gender; she said '[*student loan paperwork] still got my old name on it and I can't change it. It's part of my student loan identity and it's going to live with me for the rest of my life*'. A similar act of territorialisation was apparent within medical components of the assemblage. Dee described a phone call she had received from the Blood Donor Centre in which she was defined by her gender transition rather than her female identity:

> I explained the situation to her and the first question was 'have you had the operation?' and I thought that's a little bit much anyway, why, why do they need to know that [...] so the doctor came on and again similar questions 'so you're post op?'

> 'yes' [...] 'you're on hormones', 'yes', 'okay – I have to ask you a very personal question', 'go on then'. 'Have you ever had sex with another man?' [...] Another man! That's – another man!' It really hit me.

Dee's workplaces combined with the familial home and normative expectations of family gender roles aggregately affected a masculine gender and role. However, territorialisation was also manifest through the informal processes of bullying and workplace bonding. Dee kept her gender identity concealed when working in the corporate sector but after transitioning she experienced bullying due to her gender identity which she was then starting to express more freely:

> So, I'm struggling with my own identity in this place and I was struggling with who I am in this environment. Some of the [colleagues] were fine and were treating me properly, other ones were very stand-offish and treating me as a sort of strange exhibit

Dee described how colleagues in her current setting show curiosity rather than hostility with regards to her gender which she rationalised as a form of bonding:

> They always start off with, 'can I just ask you?' and I, I find it natural just to say 'yeah ok' and then it usually gets a little bit more [...] and then it goes on a bit like that and we then get to a point where it goes a bit too deep and then I, I feel like I can't say no at that point and so then I carry on, and then afterwards it's fine, it's perfectly normal and happy again. It's alright.

Dee explained how disclosing information can be a means of '*building rapport*' with colleagues, when asked if colleagues disclosed such private information about themselves Dee responded that they talk '*about marriages and complications of these'*. However, the depth of disclosure expected from Dee regarding her gender history arguably has little parity with what her colleagues share with her particularly in relation to the risk such disclosures entail. Dee recalled a rare occasion when a friend misgendered her; such instances are arguably representative of re-territorialisation in that whilst

these did not create new capacities that were welcomed by Dee, they did undermine the stable territorialisation that enabled Dee's gender expression. Arguably, this is a form of territorialisation of gender expression, much like the encounter with the Blood Donor Centre, as whilst Dee is accepted it is done so with a heteronormative narrative of pre and post transition imposed upon her. It would seem that the notion of biological sex is a territorialising force.

In previous sections it is discussed how walking interviews provided instances of de-territorialisation within the research assemblage. Whilst there was an occasion during our walk where there was an example of spatial and temporal de-territorialisation (explored in the Discussion chapter) there was also a stark example of territorialisation. Namely, we started our walk mid-morning and in order to reach the canal side we walked through the town centre where there was pub already filling with male rugby fans who were singing and chanting loudly. With unease, Dee and I both acknowledged it in conversation. It was a scene which arguably territorialised gender, the masculinity of not just the pub patrons, but also the sport and the venue served to heighten our own gender identities.

There were clear instances of de-territorialisation, namely specific instances where lines of flight could be ascribed which created new capacities for Dee in terms of her gender expression. Engaging with the Open University programme whilst working in the pub is one such instance and whilst this did not directly affect Dee's gender expression it sparked an affect within the assemblage (such as work place, income, home and confidence) which offered new capacities. Dee's transition was not a subtle deviation from the corporate pathway but rather was a forceful, decisive move; in her own words '*a chasm you have to jump*'. Such an action required new capacities of Dee which were evident the first time that she wore female clothes publicly. At this point Dee had separated from her wife and having re-located overseas she struck an online friendship with a transgender woman who encouraged her to attend a

concert at which she was DJ-ing. This event, her friendship and being away from home opened up new capacities of gender expression and was a pivotal event in terms of her transition:

> now in this country there's a lot of Bank Holidays [...] I got in the car drove to the town and went in to the shop, the department store they had there and I bought a full outfit, I went into another shop and bought some make-up, I went into another shop bought some shoes, lucky I found some to fit, but I did and I had a full outfit and I was ready. The taxi driver couldn't actually find the property, so I had to walk down the high street where everyone knew me in the old mode waiting for a taxi, my first time out. I got into the taxi and off we went, we arrived into this place and it was in a way converted building at the back end of this place and I, we couldn't go any further by taxi and he stopped and said 'right, this is it'.

This account demonstrates the capacities that she enacted, leaving work, buying clothes, getting a taxi and attending the concert which enabled her to express her gender publicly. There is something very queer within the fabric of this narrative; namely it happened on a Bank Holiday when businesses are closed, a fact of significance to Dee given the conformity the corporate workplace demanded of her. Furthermore, there is something dreamlike and disorientating about Dee's description of how she entered the old converted building to '*emerge in a sea of motorcyclists'*. This liberating space with the antithesis of the LGBT group Dee described as staid and inflexible. More so, it affected in Dee a queer sensibility in entering a space which was so outside of heteronormative structures. Furthermore, it was an event that forged new relationships; Dee spoke of someone she met there:

> she supported me, she just said 'come on, you're a girl, you're friendly with me now' and that was it. She's from Poland, she's just amazing so she just adopted me, I'm her sister and that's how we've been ever since and [sighs] she pushed me and pushed me and pushed me from that day onwards.

This relationship enabled a discourse, '*come on you're a girl'*, which affirmed Dee's gender identity and furthermore provided Dee with support that directly

affected her capacities to undergo her transition. Her friend became, in effect, her queer family and subsequently lived with her, as Dee described, '*I had a home, I had a sister who could support me and show me how to do things*'. Finally, Dee's home was a place where she was not just free to express her gender but with a chosen family who actively facilitated such expression.

As discussed, the initial interview produced a controlled and linear account in terms of the chronology of events discussed. Arguably, the structure of the interview, an official interview in a meeting room where we were seated across a table compelled such a formal account. In contrast, the final *walking interview* for which Dee spontaneously chose the route and its duration ('we're going to carry on past that, go up further up the river and er, not sure then we'll see!') could be understood in terms of de-territorialisation in that it created new and different ways of conversing for both Dee and myself.

5.6.5 Conclusion

Dee was the only participant who defined their gender transition in binary terms, namely transitioning from her assigned gender of male to female. It was clear from her narrative that her engagement in activities and occupations served to territorialise gender expression. Namely, prior to her medical transition and whilst living in her assigned male gender she was expected to express her gender through undertaking activities which society deemed to be masculine, such as working in the corporate sector and undertaking extreme sports. These both served to fix her perceived masculinity and provide career opportunities whilst simultaneously entrapping her within a performativity of masculinity. Following her medical intervention and when living as a woman her gender was, arguably, re-territorialised through these same processes namely engagement with activities associated with female gender expression. This summary could imply that territorialisation in some way facilitates such binary transition however there was no ease in this process. There was a line of flight required for Dee to begin this process and this was not a passive,

spontaneous occurrence. Rather, it required an intra-action within the assemblage including friendship, location, a counter-culture gathering and music – creating a profound instance of de-territorialisation.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has presented findings participant-by-participant and has analysed how components of the assemblage intra-acted and produced capacities of gender expression. In exploring these disparate components, it has foregrounded how the intersection of identity – such as age and class – act upon gender expression. Furthermore, analysis has uncovered how objects, activities and space affect gender expression, serving to territorialise binary gender expression or provide new ways of being.

The following chapter will discuss in depth these findings, focusing, as set out in the research objectives, how activities, space and place and the individual intra-act in terms of gender expression for those who are transgender or non-binary.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter draws on queer, feminist and new materialist theories to address the research question. Before the discussion, a summary of findings is presented followed by a reflection on my role as a researcher.

6.2 Summary of findings

Five participants responded to a call for transgender, non-binary and genderqueer people to take part in this research project and were interviewed over a one-year period. Their interviews were analysed and presented individually in the preceding chapter. As a prelude to a discussion, findings will be presented collectively, this is not to diminish or reduce individual participant's voices but to provide a snapshot of commonalities and divergences. Participants defined their identities in the following ways: Fred as trans masculine non-binary, Eli as trans masculine, Max and Sam both as non-binary. Dee was the only person who defined herself in binary terms as a transgender woman. In anticipation of the following discussion it also seems prudent to revisit the research question, namely to understand how engagement in activities and spaces can support, or otherwise, expression of gender identities for those who define as transgender or non-binary.

Assemblages, writes Bennett (2010), are random, living groupings of diverse elements which generate effects that are distinct from each materiality in isolation creating a collective agency. Affects which flow within the assemblage are multiple and rhizomic, opening up becomings (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Findings indicated how there was an intra-action within assemblages, amongst elements such as buildings, legislation, humans and money which generated the effect of gender.

For all participants the home was a significant element of their gender expression assemblage and was a physical place where in adulthood,

participants could freely express their gender identity through relationships with partners, decoration of the home and activities undertaken therein. Whether the home provided an unequivocal refuge from the scrutiny of others depended upon its architecture and the financial relationship, namely whether the home was self-owned, rented or a house or a flat. For example, Fred who lived in a flat with his partner felt safety within it but a peripheral sense of threat within the communal grounds. Two participants, Eli and Sam, were at university and so the notion of home was one that was transitory and polarised in meaning. The university campus provided a space of liberation in terms of expressing authentic and fluid gender identity as opposed to the familial home where identity was either repressed or disregarded by family members. For Dee, university also held significance in terms of enabling her gender expression, but this lay in the opportunities it provided her with to enter a lucrative career which helped her financially to transition gender.

All participants apart from Eli, who had just left home to start university, discussed at length how work impacted on their gender expression. For all, the work environment was a hotspot of binary gender conformity and its intra-action with other elements within the assemblage determined how gender could be expressed. This was done through formal mechanisms such as HR policies, use of uniforms and staff toilets and it was done informally through office banter and bonding. Being in nature provided for some succour from the workplace in terms of gender expression and the internet was, for all, a virtual environment which enabled connections and discovery. There were of course, elements of the assemblages which were distinct to each person such as time and schools which had bearing upon gender expression. Each person also had an interest, hobby, skill or occupation which was particular to them, collectively these can be grouped as 'activities' the role of which and the creativity they enabled and the connections they facilitated, was profound.

The effect of gender was either stabilised in binary terms or de-stabilised within the assemblage, in other words gender was territorialised or de-

territorialised (Delueze and Guattari, 1987). These two processes occur in association, territorialisation consolidates relationships within assemblages whilst de-territorialisation facilitates the emergence of new components within the assemblage and so also new relationships (Sellar, 2009). There were many instances of territorialisation of participants' gender expression and this typically occurred in formal settings such as the workplace or toilets where to challenge such entrenched binary expectations of gender could come at the cost of personal safety or job security. Territorialisation also occurred through the aggregative effect of micro aggressions such as persistent misgendering, comments and questioning by others. The persistency and frequency of these occurrences caused participants to feel exhausted and frustrated to the point of no longer presenting in ways which challenged understanding of the gender binary.

There were, however, significant and profound instances of de-territorialisation when gender could be expressed in authentic and liberating ways. This could be done in ways such as wearing make-up or particular clothing, but these were not de-territorialising actions in themselves but occurred in relation to specific spaces. Of significance was how territorialisation and de-territorialisation affected gender expression for those who defined as non-binary and for Dee who defined in binary terms as a transgender woman. Namely, for non-binary participants authentic gender expression was embedded within de-territorialisation however for Dee, whilst a distinct moment of de-territorialisation opened up a new way of being to identify as a woman, it was then the process of territorialisation which stabilised and secured this desired identity and its expression.

6.3 Researcher within the assemblage

There was one consistent element across all the assemblages which was myself. It is inevitable that researchers become enmeshed within the assemblages they study (Feely, 2019) and as such a reflection upon my role and

how I may have influenced gender expression of others is critical to explore. Undertaking the role of researcher is a performative endeavour (Markussen, 2005), and recollecting the interviews and reviewing my notes this was apparent, in particular in the initial interviews undertaken with participants.

These first interviews were undertaken in formal meeting rooms either close to participants' places of work or study or at the university at which I work (I had noted that *'I was particularly anxious [about being in a] clinical white room'*). The meeting rooms, the tables at which we sat, my dictaphone, pen and notepad all mobilised and initialised the process of interviews. Significantly, two of the interviews were held in the offices of LGBTQ+ charities. These were warm and informal settings and the sofas, plants, kettles and snacks that decorated the room were in contrast to the sterile, officious design of the university meeting rooms. I was aware however, that whilst these rooms may stimulate a more relaxed conversation, that being in a LGBTQ+ designated space may heighten or presume aspects of identity which the participant may not wish to present or discuss. It was also an underlining of my identity as a gay woman, perhaps a gesture on my part to overlook difference (me being cis gendered) and amplify a connection through a belonging to LGBTQ+ communities. Across the course of the interviews I was to learn, that, with the exception of Eli, LGBTQ+ sites did not resonate with participants' identities and in fact for some there was a feeling that transgender and non-binary identities were not understood.

I had entered into the research acutely aware of my outsider status and questioned my right to be doing this research, would I replicate research which had historically objectified transgender people (Yost and Smith, 2014) or was I stealing a transgender researcher's space or funding, or like Nash (2010, p. 134) queried of herself as a lesbian was I 'queer enough' to undertake this research? In other words, should we 'represent members of groups to which we do not ourselves belong – in particular, members of groups oppressed in ways we are not' (Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 1996, p. 1) was a

question which lay at the foundation of this research. Through conversations with the advisory group I realised that these were not anxieties that needed to be allayed in order for the research to progress, rather this was a valid and important concern that needed to be embedded in research design and process.

I queried at one point whether my relentless positioning of myself was actually territorialising and totalising my identity as a cis gay woman. Alldred & Fox (2015) write that participants construct researchers in fixed terms and I query whether at times my presentation in recruitment literature and follow up emails as a cis gay woman had contributed at times to this. This most starkly occurred in my initial interview with Dee who had looked to me for affirmation when she remarked that women like feminine design. As someone who does not consider themselves feminine in sensibility or expression it was a comment that displaced me and rendered me as an outsider in unexpected ways.

There were distinct and simultaneous occurrences which, for me, deterritorialised the notion of insider and outsider relations. When I embarked on the interviews I attended a screening of '*A deal with the universe*' (2018) a film by Jason Barker which documented his attempt to become pregnant. In a post-screening interview in response to being asked what it felt like to have home life documented, Barker responded that he had initially felt some discomfort that the content of his kitchen cupboards were on display for scrutiny but then he realised that the visible crisp packet in the cupboard captured in the background of one scene was as much about his trans identity as any other aspect captured in the film. This statement, as well as emphasising the relevance of objects to subjecivity, for me reconceptualised gender as being part of lived experience rather than identity. This happened at the same time, within my own research assemblage I came to know participants better and perceive their lives beyond their gender identity.

I realised that I had points of connection with participants, such as being from the north, reading graphic novels and being a similar age, which provided nuance to the notion of sameness. The methodological choice of undertaking a walking interview served to deterritorialise the notion of a research interview. There was seemingly a subversion of the power lying with the researcher as routes were chosen by the participants. This meant that they not only determined the duration of the interview as well as its location, but they literally led the interview; as Fred commented in response to me stating I did not know where we were going, '*you don't need to worry about where we're going!*'.

As well as shifting power within the researcher participant relation the walking interview also created a spatial discourse (Evans and Jones, 2011) rather than a chronological discourse. This was evident when walking with Dee whose initial interview had linearly documented her life as pre and post transition. During our walk when encountering a dog, Dee remarked '*Oh I love dogs! When I plan to retire I will retire somewhere where I've got access to this kind of place easily where I can take a dog. I love Labradors [...] we used to have one when I was child*'. Dee's connection of past, present and future though her spotting a dog was at odds with her previously linear conversation, charting her transition, and is reminiscent of Coverley's (2010, p. 14) observation that wandering across a topography can prompt 'a vertical descent into the past'.

I was aware that the process of analysing data and writing the Findings chapter was a process of re-territorialising participants' gender expression. A process which is reminiscent of bell hooks' (1989) assertion that researchers participate in the construction of the other:

> No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know about your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way.

bell hooks (1989, p. 22).

Sharing with participants the Findings chapter was something that I had been committed to from the outset of the research. This, though, did not in any way assuage feelings of trepidation I had when I emailed participants their respective findings section. At the point of contacting participants by email we then arranged a time to speak one to two weeks later. This was around two years after our initial interview and whilst I had been immersed in their narratives for this time I wondered whether they had given the research any subsequent thought and whether they would have seen a static capturing of their words by me jarring.

There were discussions around the accuracy of presented facts (for example Fred wanted to clarify the social housing status of his home) and whether participants had felt that their identities were sufficiently anonymous. I had not really anticipated conversations beyond this yet both Max and Fred spoke with generosity about the meaning the research held for them. Max told me that engaging in the research had helped them understand their non-binary identity and for Fred it provided a reflection on how gender affected his everyday life. I had written in my notebook after the first interview I had conducted, '*is my PhD actually interesting / going to be any use?*'. This anxious enquiry came from querying whether my interview style was prompting sufficient conversation and whether what I had to write – as an outsider – was relevant. Three years on from writing that statement I am not sure that I can, or will ever be able to, respond to that question! Without doubt there will always be to some degree, due to my cis privilege, an element of colonisation (hooks, 1989) regarding writing about marginsalised voices. Yet – and I write this with hesitation in case I have in some way idealised the process – from conversations with participants and my own reflection, the research seemingly sparked divergent yet inter connected becomings for participants and myself.

6.4 Discussion

The following discussion, whilst not reducing findings to themes, draws on commonalities across the assemblages and compares processes of territorialisation and de-territorialisation.

6.5 Visibility, assimilation and recognition

Writing about transgender identities, Jacqueline Rose (2016) asserted that no one can survive without recognition, a statement which could imply that authenticity of identity is contingent on the validation of others. Yet, when considered in the context of participants' experiences it raises the question of what recognition means for those whose gender expression is widely considered culturally intelligible and whose right to exist is debated. With such identities Butler (2005) calls for an ethically bedded form of recognition, where recognition is not contingent on others deciphering and defining identity but rather a process of understanding one's limits of acknowledgement which in turn allows others to live.

Such a conceptualisation of recognition was not reflected in participants' experiences, whereby at times their identity was scrutinised and ultimately categorised or voided. Such experiences resonated with the concept of interpellation whereby in being recognised the subject acquires a social position within a heteronormative discourse (Butler, 1993). This chapter will explore the concept of recognition and how validation and expression related to space, objects and activities. It will consider how engagement in activities and place / space could be both creative allowing for authentic gender expression or necessarily strategic resulting in assimilation to blend in with the environment.

6.5.1 Self and visibility

Western society arguably perceives the individual as a 'closed circle', autonomous and separate from the environment (Kirby, 1996, p. 45). The findings of the research countered such a perception and illuminated the

intra-action between individual and place and space, and how the environment is a constant and significant part of the assemblage affecting gender expression. As Grosz (1995) explains, the environment provides context and co-ordinates for corporeal being, that for an individual to be situated as a subject they must be able to locate themselves. Participants' accounts revealed how space could both serve to locate and dissipate a sense of self and that this was not a static sensation due in part to the unpredictability of people's reactions to their gender expression.

Max spoke of how the beach of their childhood and teenage years was a '*conflicted space'* in terms of their gender expression. When in the summer months the beach was populated with sunbathers, paragons of binary corporeality, Max experienced a spatial dissonance, common to minority groups (Duncan, 1996). There was no camouflage of clothing or activities that was available to Max leaving them with a sense of being vulnerable to scrutiny. Such exposure engendered a disconnect from, and a distorted sense of, self. Max described how the gaze of others rendered them with a sensation of there being '*different versions of me that I can't control'*. Salamon (2010, p.2) aligns the sense of self provided by cultural recognition as proprioception whereby 'the body hinges on felt sense'. Such lack of recognition appeared to dissolve further the borders of being and space for Max culminating in extremes of hypervisibility and invisibility. Indeed, Max spoke of how as a child they aspired to be invisible in order to escape such public scrutiny. Their experience resonates with how the author and social commentator, Roxanne Gay experiences the public perception of her obesity. Gay (2017) writes how strangers view her body as a public space intently perceiving it without care or consideration that renders her with a sense of invisibility, in other words becoming unlocatable to herself.

This aligns with the phenomena of being wilfully unacknowledged. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2009, p. 51), writing about 'gay shame', described that where 'there is an inability to effectively arouse the other person's positive

reactions to one's communications' the consequence is shame. Further, Sedgwick (2009) writes how shame and the resulting unmanageable relationality constitutes a performativity for queer identities, a position which is seemingly illustrated by how Max feels that they are located on the beach.

Resonant of Sedgwick's (2009) take on performativity is Eli's account of how his coming out to his mother and disclosing his attendance at the Gender Identity Clinic went unacknowledged. Eli described being unable to turn his gaze to his mother and as though trying to locate himself, described staring at objects in the room, the ceiling, the sofa. This instance resonates with Ahmed's (2006) assertion that when an observer is disorientated, as arguably Eli's mother was following his disclosure, they re-ground themselves through reproving the observed. Such a process could be seen as placing the observed in a state of hypervisibility yet the consequence of this is arguably a form of invisibility both as a sensibility and manifest.

To deny recognition of gender is, as Gordon (2008, p. 207) writes, 'to choose blindness' which has the result of creating phantoms of those who are not seen. Participants alluded to such opaque existences within hostile environments. Sam described how not being open about their gender at work meant that they were '*discarding things about me*'. This process was again evident in how all the participants described how incessant questioning by others regarding their gender expression rendered them invisible either through the exhaustion of not being heard or through not being seen. This was apparent in Eli's description of disclosing their identity to others '*it's hard to articulate',* or in Sam's case, not being perceived to wear clothing that was indicative of their non-binary identity.

6.5.2 Nature, public and private spaces and activities

The impact of nature upon participants' sense of selves indicates how space is not a passive backdrop (Grosz, 1995; Jagger, 2015). Namely, being outdoors provided succour in relation to gender identity for participants. This was in

part due to the paucity of people and therefore scrutiny but there was something intrinsic to the space itself which enabled this. Fred described how the tree in his garden was one of the few spaces he can be himself, providing him with both a '*fixed space'* and a sense '*of continuity'*. It seemed as though the space allowed for his gender to exist intrinsically rather than necessarily be expressed. A sensibility which is resonant of Grosz's (1995) assertion that the environment has the capacity to locate us as well as lose us. For Fred the tree is also associated with time, both the past and future, and there is a congruence of the motion of time which the tree represents with the inertness of the space within which it is located. It appears that the tree embodies a temporality and spatiality that is located outside of normative values of progress - such as relating to the family and capitalism - usually associated with time and space (Halberstam, 2005). Similarly, Dee and Max relayed how being alone in nature, whether this was the coast or countryside, created the capacity for them to get lost in themselves. In other words, they were able to locate themselves in a place that did not determine their being in normative and binary terms.

Such concord would also perhaps be expected from the home environment. However, with the exception of Max who found solace at home with their partner, this was not the experience of others. The home did not just reflect cultural and societal expectations of gender expression but affected their enforcement. In writing about the domestic duties of women, Grosz (1995) writes about how the home was (and still can be) a site of confinement of women, engendering a sense of dissonance and erasure of the self. As an adult living alone Dee did not feel, prior to her transition, that she could decorate her home in '*feminine'* décor for fear of outing herself. What appeared to constitute a home was not just freedom of expression but also the security of evading scrutiny. The location of home was a site of transformation for Eli, from his familial home where his gender was not acknowledged to his campus accommodation where there was the freedom to express his gender and freedom from admonishment.

The childhood home, as a site of normative gendering (Duncan, 1996) was evident in participants' accounts. Dee described the almost regimental process of ensuring that she did not stray from the path of boyhood such as the evenings spent doing mathematical equations whilst her father watched. Sam described how their play was censured, even the colours that they were allowed to wear and draw with, to the extent that they could only '*be part of [themselves]'* at home. Not being able to locate oneself within the home illuminated the tenuous link between private and public space where there was a seeping of regulation of gender into the boundaries of the home.

Occupational transitions do not just encompass growth and competence but can also be accompanied by loss when social identities are disrupted (Beagan and Hattie, 2015) and as Schneider (2019) identified in their study transgender children are acutely aware of the societal expectations of occupations expected of their assigned gender. Ahmed (2010) makes this point through her exploration of happiness, namely, how objects gain societal meaning and the engagement with certain objects can result in societal admonishment. Ahmed (2010) writes that there is a communal happiness in objects and if one does not experience happiness with an object which is deemed appropriate the individual can become alienated from, and out of line with, a community.

In other words, objects can hold promises of happiness, but it is a societally acceptable form of happiness (Ahmed, 2010). If a child or adult rejects that object they are seen to be rejecting an acceptable way of being in the world, they are understood to be unhappy beings. Ahmed (2010) utilises the phrase 'I just want you to be happy' a speech act often employed by parents when their child announces their difference, such as their sexuality or gender identity, to explore the idea of happiness being a communal promise. It is an utterance which implies that happiness is something that lies ahead, that can be reached through appropriate orientation to objects and activities. Yet being happy in this sense does not appear to relate to joy, a possible consequence of engaging

in meaningful activities, but rather to being perceived as untroubled. If then gender expression is an effect of how we engage with objects, 'happiness' is arguably a citation which polices our interaction with objects and regulates gender expression.

It is understood that there are laws, customs and beliefs which regulate who can and cannot access public spaces (Valentine, 1996). Whilst the movement of transgender and non-binary people is not regulated through law (with the contentious exception of protected spaces under the Equality Act 2010) participants reported the censuring of movement as a consequence of public questioning, rebuke and, in some cases, violence. School for many of the participants was a site which came together with law, discourse, cultural attitudes and social hierarchy and enacted a territorialisation of binary gender identities. Dee described how as a gender non-conforming child she was moved from her mainstream school and placed in a remedial group where she found that her gender expression was kept in check through bullying by her peers. The public toilet also epitomises such contested spaces to the extent that it has become a *'cliché'* (Fred). Yet, this is not a redundant or predictable trope, as someone who identifies as trans masculine non-binary, Fred described his '*terror'* at the potential violence and scrutiny he may face in these sites. Since their conception public toilets have regulated movement, the introduction of female only toilets reflected the rights of women in the workplace but furthermore in segregating the sexes its purpose was to protect public morality (Kogan, 2007).

Ahmed (2019) writes of how the intended functionality of objects determines not just what an object is for, but who it is for. The public toilet arguably exemplifies this point and in being a public space where a private act is undertaken, amplifies this link between function and identity. The toilet as a space, and toileting as an activity, questions the very legitimacy of the identities that fall outside the male and female signifiers. Doan (2016) posits that access to toilets enables transgender people to move through public

space. This was unquestionably apparent in the findings, participants spoke of avoiding venues such as bars, even workspaces where they did not feel safe toileting. However, single sex toilets did not merely regulate movement but served to territorialise binary understandings of gender, within and beyond their setting, and in doing so regulated all gender expression through exclusionary means and 'radical erasures' (Butler, 1993, p. 8). As Fred relayed, being excluded from a public bathroom is '*probably the one thing that makes me aware of being trans or non-binary.'*

6.5.3 Passing, assimilation and recognition

If, Malatino (2019, p. 192) writes, one is not born a man or a woman and continue to live as such then one had 'better become a passable, socially legible version of one or the other'. The following sections will discuss how assimilation, through participating in occupations, can be a strategic necessity for transgender and non-binary people in order to function and survive in heteronormative spaces.

Assimilation through engagement in activities facilitated a recognition which engendered a security, namely safety from scrutiny but was not without a sacrifice of authenticity. As Grosz (1995) argues if a subjectivity cannot be anchored in space because it is not acknowledged, this can drive an individual to co-opt it through mimicry of those around them and in doing so be spatially located by and as others. The result of this is that the subject becomes a point amongst others, rather than the focus of attention (Grosz, 1995). Put in the context of participants' experiences, occupational participation can provide a form of camouflage avoiding the analysis of others but at the cost of authentic gender expression.

This process highlights how identity is strategic (Hall, 2000), and for those who are transgender or non-binary to fit in is to be strategic, to be invisible. As Busch (2019, p. 198) explains 'understanding how to disappear is part of understanding who were are. How to *be* depends on knowing how to be fully present and how to disappear as well'. The significance of Busch's statement is,

aside from the disappearance, is the intent and ability to disappear, namely that this is different to previous discussions around being lost within space and to oneself. Disappearance or assimilation through engagement in occupations, illuminates how invisibility for marginalised identities is not necessarily a passive endeavour. Visibility shifted across the life course and aging seemed to affect the relationship between space and invisibility. Fred described how he felt aging afforded him an invisibility which actually enabled him '*to feel genderqueer'*. It would appear that being, that is having a sense of one's self, does not have to equate with being seen and in fact such invisibility provides liberation from normative readings and analysis.

Butler (2005) argues that we do not survive without being addressed and it appeared from participants' accounts that the performing of occupations enabled an assimilation which provided a form of recognition by others. Whilst it was not a recognition of an authentic self, for example Dee engaging in extreme sports with her colleagues, it was a location of subjectivity within a hostile space which arguably provided safety and a grounding within the environment. The workplace is arguably an environment which is steeped in gendered attributes and often expects adherence to gendered roles. These are manifest not just in the sociocultural gender-roles but in occupational segregation, gendered-responsibilities and gender relations within the workplace (Kerr et al., 2020).

Dee's description of working in a factory in the 1980s exemplified such gendered stereotyping being a place where '*women did the sowing and men did everything else'*. Whilst not having such stark gendered segregation at work, other participants described engagement in work as only being possible when there was a concordance with expected gender roles. For Max, this came from working in an environment immersed in history and tradition; for Fred, through the expectations of clients; and for Sam, working in a place where gender was demarcated through uniform. Nearly all participants recounted how the workplace was such a space which necessitated assimilation and that

this was achieved through engagement in activities in concordance with gendered expectations. There were other gendered public spaces such as swimming pools and gyms which participants encountered. Exercising at the gym was a valued occupation for Fred, yet it was a space steeped in gendered roles and enactments and a place, particularly the changing room, where bodies were uniquely visible. Fred, in order to keep himself safe from potential abuse would attend the gym with a friend, *'safety in numbers'*. Whilst the changing room was a hotspot of binary representations of gender leaving Fred vulnerable to scrutiny, the gym itself was a space where individuals were absorbed in activities and paid little heed to others.

Max likened the process of workplace assimilation to performativity that is they self-scrutinised how they held themselves, sat and interacted with others in order to create the effect of a normative gender identity. Max engaged in a laborious, repetitive and strategic enactment of gestures, activities to create 'the illusion of an abiding gendered self' (Butler, 1990, p. 191). Yet, what is clear here is Max's intent, namely their enactment is so that it '*elicits the response you want'*. Such an observation could be seen as an illustration of Serano's (2010) position that the theory of performativity is requisite on there being an audience to observe, police and judge, such manifestations of gender.

As Ahmed (2010) writes there must be collective agreement for a space to be deemed to be happy and if one is not aligned to objects attributed to being good that person is alienated. Max's account also highlights a paradox, namely that in expressing a binary gender identity to fit in with a normative environment they exposed the artifice of gender expressions which are deemed to be natural. Dee also spoke of how in order to remain safe at work she felt compelled, whilst presenting as a man, to engage in overtly masculine activities such as white-water rafting with colleagues. Ahmed (2019) writes how when an object is used correctly – in this case the object being in alignment with the gender of the subject - it is seen as natural, so too arguably then is the person who uses the object or engages in the intelligible activity.

The consequence of this correct usage results in the object disappearing from view (Ahmed, 2019) and seemingly also the person utilising the object. Thus, arguably assimilation enables a locating of oneself, that is to be seen rather than watched, yet what is observed is not necessarily an authentic expression of self.

Safety appeared to necessitate assimilation within potentially hostile spaces yet there were also other reasons for the adaption of gender expression. Sam and Eli spoke of the exhaustion of constantly having to explain their identity to others when presenting in make-up and dresses. This not only left them weary but also in Sam's words '*emotionally vulnerable'*. Yet, it became apparent from Fred's account that the need to assimilate within the workplace was not to protect himself but rather to ensure his work can be undertaken. Fred, whose work role involves providing advice and support to marginalised and disenfranchised people, commented that '*my job is to help this person it doesn't matter how they perceive me* [...] *I always start to think about is it necessary to assert my identity, does this help to get to the goal of increased knowledge?'*.

In considering his gender expression in this way it appears that Fred conceptualises, in the terminology of intersectionality, that gender cannot be separated from politics and cultural contexts (Crenshaw, 1991). More so, that gender becomes intersected through interactions with others and that these are spatially located through different subject positions (Valentine, 2007). In Fred's case this is apparent in his workplace in his role as an advisor and support worker to those more marginalised than himself. It would seem that a shift in the assemblage, namely the intra-action of the clients he works with within the work environment creates a distinct affective flow. Fred's insight into how power dominates ways of being, within specific spaces, arguably reflects what Rolin (2009, p. 217) describes in the context of Standpoint Theory as the 'epistemic advantage', that is those with unprivileged social positions are likely to have clarity regarding the mechanisms of social reality. In other

words, Fred being marginalised himself within the workplace knows the complexity of oppression when it comes to identity and the position of privilege he held, as being white and in good employment. Whilst Fred felt that the non-disclosure and expression of his gender identity was necessary this impacted on him emotionally. Likewise, participants described the impact that hiding their gender identity had upon them in the workplace; Sam described it as '*discarding'* important things about him and Max stated that such non-disclosure held them back professionally. Dee also spoke of the psychological impact of assimilating, the sense of not belonging and how she would walk long distances to exhaust herself after work which served to arguably silence the disconnect between herself and her environment.

Assimilation through occupational engagement appears to have some resonation with passing, whereby a trans person is perceived to be the gender that they identify with, namely not to be identified as trans. Bornstein (1994, p. 125) writes of passing as 'a form of pretending, passing becomes the outward manifestation of shame and capitulation. Passing becomes silence. Passing becomes invisibility'. This polemical critique of passing, whilst overlooking how it, as Malatino (2019) identifies, can be a survival strategy in hostile spaces appears to resonate more with non-binary participants' experience of passing. That is the notion of passing for those who define as non-binary is arguably a paradoxical one as it is an identity which is not defined by cultural parameters of gender. Whereas for Dee, who defined in binary terms as a transgender woman, passing meant an indiscernible transgender identity and also recognition of her female gender identity. The distinction between assimilation through engagement in activities or instead recognition through such engagement is arguably aligned with the process of territorialisation and de-territorialisation. Non-binary participants recounted how others attempted to define them within binary terms, that is territorialise their gender expression. Fred, who defines as trans masculine non-binary, told of how a good friend of his wanted him to take hormones as it would be '*easier'* for other people them to read their gender if he had a lower voice.

6.5.4 Territorialisation and re-territorialisation of gender

The processes of territorialisation and re-territorialisation appeared to determine on what terms Dee's gender identity was recognised. The assemblage which related to her gender expression was, as Bennett (2010) writes, in a constant state of reinvention rather than repetition as the modes of spaces she inhabited and activities with which she engaged shifted. Arguably Dee living openly as a woman represented a line of flight from territorialisation whereby her transition represented, as Kaplan (1987) writes a destabilisation of the conventions of identity. However, within the workplace in her role as a team member acceptance and recognition by her colleagues was not wholly on her terms. Namely, Dee described how her colleagues would go *'a bit too deep'* in terms of questioning her about her gender history, seemingly conceptualising it chronologically and in binary terms as pre and post transition.

This process is akin to re-territorialisation whereby there is not a return to older territory, for example in terms of colleagues misgendering her, but a new territorialisation of gender identity based on the occurrence of the de-territorialisation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) of her transition. The movements of deterritorialisation and re-territorialisation, as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write, create a circuit of becomings, enacted and evident in Dee's disclosure of her gender identity.

Such processes of re-territorialisation of gender expression was seemingly manifest with LGBTQ+ spaces and cultural representations. Participants did not view LGBTQ+ venues as providing sites of safety, representation and freedom of expression. Rather, these were spaces where LGBTQ+ identities were endorsed and patronised by the heterosexual community and where a particular type of LGBTQ+ identity was expected to inhabit. Sam described how local LGBTQ+ venues were frequented by heterosexual people who expected a particular type of LGBTQ+ identity to be represented there and

where they could experience a '*gay night*'. This is arguably reflective of Duncan's (1996) assertion that the privatising of public space is de-politicising for queer people. Similarly, Eli rather than feeling validated, felt frustrated by transgender protagonists in films as they tended to be performed by heterosexual and cis gendered actors. Both Sam and Eli's experience indicate how there is a cis gendered authorial lens, that is a re-territorialisation of trans and non-binary identities, that provide a potentially sanitised representation of transgender lives.

The cultural and social debates regarding the rights of transgender and non-binary people seemingly served to both territorialise cis gender identities and marginalise those who transgender and non-binary. Indeed participants commented how they only became manifestly aware of their gender identity when faced with cisgenderism through, for example, lack of gender neutral toilets. Participants discussed their unease and at times outrage at how gender in of itself was debated by those proclaiming to be trans exclusionary feminists (TERFs). A movement whose argument could be seen to territorialise gender in that it delineated 'between who or what is inside or outside of the assemblage' (Everage and Bright, 2022; p.6). It was a debate that served not just to marginalise transgender and non-binary people but also render their being in hypothetical terms. The unease regarding the theorising of gender extended to gender theory, such as, queer theory. However, rather than being seen as a threat it was instead perceived as irrelevant with Fred describing it as '*inaccessible*'. In contrast, Max drew on social theory in describing their gender presentation as performative of social norms. Interestingly, gender theory in this instance was utilised not to illuminate queer agency but critique the artifice of cisgenderism.

6.5.5 Occupations, connection and recognition

Participants spoke of the almost effortless process of recognition which came about when engaging in everyday activities with others outside of the workspace. This appeared to come in part from being visible in a way not

usually afforded to them, namely being able to redefine themselves in relation to others and reorientate their actions collectively (Busch, 2019), through activities. This was apparent in Sam's engagement in role playing games, Eli's membership of the university's LGBT+ group and Dee's membership of a women's group which held activities such as book groups.

The social and cultural context of the activities were essential in engendering such affinity and collective identity. For example, the alternative and fantastic world of role playing games subverted gender roles for Sam and the feminine ascribed activities of Dee's women's group bonded participants in relation to their female gender. It seemed that such communal activities were underpinned with an acceptance and understanding of gender identity, but this was not foregrounded in the interaction. As Eli said of his LGBTQ+ group '*we meet up for tea and coffee and we just laugh together*'. This arguably implies that recognition of identity does not lie in its enactment but can result from unfettered engagement in activities which are cherished because of their ability to connect with others. In other words, the mundanity of the activities could be seen to re-territorialise gender expression in ways authentic to the individual and perhaps even re-territorialise the signification of such objects and activities.

6.5.6 Occupational assimilation

The engagement in activities and occupations are posited to engender a sense of belonging, connectedness and meaning to those engaging in them (Hammell, 2014). This research has illustrated however that this was not the experience of participants when in spaces, in particular the workplace, which had an expectation of normative and binary gender expressions. Drawing upon occupational science, such experiences could be said to be akin to the concept of occupational alienation whereby engagement in activities which are devoid of meaning are considered to create a 'sense of isolation, powerlessness, frustration, loss of control and estrangement from society or self' (Wilcock, 1998, p. 343).

Indeed, research from the field of occupational science has attributed transgender people as experiencing occupational alienation (Beagan et al., 2012; Avrech Bar, 2016). Whilst Wilcock's definition of occupational alienation shares similarities with the experiences of the participants, it does not, arguably, capture the entirety of their accounts. Namely, there was a motivation – albeit one which came from necessity rather than volition – for participants to engage in these occupations which lacked meaning and did not allow an expression of, or connection with their gender identity. As Christiansen (1999) writes unconventional behaviour carries risk and it would seem that engagement in these activities provided safety, conformity, enabling them to be locatable rather than scrutinised, and acceptance rather than abjection. In this sense the term 'occupational assimilation' seems more apt.

Assimilation in the workplace for those who are transgender or non-binary engenders an acceptance of sorts but can force an inauthentic presentation of the self not unlike the experience of cultural assimilation expected of immigrants. It is posited that assimilation in this context is whereby a full acceptance of the host culture is expected causing immigrants to experience the integration of problematic experiences into their own actions (Henry et al., 2005). Whilst the performance of expected roles enabled 'acceptance, approval and recognition' (Christiansen, 1999, p. 533), occupational assimilation included experiences associated with alienation such as the stifling of creative responses to problems and issues (Bryant et al., 2004). It is also posited that occupational alienation can create separation from the outer world however, when it comes to the expression of gender through occupations, there was also seemingly disconnect from a sense of self.

The experiences of participants suggest that rather than shaping identity as posited by Stadnyk et al. (2014), occupations determine how identity is perceived by others. Such alienation is argued to be located within the nature and the form of the occupation, but also drawing upon its Marxist roots, the

environment within which the occupation occurs (Bryant, 2016). The spatial context of occupational assimilation was evident from participants' accounts, namely that activities undertaken, for example, in the workplace such as having a cup of tea with colleagues were experienced very differently in spaces, such as LGBTQ+ common rooms on campus. This highlights the importance of the collective nature of occupations in enabling recognition. As Bryant et al. (2004) identified a sense of belonging can diminish alienation.

6.6 Creativity, being queer and occupational becoming

This section will now address the creative process of undertaking activities and occupying spaces and how this related to expression of gender identity. Creativity is understood as a process from which the parameters of conventional thinking can be escaped (Sternberg, 2006). The writer and philosopher Susan Sontag (1977, p. 9) considered creativity from the context of photography and described how the process of taking photographs puts the photographer in relation to the world and 'makes real what one is experiencing'. In other words, it could be argued that creative endeavours can orientate oneself to and in the world, an alignment which for those who are transgender or non-binary may not be the norm. Yet, for those who are transgender or non-binary creative ways of relating to the world can be as much about being seen in ways other than through a normative lens as seeing environments from a new perspective.

Creativity is understood to be dependent upon motivation, risk taking and the environment (Sternberg, 2006). Considering this in the context of transgender and non-binary identities it could be posited that risk-taking and motivation are intrinsically linked, that is to be recognised is to express one's authentic gender identity which is rarely without risk. Central to participants' ability to engage in a creative expression of self was the space within which such actions were undertaken. This passage will explore how creative gender expression

was necessitated by heteronormative and hostile environments and how also supportive spaces were needed to recognise such gender expressions.

6.6.1 Creativity and queer agency

It is prudent to make the distinction between activities which are understood to be inherently creative, such as the 'arts' and those activities, sometimes mundane, which are undertaken with creativity. Whilst activities understood as being creative did provide opportunities for inventive expression, such as drawing for Sam and Eli, their traditional foundations could also replicate binary understandings of gender which stifled creativity for non-binary participants.

Both Fred and Max who enjoyed singing and dancing respectively, stated that the forums in which they did this had no place for expression of their non-binary identities. Max who attended dance classes explained that the lessons were structured upon male and female roles and that there was '*no space for me'*. Likewise, Fred stated that the LGBTQ+ choir he attended was not '*the right kind of space for me'* because '*voices get gendered'*. It is significant that for both Fred and Max, exclusion from an activity imbued the spaces it occurred in with enmity and it became a both a literal and metaphorical site which prohibited self-expression. Both experiences illuminate how even activities deemed to be creative can insidiously be embedded with binary gender norms and that the very engagement in them replicates and enforces such structures. The need to exist and express a gender identity beyond the binary imbues a queerness to such non-binary identities (Edelman, 2004). Queer agency in and of itself is arguably inherently creative, as it not only exposes reality but as Butler (2010) contests in relation to transgender identities, can reconstitute a new form of reality.

Ahmed (2019) writes that the queer use of objects is when things are used in ways other than they were intended or are used by those for whom they were not intended. This is not, though, to presume that humans possess the agency

and that objects are inert in engendering the effect of gender, as Bennett (2010, p. 6) writes 'thing power: the curious ability of inanimate things to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle'. For participants, particularly those who defined as non-binary, when there was an alignment between spaces, object and intentions a creative and queer affect appeared to be constituted which enabled authentic gender expression.

For Sam wearing dresses and nail varnish could be an expression of their identity but they only felt safe doing so on their university campus where their non-binary identity was recognised. The shifting meaning that walking held for Dee pre and post transition arguably illuminates how the agency of assemblages is a collective rather than individualistic one. Namely, when expressing her identity as a man, Dee undertook long walks as part of the process of '*pushing'* herself to escape from and numb the realities of living as a man. After transitioning, walking retained its importance for Dee but its meaning had changed it does not hold the same '*escapism'* rather it is a way of connecting to the environment. The transition in meaning of walking seemed to intra-act with the change in Dee's gender expression. Schneider et al. (2019) wrote how gender transition correlates with occupational transition and this finding arguably develops this point as it suggests that the meaning of occupation can transition alongside gender expression.

The relationship between creativity and gender expression appeared to be a reciprocal one in that not having one's authentic gender identity recognised encumbered attempts at creativity. Eli, prior to leaving home where his trans identity was not acknowledged, felt unable to focus on solitary activities such as reading and drawing. Yet, when leaving home, he was '*enraptured'* in these activities spending time on his own listening to music and drawing '*for several hours'*. The shift in physical environment from familial home to university clearly affected such a creative shift his acceptance by self and others seemed to engender a queer agency.

It could be assumed that transgender and non-binary people who are unable to express their gender identity are experiencing a form of occupational alienation in regard to the normative gender identity they are forced to perform. Such alienation of gender expression leaches any joy or meaning from their engagement with environments and activities. In other words, the estrangement that they are experiencing from themselves (Bryant, 2016) has bearing on their ability to connect with activities which enable an expression of self.

6.6.2 Epiphanies and lines of flight

In contrast, creative endeavours were associated with the liberation of gender expression for participants, in that they enabled 'joyful estrangement' from binary gender categories (Malatino, 2019, p. 197). These moments of emancipation can be linked to de-territorialisation which for Kaplan (1987) is associated with the imagination and escape. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) ascribed such instances of change within an assemblage as a 'line of flight'. These lines of flight can provide both fleeting and profound moments of 'gender disruption' for transgender and non-binary people (Fournier, 2014, p. 121). Such line of flight resonates with the notion of epiphanies whereby a seemingly innocuous event can trigger an enduring revelation about one's being in the world (Miller and de Boca, 2001) Epiphanies in participants' accounts were points of transformative realisations regarding their gender identity which appeared to be nested within everyday actions.

Ahmed (2017) describes such instances of clarity as feeling 'magical' implying they are somehow ephemerally delivered to a subject. Instead, such moments of potential do not originate from human initiative but rather the disposition of things that together in an assemblage create a vibrant and dynamic force (Bennett, 2010). Understanding the material and cultural influence upon gender illuminates how such realisations are not so much the unprompted realisation of an unattended lifelong thought, but the collective effect of assemblages. Such lines of flight in relation to gender identity were apparent

in the accounts of Dee, Max and Eli and moments significantly these occurred in relation to the virtual environment. It was whilst roaming the internet that they encountered the terms non-binary and in Dee's case, transgender and people who embodied these identities. Dee, Max and Eli were, for the first time in their lives, able to locate themselves. Whilst providing a realisation of an identity, the process in which this occurred namely roaming the internet through potentially inexhaustible searches calls to mind the image of the nomadic figure that is one who is embarking on lines of flight (Malatino, 2014).

6.6.3 Nomadic becomings

Nomadic figures are said to be in perpetual states of becoming, a concept which challenges the notion of the body as static and in doing so questions the stability of power structures associated with such beliefs (Garner, 2014). For non-binary participants the sense of becoming was profound part of their identity. Max appeared to frame their gender identity in such terms, the wonder of non-binary identity for them was that it embodied the '*capacity to […] develop and grow'*. Time was a significant aspect of participants' conceptualisation of their gender identity and as such how they chose to express it. Sam described time as the '*fourth dimension'* of their gender identity explaining how their gender was not inert but was in a constant flow. This resonated with Max's sense of their gender identity being in a perpetual state of becoming. For Sam and also for Eli, how they expressed their gender identity was not static but would change from being masculine to feminine whilst wearing make-up such as nail varnish.

The nomadic becoming is a process of intense interconnectedness and in terms which resonate with non-binary identities is not a result of reproduction or imitation but rather proximity to other components within an assemblage (Braidotti, 2011). The defiant refusal to imitate gender binaries simultaneously outcasts and liberates those who define as non-binary. As Sam explained '*when you're non-binary, you break the game!'*. In other words, being non-binary both

defies and exposes the heterosexual matrix of discourse which both fixes and naturalises binary understandings of gender (Butler, 1990). Sam's engagement with the activity of role-playing games (RPG) facilitated a creative expression of identity. Sam described being non-binary as the *'taking away'* of things that are used as the building blocks of gender, reminiscent of Butler's (1991) assertion that gender is an imitation of which there is no original. Sam's playing of RPG seemingly enabled them to restructure a gender expression through the activity that were not modelled on binary tropes.

The roles adopted as part of engaging in RPG enabled temporary, fictional ways of being reminiscent of Braidotti's (2011) philosophy of 'as if'. Namely the process of interconnectedness rather than reproduction. The practice of 'as if' is not a process that serves as an end in itself but rather its enacting affirms the fluidity of boundaries and opens up strategies where alternative means of agency can occur (Braidotti, 2011). Sam's engagement in RPG has opened and affected a queer agency in relation to their gender expression: '*you start thinking outside the box a lot more and you can start making things a lot more alien, more different, more fantastical*'.

It could be argued that whilst this engagement in the activity facilitated new ways of being, the reality for non-binary people is that such radical gender expression is met with social resistance. This is evident in Sam and Eli's accounts of admonishment and abuse as a result of wearing clothing not perceived to be appropriate. It seems that, as Deleuze and Parnet (2007, p. 182), write such lines of flight can turn out 'badly' not because they are imaginary but 'because they are real and move within reality'. In describing their position to society Sam stated their affinity to monsters, *'I like monsters, I like non-human entities a lot more than human'.* For Sam the figure of the monster had overlays with queer identities. Koch-Rien (2014) posits that when trans people are cast as less than human, the monster can become the figure of choice, one in which alienation can be recast as agency. Yet for Maratino (2019) the monster is not the trope of the outsider but one which exists within

and who resists assimilation. Activities such as RPG and drawing enabled a metaphorical means of self-conceptualisation and an emancipation from binary ways of being.

6.6.4 Queer spaces

The right to move within space is not an equitable one. Public spaces are understood to be heterosexual by default (Nash, 2011) and if one is white and male the movement within private and public spaces is done with legitimacy and safety (Duncan, 1996). Indeed, participants described a tense, sometimes strategic, negotiation with accessing space that, if not presenting as hostile to them had the potential to present such a threat.

This peripheral sense of scrutiny by others in the environment was articulated by Fred who described how his home and the communal garden was surrounded by other people's homes opening him up to scrutiny and the unpredictability of how he will be read. Such experiences call to mind Braidotti's (2011) notion of the nomadic figure who trespasses upon space. Yet, unlike Braidotti's conceptualisation there is little desire and drive to do this in these accounts, the threat of danger appears too real. Rather, there is a sense of being excluded, of having boundaries encroaching upon one's freedom to roam.

Engagement in activities could transform relation to space and dissolve such boundaries. Max and Sam spoke about how galleries and theatres were important spaces in which they could authentically express their identities. Rather than this safety being affected due to creative endeavours, it seems to have been produced through an intra-action of the physicality of the space and the materiality of the art which has the capacity to captivate attention. Undoubtedly, the art on display or the drama being enacted held the gaze of audiences so allaying feelings of scrutiny, but the activity itself of observing art held a transformative quality which dissolved the exclusionary boundaries and affected a freedom to expand into that space.

Queer spaces are understood to be sites of resistance, spaces where those who operate outside of heteronormative and binary LGBT structures can exist and create rather than assimilate (Nash, 2011; Stella, 2012). Such spatialisation of queer identity occurred for Sam when meeting with others to engage in RPG. Sam described how playing RPG, activities can provide '*space for marginalised people [...] to expand into'.* It was perhaps most starkly presented in Dee's account of when she first wore women's clothing in public. It was significant that the setting for this pivotal event occurred in a derelict building as spaces which are neither private nor public can be subject to de-territorialisation processes (Duncan, 1996).

This event marked a clear line of flight for Dee as it transformed the trajectory of her gender expression from presenting as male to living her authentic female gender. Dee's ability to dress this way came from a place of intent on her part but cannot be extracted from the space in which it occurred, namely at a music gathering held in a derelict building. It was not a queer space by design, in that it was not specifically for LGBTQ+ people, but there was an incongruence between the space and those there. Arguably, the intersecting of identities who had gathered there imbued the space with a collective queer agency. Dee described how upon entering the usually derelict building, she emerged amongst a '*sea of motorcyclists*'. Ahmed (2019, p. 200) writes about such moments of disorientation, stating that when spaces are used for purposes other than that which for they were intended 'might become queer'.

The gathering facilitated recognition for Dee, however the music event's setting of the disused building also provided shelter from the gaze of others. Duncan (1996) posits that whilst private spaces provide safety, they are also de-politicising and that it is the streets that provide sites of resistance because heteronormativity can be challenged. Edelman (2007) argues that this position of resistance, of embracing negative power such as shame, is one that queer agency should embrace. Yet, such public transgressions of gender identity come at significant risk to the transgender individual. Stella (2012) argues that

the concept of visibility is one which is culturally laden and that in enabling invisibility alongside recognition does not diminish it as a site of resistance rather it is inherent in queer spaces.

Such an understanding of queer space as providing both a site of creative and extraordinary expressions and safety from the hostility of others can also arguably be found in the drag ball culture of New York's African-American and Latino communities as portrayed in the documentary '*Paris is Burning'* (1991). The participants meet, perform and compete against each other in public venues, hired for the occasion, which allow for transformative expressions of self and in themselves are spatially transformed into sites of resistance. The drag balls fostered communities with different houses emerging led by a 'mother' whose members were referred to as 'children' (Hildebrand, 2018). The drag ball was the genesis of the queer families depicted in *Paris is Burning* (1991) and their formation came about through a collective engagement in these occasions helping each other prepare for the balls through activities such as sewing (Hildebrand, 2018). Queer familial communities were apparent in participants' accounts whose kinship was also born from a collective engagement in activities. Sam described how when they meet up with their RPG community it '*sort of becomes a home*' for fellow outsiders. Likewise, Dee described how entering the music venue enabled the initiation of a friendship with someone who she described in familial terms, '*I had a home, I had a sister who could support me and show me how to do things*'.

6.7 Conclusion

For identities which are marginalised, namely those who are transgender and non-binary, the assumption that we are what we do is vastly inaccurate. It is also an over simplification to posit that certain occupations enable gender expression and some environments allow or hinder such expression. Rather, the power structures which construct gender binaries are inherent in occupations and environments themselves and there is an ongoing intra-

action between these elements which serves to locate the individual in relation to such the gender binary.

Nature appears to be a place which provides respite from this process for those who are transgender or non-binary in that it can provide opportunity for those whose identity is beyond the gender binary to locate themselves. Invisibility appears to be an important state of being, yet this was not an acquiescence on the part of participants rather it was done for reasons of safety, through strategic engagement with activities to assimilate into hostile environments. Nor was invisibility at odds with queer agency, rather it seemed to be a vital part of it. Creative endeavours provided both visibility and invisibility which enabled those who are non-binary to locate themselves and crucially connect with and be recognised by others. For those, then, who do not have a static gender identity undertaking activities can locate - and entrap - through assimilation into binary modes of being or liberate expression and enable recognition and engender queer spaces.

Ahmed (2006) explains that gender becomes naturalised as a property of bodies, objects and spaces, a relationship which sets bodies in a specific direction and that gives the false appearance that it is the body that determines this trajectory. Instead, understanding gender as spatially imbued it seems pertinent to understand gender as a landscape (Fournier, 2014). Barlott et al. (2017) called for occupational science to adopt in Deluzian terms, 'minor theory' which is theory situated on the margins of dominant practice which disrupts dominant practices of thinking, providing transformation not just to those marginalised but all things.

Reconceptualising gender challenges conventional understandings of the environment and occupation. The Person, Environment and Occupation transactional model (Law et al., 1996) arguably exemplifies such a conceptualisation of occupation and the environment highlighting the transactional nature of this relationship. Such a model arguably locates gender

within the person and presents occupational performance, and as such the expression of self, as being the consequence of accessing meaningful occupations in enabling environments. Sellar (2009) contests that this model still leans upon interactional understandings and retains a dualistic understanding of person and environment. Such a dualistic position was seemingly evident in McCarthy et al. (2020) research into the environment and non-binary identities.

Drawing on assemblage theory, Sellar (2009) suggests that understanding occupation as a social assemblage moves away from conceptualising occupation, person and environment as boundaried entities with the person imbued with agency within a passive environment. Furthermore, conceptualising environment, person and occupation in terms of an assemblage not only reconfigures the notion of agency as residing solely within the person, but also disperses gender beyond the individual. Gender rather is the phenomena resulting from the intra-action (Barad, 2008) of the assemblage and is not static but in the process of becoming. Nor, arguably is occupation a distinct entity which neatly and productively intersects with the environment and person but rather together have different capacities to affect gender expression and occupational meaning, such as assimilation or creativity.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

The aim of this research project was to gain insight into how activities and the spaces in which they occur affects transgender and non-binary people in their gender expression. The context in which this PhD was undertaken – namely the volatile rhetoric around the recognition of transgender and non-binary people and their right to access public spaces - underscored the importance of better understanding how these communities can navigate such unpredictable terrains. This chapter summarises the findings of the research and discusses the tensions in the methodological approaches, the implications for research and theory and offers a reflection on being an outsider researcher. Finally, the rigour and limitations of the research are presented.

7.2 Theory

The Literature Review and Background chapter explored the dichotomy of the theoretical notion of performativity and the lived experience of those who are transgender and non-binary. Theorists have commented on the commonality

between occupational science and queer theory with regards to how both are concerned with the influence of social constructions on lived experience (Hammell and Iwama, 2012). Occupational science understands that objects are associated with identity, but like the profession of occupational therapy, recognises that the individual has agency and autonomy in expression of an authentic self through engagement in occupations. As such this could be seen to represent a point of ontological tension within this research. Yet, this comes from a position, as Ahmed (2008) writes, that to understand the conditions in which human bodies are given agency, attention must be turned to matter.

This thesis has acknowledged the humanist approach of phenomenology and more specifically drawn upon new materialism in understanding that human bodies in relation to occupations can act with intent, but that agency exists within assemblages of material and non-material matter (Bennett, 2010). Applying a new materialist lens shifts the emphasis from the person exerting agency on inert objects to an intra-action (Barad, 2015) of person, activity, object and spaces in the expression of identity. This opens up new conceptualisations of the relationship between person and occupation in the expression of an authentic self. Namely, moving from a possibly idealistic formulaic understanding of occupational engagement, whereby unencumbered engagement in meaningful occupation results in identity expression (Black et al., 2019) to a conceptualisation which highlights the dynamism and potential instability of these relationships which result in such gender expression.

As such the research question posed at the start of this thesis regarding how objects and spaces can facilitate or act as barriers to gender expression is answered in its reconceptualisation. Namely, they are not a conduit to expression rather they are of themselves components of gender expression assemblage. This does not arguably negate the authenticity of gender expression but locates this within the assemblage rather than solely within the individual.

7.3 Summary of findings

The research was undertaken to address the following aims:

- To examine how objects, space and embodied knowledge relate to the formation and expression of identity for those who define as transgender, genderqueer or non-binary.
- To explore how themes, associated with transgender, genderqueer and non-binary identities, such as agency, social stigma and environment, are embodied and / or enacted through engagement with occupations

These aims were set out at the start of the research when the only clarity around the methodology was that it would be qualitative in design. That is, they were written prior to the choice of new materialism to provide the ontological foundation and methodological framework. However, these aims can be conceptualised within the language and parameters of new materialism, namely exploration of the components of gender expression assemblages and their capacities and affects and how these can territorialise and de-territorialise binary notions of gender. As such the first aim can be reconceptualised as how subjects, objects and spaces relate with *one another* to create capacities which affect gender expression.

Gender expression related to recognition and for participants this was pitted against the experience of feeling scrutinised or shame when they felt hypervisible within hostile or questioning environments. Recognition, findings indicated, could be understood in terms of being locatable. Within heteronormative environments, such as the workplace or public toilets, this translated as assimilating through engagement in occupations in order to evade scrutiny. Whilst this provided succour from scrutiny it led to a sense of being opaque and not being truly visible, this not only encumbered gender expression but also creative expression. Yet, there could be intra-actions

between objects, spaces and people which led to capacities for creativity in relation to gender expression.

These radical departures from binary and normative understandings of gender expression were arguably queer affects that allowed for new realities. These were powerful moments which defied assimilation and where components within assemblages came together to create either self-recognition for participants, conceptualised as 'epiphanies', or recognition by others. These not only provided a sense of belonging but also kinship which facilitated and safely allowed for such profound becoming of gender expression.

7.4 Reflection on being an outsider researcher

As I have detailed in earlier chapters, the issues of being an outsider to the transgender and non-binary communities was a persistent concern when embarking on this research. Specifically, whether I had any right to undertake research into a community that I do not belong to and as Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1996) highlight, a community which experience oppression in ways which I do not. Queer theory and a queer approach to methodologies has been central to this research and it is a position which enables the questioning of the notion of stable identities and as such interrogates the positions of insider and outsider (Gorman Murray et al., 2010).

At the start of this research I queried whether this queer perspective provided an opportunity to re-evaluate the researcher position or was a convenient negation of the concerns I had regarding the complexity of being an outsider researcher. Whilst remaining mindful of and attending to the power differentials of being an outsider researcher I have observed the fluidity of identity positions for myself within this research. In the early days of this research whilst I was dwelling on the theoretical potential of queer in relation to the insider / outsider dichotomy, I attended a work-related conference. It was a large gathering of around 300 professionals, mainly women who wore

dresses or skirts and I was one of two or three cis women, I presume, in trousers. It was a profound experience of not feeling female enough, not remotely feminine enough to be in that room. Just a month or so after this I went to an LGBTQ+ conference and another delegate said to me 'you're too straight to be here'. In a few weeks I had gone from feeling the queerest person in the room to the straightest, but nothing about me had changed at all.

It was an experience that stayed with me and I cite it to illustrate both the contextual and relative nature of identity positions and how such sense of identity is not necessarily located within but rather by the environment we inhabit. In other words, the potential and capacity of the assemblage to create affects our positionality. There was a point in the research that I realised in determining myself as the outsider I had made the very fixed assumption that participants of the researchers were insiders, and even that they would perceive themselves as such. When after initially meeting participants, this thinking started to evolve and I jotted down the following in my research journal:

> I've seen myself as the insider/outsider but I hadn't really thought that, for participants, they must rapidly feel like outsiders. The more they share, someone is taking their words and writing them up - how must that feel?

I realise that in fixing the participants as insiders I was potentially undermining their experience of the research process and negating their potential vulnerabilities within this process. In this sense I query if a researcher can ever confidently assert themselves as being insiders to the community that they research. It is a point which arguably resonates when the complexity, fluidity and intersectionality of identity is considered. As Vincent (2018) writes it is the researcher's responsibility not to reduce the transgender and non-binary participants to solely their gender identity. As a cis gender researcher interviewing transgender and non-binary participants I was struck

and, somewhat naively, surprised by our points of connection and recognition we had such as sharing a home town, a love of art and graphic novels.

Applying a queer reflexivity to the research illuminated the complexity and intersectionality of both researcher and participant identities. Methodologies used within the research arguably facilitated a revision of the researcher and participant power dynamics with the aim of making participants insiders to the research. In keeping with new materialist approaches creative approaches to data generation (Schadler, 2019) were used alongside more traditional interviews. Participants were asked to bring a photograph which depicted a significant place or activity. This was done with not only the purpose of making the notions of 'occupation' and 'space' less abstract but also, in asking participants to explain what meaning they held, involved them also in the process of data analysis. In addition, the second interview primarily consisted of asking participants about their thoughts and response to their reading of the transcript of the first interview.

Perhaps the most significant methodology in diminishing the dichotomy of researcher and participant was the 'walking interview'. This was the final interview and came at a point when trust and rapport had developed between the participant and I. It was an interview which was physically and discursively led by the participant, in all senses I was following their lead. More so, it enabled as Schadler (2019) writes, the components of the research assemblages to be exposed – the terrain, the weather, noises, voices and gazes of other pedestrians – and becomings to emerge. Undoubtedly, the realignment of the relationship between myself and participant was one such becoming, a line of flight from researcher power and control. More profoundly though was how the 'walking interview' provided a departure from an interview where participants spoke about gender expression to one where it came into being through an intra-action with the material environment we traversed.

Brim and Ghaziani (2018) write, within research what is observed depends on how we measure it. I discuss in the Methodology chapter the complexity in defining transgender identities in terms of the recruitment process, but I realise how this were true of my own identity in relation to the research. I was clear at the outset of the research that I was going to not just be open about, but state on recruitment material, my identity as a gay cis woman. At the time I understood this as a declaration of my outsider status, an openness which felt central to the ethics of this research. However, in reflecting on the relationship with participants and in applying a theoretical perspective that his informed this thesis, it could instead be understood in phenomenological terms. That is to be orientated to an object requires a process of intentionality (Ahmed, 2006). Namely, it could be posited that, in providing clarity regarding my identity position enabled a cognisant orientation between participant and myself to occur. That in effect I had made myself locatable and it is the process of orientation that is relevant in creating safety and connection rather than whether a researcher is to be an insider or an outsider.

7.5 Implications for theory

Findings from the research resonated with, and illuminated existing theoretical concepts within occupational science, such as engaging in activities can create a sense of belonging (Wilcock, 1998). More so there were distinct findings which could be said to advance current theory, namely: 'occupational assimilation', occupational transitions and re-conceptualising transactional models.

7.5.1 Occupational Assimilation

The concept of 'occupational assimilation' was apparent in participants' accounts when discussing how environments such as the workplace necessitated a need to express a normative, expected and binary gender identity. This was particularly acute for those who defined as non-binary. There were similarities to the phenomenon of occupational alienation,

whereby an individual due to external pressures, such as societal or financial, needs to engage in an activity that is empty of value to them and which may have consequences for their health and wellbeing (Bryant, 2016). In similar ways, occupational assimilation was required because of external factors, in many cases the need to be safe within hostile environments but it was also distinct. It came about through the desire to both avoid scrutiny and also be locatable to the self and to others; as Grosz (1995) writes to become a point amongst many. In a sense to become unremarkable.

Whilst 'occupational assimilation' provided safety in part arguably because it signifies to the wider 'host' or dominant environment that their values are reflected back to them it came at personal cost to the individual. To be unremarkable, to be invisible appears to be the antonym of creativity – something which seemingly is fundamental to transgender and non-binary identities – and facilitates a conforming. In this sense, occupational assimilation does not provide either 'belonging' or 'becoming' two attributes of occupational engagement (Wilcock, 1998).

Conceptualising occupational assimilation as a form of territorialisation of the gender expression assemblage provides insight into the factors which create the capacity of occupational assimilation. In other words, whilst the individual who experiences occupational assimilation does so because of a degree of intent on their part to fit in to their environment, it is a cumulative effect of the material and immaterial of the assemblage. The workplace was a key environment in which this occurred, and it was the building (for example, lack of gender neutral toilets), HR policies, workplace roles and activities and clothing (such formal and informal uniform policies) which cumulatively necessitated the need to assimilate through the undertaking of gender-expected activities.

The research also indicated that there were assemblages which made assimilation challenging, if not impossible, and this impacted significantly on

the wellbeing of participants who experienced this. An example, being that for Max going to the beach during the summer whereby the exposed terrain of the beach, the weather and the cultural uniform of bikinis and shorts created a binary gender landscape. The consequence for the participant in this instance was that to preserve their sense of self they avoided this environment altogether.

Occupational assimilation is akin to 'passing' for transgender and non-binary people – that is acceptance through doing what is expected of them to create a binary and normative gender expression. Yet, occupational assimilation is not unique to these communities. Arguably it has relevancy to many marginalised communities such as those who define as lesbian, gay or bisexual and also immigrants and people from black and minority ethnic communities or those who in some way experience a lack of cultural fit or values match.

7.5.2 Occupational Transitions

The life course of those who are transgender can be accompanied by occupational transitions, both losses and gains (Schneider et al, 2019) and this research to some extent supported this supposition. Specifically, however, the findings suggested that the milestones associated with a heteronormative life course, such as playing with gender appropriate toys, were expected of transgender and non-binary people to the detriment of expressing their gender identity. Yet, as Schneider et al. (2019) presented, once able to express their gender identity freely, findings indicated that those who are transgender and non-binary are more able to engage in their chosen occupations. For example, Dee, who had a binary transgender identity, when living openly as a woman felt freely able to engage in activities that she saw as supporting her gender identity. As Avrech Bar et al. (2016) highlighted, engaging in occupations which were inherently gender stereotyped could serve to ratify gender identities.

This research also revealed how there were occupations which were consistent in participants lives which were undertaken before expressing gender freely. The significance here is that the meaning of, or relationship with, the occupation transitioned in relation to the participant's ability to express their gender identity. For Dee this was evident in walking which prior to transition was undertaken to exhaust her and post transition was an activity which connected her to her surroundings. Eli, who was trans masculine, felt activities of drawing and listening to music were imbued with creativity once he was living openly as trans masculine. Understanding this in terms of assemblages suggests that the meaning of an activity is not inherent nor is it determined by the person doing the activity but is an intra-action of person, object and environment. In other words, the significance and symbolism of occupations for an individual are not static but in of themselves in a process of becoming.

7.5.3 Re-conceptualising models of occupation

Whilst findings supported the perspective that occupation should be perceived as transactional, a relationship between the person and their situation, rather than individualistic (Dickie and Cutchin, 2006). However, in considering occupation within a new materialist ontology the research also progresses this understanding. Namely, that occupation is an affect that resulting from an assemblage of environment, objects, the individual and other material and non-material components which intra-act and have the capacity to affect and be affected (Feely, 2019). Significantly, such a conceptualisation does not locate agency within the individual but collectively within the assemblage. This challenges the perception that occupational performance results from a congruent fit between person, occupation and environment (Strong et al., 1999). Furthermore, it displaces the agency relating to gender expression from the individual to within the assemblage. To comprehend occupation in this way requires new standpoints of conceptualising the relationship between person, occupation and environment.

This thesis positions how queer perspectives and spaces can provide creative ways of being, lending new perspectives to concepts and understandings and I encourage such a standpoint is taken here with theoretical occupational models. A 'queer model of occupation' could, just as queer identities critique the notion of identity (Jagose, 1996), provide a radical departure from traditional understandings of the transactional nature of occupation. In applying the dynamism and non-unitary ethos of queer (Braidotti, 2011) to occupations, such a conceptualisation of occupation would challenge firstly the notion that models explain human behaviour and also that occupation, environment and person are three static, boundaried and separate entities. Theorising occupation through a queer lens would, I suggest, instead re-imagine a rhizomic relationship whereby there is not one truth, that is a formulaic understanding of this phenomena, but rather multiple ways of being and becoming in relation to occupation.

7.6 Implications for future research

At the time of writing this chapter there seems to be a developing understanding of the transgender communities by occupational science as evidenced by the publication of McCarthy et al.'s (2020) research into the lives of those who are non-binary. However, there needs to be more undertaken and the findings of this research have illuminated how complex and challenging it is to freely and safely express non-binary identities within environments and occupations which mandate a binary expression of identity. With occupational science's concern with health and wellbeing of marginalised communities, it is a theoretical field which is well placed to explore the impact of occupational injustices upon the physical and psychological welfare of non-binary communities. Furthermore, this research has indicated how gender expression is a complex intersection of other factors such as age and class, and I would encourage any future research to foreground the intersectional nature of identities. In particular, the views of

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic trans and non-binary communities - who experience disproportionate levels of abuse and violence (Human Rights Campaign, 2020) - into what needs researching should also be heard. The support and advice of the advisory group was critical in providing practical and ethical advice for this research and I strongly encourage that any research, in order to be meaningful for the communities it attends to, involves transgender and non-binary researchers.

The concept of 'occupational assimilation' emerged from the findings and I believe there to be worth in exploring this further in relation to other marginalised communities – such as those who are defined as immigrants or having a disability - who adopt occupations in order to assimilate into dominant cultures in order to keep safe from scrutiny. This could provide valuable insight into how occupations are both used to maintain governing and organising systems and how they can be strategically engaged with – at personal cost – to avoid abjection and discrimination by those outside of such systems. The research also foregrounded how occupations can stimulate creative gender expression and spaces and provide a sense of becoming and belonging. Further exploration into this relationship into this subject could unlock new perspectives into what it is to be 'creative' in relation to occupations.

Finally, the ontology of new materialism has driven this research. Its understanding that the human body and materials, such as objects, are not immutable static entities but as a dynamic, intra-acting phenomena (Barad, 2008) arguably not just resonate with occupational science's transactional understanding of occupation but advance it. Specifically, as Sellar (2009) identified it is a conceptualisation which provides a new perspective on the notion of agency, challenging the understanding that it is the human who acts upon passive environments and objects and other matter. As such, I encourage other researchers to draw upon new materialism to understand how dominant

forces are territorialised and how human bodies and objects – and themselves as researcher – relate within a dynamic assemblage.

Whilst this research was not addressing the profession of occupational therapy it is worth noting that occupational science research can influence practice through informing and developing occupational therapists' clinical reasoning and values (Kristensen and Schultz Petersen, 2016). As such, findings from this research could potentially inform occupational therapists' work with clients who are transgender and non-binary. This is a particularly pertinent concern given findings from the government's Transgender Inquiry report (House of Commons, 2016) singled out NHS staff for lacking training and awareness regarding the needs of these communities. In summary, occupational therapists could draw on the following research-derived recommendations in terms of guiding practice:

- Participants spoke of the pain and negation caused when misgendered. This is arguably amplified when it is done by someone in a position of power, such as a health care professional. As such it is important that occupational therapists ensure that clients are asked their preferred pronouns and that these are consistently respected or if any mistakes are made that they are unequivocally apologised for.
- Occupational therapists must improve awareness regarding how environments and occupations themselves are inherently gendered and that for those who are non-binary these can cause feelings of intense discomfort or scrutiny or invisibility. In considering this, occupational therapists need to be mindful how their own practice may replicate binary representations of gender and as such undermine therapeutic potential of interventions.
- In particular, it is important to consider how formal environments such as the workplace or schools can compel transgender and non-binary people to engage in occupations which enable them to assimilate rather than engage creatively with others and the environment.

7.7 Implications for transgender and non-binary communities

Participants spoke of how their engagement with this research provided them some insight into how gender impacted upon their lived experiences and identities. This space for reflection seems like a small return for their generous commitment to the interview process and interest in my research journey. It is with some apprehension that I consider the question of what this research could offer or contribute to the transgender and non-binary communities. It is perhaps a question which exposes a gulf between the insider and outsider positions, namely as a cis woman I have documented the hostility and analysed social and occupational injustices which are no revelation to those who experience them. Equally, this research's findings that when ones gender identity is recognised that the outcome is so very validating will come as little surprise to those who exist within a cis gendered world. What, though arguably this research explores is how - when trans and non-binary people can simply be - what they can do can be extraordinary. That is the research has focused on the relationship between occupational engagement and gender expression and has illuminated how the meaning of occupations can be transformed when participants are allowed to be themselves unfettered from scrutiny. This was evident in the workplace and in creative endeavours but also in activities which may be considered mundane. For example, the joy and power in having a coffee with friends in a welcoming space.

This chapter outlines how the findings could influence and improve practice within the occupational therapy profession. The recommendations for practice are written with the aim of improving the experience of transgender and non-binary people in healthcare and social care. Through disseminating this research in articles and presentations it is anticipated that it will contribute to the improved and inclusive practice within the profession both in terms of the workforce and the clients it serves.

7.8 Rigour and Limitations

Within the thesis I have presented my epistemological and ontological position, justified the research aims and detailed the methodological approaches and analysis of the data. This has demonstrated that the research was rigorous and is trustworthy. An ethics of care has been instrumental to this research and all participants were given the opportunity to review and discuss the interview transcripts and findings. This was not done with the intention to triangulate findings, as that would posit that there is one solid truth to be found and consolidated (Webster and Mertova, 2007), but rather to counter any possible feelings by participants being objectified by the research. Whilst I was a lone researcher undertaking this study I discussed findings at all stages with both the advisory group and supervisors. Included within the thesis are my own reflections and extracts from my research journal which is to both demonstrate reflexivity and locate myself within the research assemblage.

The purpose of qualitative research is to develop deeper insight into complex phenomena by studying the meaning of individuals' experiences (Wu et al., 2016). As such an identified limitation of this study lies not with there being small numbers of participants but in that given the fluidity and complexity of gender and the number of differing and intersecting identities that fall under the transgender umbrella a broader range of transgender and non-binary identities would have been beneficial. The recruitment literature called for participants who defined as 'transgender, non-binary and genderqueer'. Whilst this was felt to be expansive it was arguably still limiting, because, for example, participants also used the terms 'gender fluid', 'trans masculine' and 'trans masculine non-binary'. Whilst they felt the recruitment material was inclusive of their identities there may have been others who felt it did not. Furthermore, it potentially excluded those who understand their gender transition to be part of their lived experience rather than their identity. I am also mindful that whilst recruitment posters were circulated in libraries and

trans organisations, all participants were recruited via social media platforms. Whilst this resulted in recruitment of participants from disparate geographical locations, background and differing ages, which I valued, it potentially excluded those who do not access LGBTQ+ venues, or who can confidently approach such recruitment material in public spaces or who have access to the internet. Undertaking three interviews provided a valuable depth of data (Wengraf, 2006) however, this may have been an off-putting commitment for some potential participants and indeed one participant, Eli, was only able to attend one interview. As such, future research may wish to consider utilising one or two interview sessions.

7.9 Conclusion

Rigour and limitations have been outlined in this chapter, along with a summary of findings and recommendations for future research. This chapter has reiterated the need to be mindful of the power dynamics that exist within the dichotomy of insider and outsider researcher positions and the importance for outsider researchers to undertake an ethics of care (Vincent, 2018a) when undertaking studies into the lives of those who are transgender and non-binary. However, it has also presented that the obligation that the researcher has to communities being researched may lay less in being an insider to such populations but rather in making oneself locatable.

Central to the research findings has been the position that occupations and the environment can both enforce and make manifest binary notions of gender expression. The consequence of not adopting such binary expressions, in particular for those who are non-binary, can be a sense of dis-location and opacity of being. Yet, when occupations and spaces can be engaged in with both creativity and safely they can provide a liberation from gendered norms and ways of being and engender a sense of belonging. It seems only right to end this thesis adopting the words of one participant, Sam, as a rallying call

to all those who do not wish to be defined or comprehended by binary gender norms, to '*break the game!*'.

Appendix A

- College of Health and Life Sciences Research and Ethics Committee approval form (A.1)
- Advisory Group Protocol (A.2)
- Sample of findings presented to Advisory Group (A.3)
- Participant Information Sheet (A.4)
- Participant Consent Form (A.5)
- Recruitment Advert (A.6)

A.1 College of Health and Life Sciences Research and Ethics Committee approval form

College of Health and Life Sciences Research Ethics Committee (DCS)
Brunel University London
Kingston Lane
Uxbridge
UB8 3PH
United Kingdom

www.brunel.ac.uk

6 February 2017

LETTER OF APPROVAL

Applicant: Ms Rebecca Swenson

Project Title: Being-in-doing: An exploration of transgender identity through the engagement in activities and space.

Reference: 4207-MHR-Jan/2017- 5520-3

Dear Ms Rebecca Swenson

The Research Ethics Committee has considered the above application recently submitted by you.

The Chair, acting under delegated authority has agreed that there is no objection on ethical grounds to the proposed study. Approval is given on the understanding that the conditions of approval set out below are followed:

- The agreed protocol must be followed. Any changes to the protocol will require prior approval from the Committee by way of an application for an amendment.

Please note that:

- Research Participant Information Sheets and (where relevant) flyers, posters, and consent forms should include a clear statement that research ethics approval has been obtained from the relevant Research Ethics Committee.
- The Research Participant Information Sheets should include a clear statement that queries should be directed, in the first instance, to the Supervisor (where relevant), or the researcher. Complaints, on the other hand, should be directed, in the first instance, to the Chair of the relevant Research Ethics Committee.
- Approval to proceed with the study is granted subject to receipt by the Committee of satisfactory responses to any conditions that may appear above, in addition to any subsequent changes to the protocol.
- The Research Ethics Committee reserves the right to sample and review documentation, including raw data, relevant to the studyYou may not undertake any research activity if you are not a registered student of Brunel University or if you cease to become registered, including abeyance or temporary withdrawal. As a deregistered student you would not be insured to undertake research activity. Research activity includes the recruitment of participants, undertaking consent procedures and collection of data. Breach of this requirement constitutes research misconduct and is a disciplinary offence.

Professor Christina Victor

Chair

College of Health and Life Sciences Research Ethics Committee (DCS)
Brunel University London

Transgender identity and engagement in activities and space: Advisory Committee

I am a PhD student at Brunel University London and am seeking between three and five people to be on an advisory board for a research project that will explore the lived experience of people who are transgender or identify as non-binary or gender queer. I am a member of the LGBT + community and trained as an occupational therapist.

Through my previous work roles in an LGBT community organisation and in designing the research protocol I am aware that members of the trans communities can feel that they are 'objects' of research and that their voices could get lost in the research process. I want my research to be inclusive and respond to the needs of the trans communities. One strategy to help ensure this is to work alongside an Advisory Committee who will help the research be informed and inclusive of the diverse trans communities.

The three-year research project aims to gain a better understanding of how the activities that people do and the places that they visit, live and work in may help or hinder the expression of their gender identity for those who define as trans, non-binary or gender-queer. It is hoped that the study will help to gain a deeper understanding of the life world of people who are trans and inform 'good practice' within health care professions especially occupational therapy. It is a profession which has acknowledged, through the partial funding of this project, that there is limited research and understanding in this area.

Occupational therapy is a health and social care profession that seeks to understand how the things that people do in their daily lives enhance and support their identity and relationships. The word occupation doesn't just refer to paid employment, it includes all activities such as leisure, self-care, friendships and hobbies. It includes working in areas of political social inequity and with communities and individuals who may face exclusion from activities and spaces important to them. It is intended that findings from the research will be made publically available, published in relevant publications and presented to national and local professional conferences.

Role of advisory committee members

Members of the advisory committee are asked to participate due to their insights into, and range of experiences relating to, the trans communities and desire to improve the knowledge and understanding of this community for health and social care practitioners. Members of the advisory committee will

define themselves as trans, non-binary or as gender-queer and be involved with the advancing knowledge that may improve healthcare provision.

The committee will be convened by the project's researcher, Rebecca Swenson. It will not be a decision-making body but will help shape and steer the research with the principle aim of ensuring that the focus of the project, at all stages, is inclusive and its findings represent the needs of the trans communities. This will involve:

- Consulting on the research's aims and methods of gathering data (e.g. through interviews).
- Providing suggestions for appropriate and diverse methods of recruitment of participants.
- Recommending strategies to help ensure the analysis of data is inclusive.
- Advising on appropriate ways of disseminating research findings to trans networks.

Remit of role

- Advisory Committee members will be acting in a personal capacity.
- Members will be advisory and not have managerial responsibility for the research.
- No identifying details of participants will be discussed or disclosed at the meeting. Confidentiality regarding the discussion and analysis of the findings in the research will be requested until the project is completed and the final reports are published.
- There will be opportunities for the Advisory Committee member to get more involved in the process such as helping to write papers or jointly present at conferences – however this would be optional and not a requirement of the role.

Advisory Committee meetings

I expect to hold approximately four meetings in a central London location from May 2017 to 2019 to discuss key stages in the research timeline, namely:

- Commenting on research design and guide and inputting into recruitment strategies
- Discussion on early stages of the project, recruitment, observations and narratives
- Discussion of analysis of findings
- Initial draft of report
- Discussion regarding dissemination of findings

Additional discussions can be undertaken by email or Skype.

Expenses

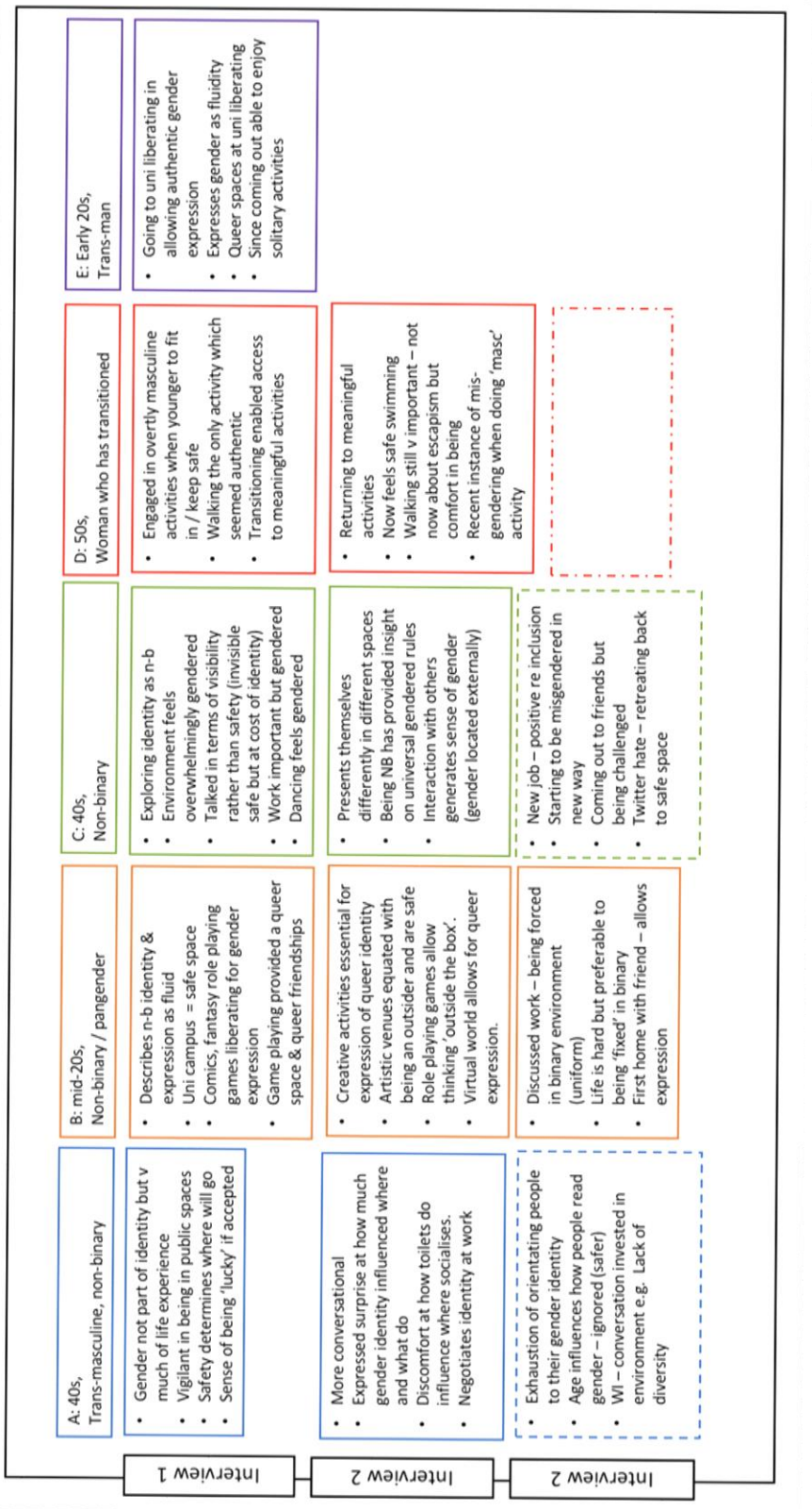
This is a voluntary role but travel expenses will be reimbursed for attendance at Advisory Committee meetings. Please note that only standard class rail, bus and tube travel can be reimbursed.

Further information

If you are prepared to be involved or would like further information please contact me at rebecca.swenson@brunel.ac.uk .

- The research has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Clinical Sciences, Brunel University London on 06.02.17.
- If you have any concerns about this project, you can contact my supervisor: pam.alldred@brunel.ac.uk or the chair of the Research Ethics Committee: christina.victor@brunel.ac.uk .

A.3 Sample of findings presented to Advisory Group



A.4 Participant Information Sheet

Rebecca Swenson

Department of Clinical Sciences

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Study title:

'Doing and being: Understanding how engagement in activities supports transgender, non-binary and genderqueer gender expression'

Why have been invited to participate?

You have been contacted regarding this research project as you responded to an initial invitation to participate. You are under no obligation to participate and if you do decide to take part, you can drop out at any time without having to give a reason. Please read the following information to help you decide if you would like to take part. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me.

What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of the study is to gain a better understanding of what people do and in what way the places that they visit live and work in may help or hinder the expression of gender identity for those who define as having a transgender, non-binary or genderqueer identity. I hope that the study will help to inform good practice within the occupational therapy profession who have acknowledged that there is limited understanding and research in this area. I am an occupational therapist and a member of the LGBT+ community.

(Occupational therapy is a health and social care profession that provides support to help people overcome barriers that prevent them undertaking activities – work, hobbies, going out, friendships etc, that are important and meaningful to them and help provide a sense of identity).

What will happen to me if I take part?

When you first get in touch we will have an email conversation which will enable you to ask any questions that you may have regarding the research. Following that, if you are happy to, I will arrange to meet at a time and place convenient to you. This will be an opportunity for me to introduce myself and answer any questions you might have. After this if you are willing to participate I will discuss your full involvement with the project.

What do I have to do?

I would like to meet and interview you over a maximum two-year period (at a time and place convenient to you). During this period it would be useful if you could 'document' from time-to-time your life, for example by taking a photograph or writing some thoughts of an object or a location important to you.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

With all interviews it is possible that areas which are discussed could uncover feelings which are uncomfortable or upsetting. I want you to be in control of the interview to help safeguard against this happening. For example, there are very few set questions in the interview and the direction of interviews will be led by you. I will ask you at the start of the interview if there are any 'no go' areas – if you tell me there are, this will be respected.

Confidentiality and your anonymity will be maintained throughout the research process and in any written reports through the use of pseudonyms (of your choice).

I am aware that, understandably, members of the transgender and non-binary communities can feel that they are 'objects' of research and that their voices can get lost in the research process. I would like you to be as involved in the research process as much as you would like to be. I will provide you with copies of the interview transcripts and talk through my thoughts about them and ask you for your thoughts which will be incorporated into the write up of the research. It is likely that the research will result in presentations and eventually be written up for publications – confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured. I will keep you

informed of this and if you would like to, can discuss your participation with any parts of these events or publications

What if something goes wrong?

As outlined above it is intended that any potential harm will be mitigated against. Should something go wrong, such as you feel upset as a result of something that came up in the interview you will be provided with details of suitable support groups should you want this. If you felt that you no longer wished to participate in the research you can leave and you could decline to have any material from the interview included in the research.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Your involvement in this research will be kept confidential and anonymous and only I will have access to your information. Any written reference to participants in the research findings will use a pseudonym and should any photographs be used these will be used anonymously. All information collected will be securely retained in accordance with the University's policy on Research Integrity and will be destroyed when no longer needed. The limits of confidentiality would be – if an exceptional circumstance – something were disclosed that could give cause for concern (such as harm to others) I would have a duty to act but this would be discussed with you first.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

Findings will be written up as part of my PhD thesis. It is anticipated that they will also be discussed in article submissions to journals and presentations given to interested professional and LGBT+ community groups. All participants will be provided with a copy of the findings from the research. Data will be stored in compliance with the Data Protection Act (1998)

Who is organising and funding the research?

The research, as my PhD, is being led by myself. I have worked in the NHS as an occupational therapist and I was successfully awarded some funding from the UK Occupational Therapy Research Foundation a division of the Royal College of Occupational Therapists. My PhD is supervised by Dr Pam Alldred (Brunel University London) and Dr Lindsey Nicholls (University of Essex).

What are the indemnity arrangements?

These will be covered by the standard Brunel University London insurances for research.

Who has reviewed the study?

The research has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Clinical Sciences Brunel University London on 6 February 2017 in letter 4207-MHR-Jan/2017- 5520-3. Professor Christina Victor at Brunel University London (email: Christina.victor@brunel.ac.uk) should only be contacted in the case of a complaint being raised.

Contact for further information or if you would like to participate in the study.
Researcher: Rebecca Swenson Tel: 07379 866858 Email: rebecca.swenson@brunel.ac.uk

A.5 Participant Consent Form

Rebecca Swenson
Department of Clinical Sciences.

'Doing and being: Understanding how engagement in activities supports transgender, non-binary and genderqueer gender expression'

CONSENT FORM

	Please tick the appropriate box YES	NO
Have you read the Research Participant Information Sheet?	☐	☐
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	☐	☐
Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? Who have you spoken to?	☐	☐
Do you understand that you will not be referred to by name in any report concerning the study?	☐	☐
Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study: • at any time? • without having to give a reason for withdrawing?	☐ ☐	☐ ☐
I agree to my interview being audio recorded.	☐	☐
I agree to the use of non-attributable direct quotes when this study is presented (in written articles or talks)	☐	☐
I agree to the inclusion of photographs I may have taken when this study is presented (in written articles or talks). Photographs will be anonymous.	☐	☐
Do you agree to take part in this study?	☐	☐

Signature of Research Participant:	
Date:	
Name in capitals:	
Researcher name:	Signature:

A.6 Recruitment Advert

Brunel University London

Trans, non-binary and genderqueer project

Seeking volunteers

I am a member of the LGBT+ community and an occupational therapist undertaking a PhD. I am seeking volunteers who define as trans, non-binary or genderqueer to collaborate in my study. The aim is to gain a better understanding of how the things that people do and the places that they visit, live and work in may help or hinder the expression of gender identity for those who are trans, non-binary or genderqueer.

It is intended that the insight gained into the importance and complexities of engaging in activities and places will help support those who define as trans, non-binary and genderqueer overcome barriers to activities and places which are important to them. It is hoped that the study will help inform 'good practice' within allied health care professions, especially occupational therapy.

Your participation will involve interviews with myself and documenting experiences that you chose to share in ways that feel authentic to you.

I would welcome any enquiries. Please feel free to contact me via the below contact details. Participants need to be over 18 years of age and confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured.

For more information please contact Rebecca Swenson:

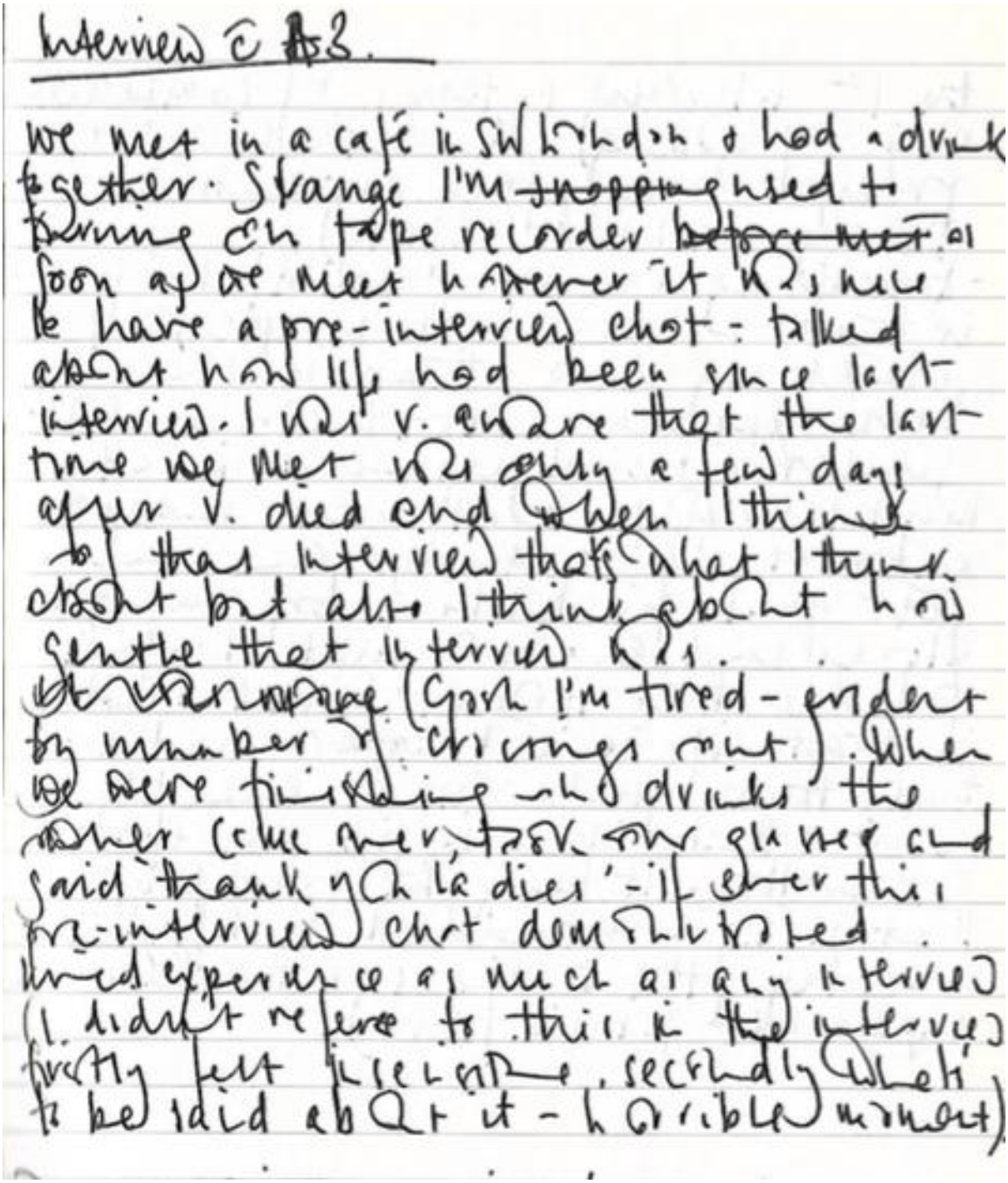
Email – rebecca.swenson@brunel.ac.uk or Tel: 07379 866858

This study was approved by Brunel University London's Research Ethics Committee February 2017.

Appendix B

- Sample entry in research journal (B.1)
- Examples of participants' description of photographs (B.2)
- Transcript extract (B.3)

B.1 Sample entry in research journal



Interview ~~#~~ 3.

We met in a café in SW London & had a drink together. Strange I'm ~~stopping~~ used to turning on tape recorder ~~before meet~~. As soon as we met however it was like we have a pre-interview chat: talked about how life had been since last interview. I was v. aware that the last time we met was only a few days after V. died and when I think back to that interview that's what I think about but also I think about how sensitive that interview was.

~~Interview~~ (Gosh I'm tired - evident by number of crossings out). When we were finishing one drinks the other (the waiter took our glasses and said 'thank you ladies' - if ever this pre-interview chat demonstrated shared experience as much as any interview (I didn't refer to this in the interview pretty self explanatory, secondly what to be said about it - horrible moment)

B.2 Examples of participants' descriptions of photographs

24 25	A1:	So, that is a picture from, probably from about April, May time and it's a, one of the trees in my communal garden space
26	R:	Ah nice.
27 28 29 30 31	A1:	It's one of the biggest trees in the back there. And that's a spot in the garden which changes all the time. So, the bank in front of the tree about a week ago was just covered in snow drops now it's got daffodils coming. There's constantly something going on and um, because I'm usually working at a [work office] or I'm travelling. At home I try to get out before I start work in the morning and that might be going round the block
32	R:	Mmm.
33	A1:	Or it might be just going out into the garden.
34	R:	For what, a little potter or walk or?
35 36	A1:	Yeah, and I might just walk around and see what birds are there and that tree is a particularly iconic spot in the garden that I'm always photographing as well.

Extract A from interview 1 with Fred.

312	B1:	Yeah, I mean it's pretty much just the picture of the stuff that I tend to bring really [pause]
313		let's bring it up, er [pause] the phone is a bit slow, don't know why, it's pretty new.
314	R:	Phones are a mystery to me.
315	B1:	[laughs] yeah that's it [gestures to photograph on phone], that's all, that's just the stuff to
316		bring with me
317	R:	Yeah, so I can see two games.
318	B1:	Yeah.
319	R:	And I can see kind of two pouches there as well, dice.
320	B1:	Dice, um and that's my little book that's full of sketches and covered in stickers and such
321	R:	So your sketches?
322	B1:	Er yeah, tends to be um yeah, er yeah
323	R:	And that's to do with the games?
324	B1:	Er yeah, I'll, I'll sit there and I'll, I'll draw out characters with that, um, and with my current
325		game I've got um [pause] I don't know, there's, there's me, there's a gay guy there's a - I'm
326		talking out of character not in character - but um in character it doesn't really matter um,
327		and there was a er, asexual lesbian and there's two other people who I think are straight but
328		we and then the person running it is non-binary like me.

Extract B from interview with Sam

B.3 Transcript extract

509 C1: It's a control of like I don't know how they're going to react, I don't know how
510 they're going to think, I don't know whether that's going to cause a reaction or what
511 that reaction's going to be and there's no way I can influence it, no way I can control
512 it therefore, what – it's avoidance tactic! I think is what it is.
513 R: So control then, I would imagine if you are, don't have an identity that is
514 marginalised you take for granted that control.
515 C1: It is yeah, and it's why, where I say [pause] I er, [pause] I've never [pause] felt able to
516 present in any other way not because I don't want to but, so yeah I have that
517 privilege and I exploit it. Kind of there's a guilt with that but that, it's a different issue
518 right. Um, yeah I feel, yeah you just feel slightly um [pause] I don't know what the
519 right word is but um [pause] fake but also like you're taking advantage of [pause] of
520 what's a privilege really, of what a privilege is really which is the opposite to a
521 [pause] er, I don't know what's the opposite well whatever. Anyway.
522 R: Is there anywhere that you don't feel comfortable going for whatever reason?
523 C1: So, for example, um [pause] dancing!
524 R: [laughs]
525 C1: It's an obvious one isn't it?
526 R: For the tape recorder I am nodding vigorously! [laughs]
527 C1: [laughs] Um [pause] yeah that's one, that's one.
528 R: What is it about, is it the activity that which just leaves you cold whatever or more to
529 it than that?
530 C1: Um so, [pause] er, [pause], [partner name] and I did pick up dancing at some point
531 um, it's a very gendered space um [pause] so we, we took up salsa and it was a
532 particular type that was um, very much a, er, couples um, partnered dance um
533 rather more than individual er, type um, and it was a really uncomfortable space cos
534 [partner's name] felt really comfortable in that space she had you know um,
535 whereas for me it's like first of all there's no place for me because the first thing they
536 do is like 'lead that side, follow that side' no it's not like that, 'men that side women
537 that side um you learn these steps, you learn these steps'. So immediately there's
538 this thing of ok there's no space for me here.
539 R: Yeah.

Extract from first interview with Max

Appendix C

- Example map with annotations from walking interview (C.1)
- Sample of data analysis process (C.2)
- Explanation of data analysis to participants (C.3)
- Tabulation of analysis (C.4)

C.1 Example map with annotations from walking interview

C.2 Sample of data analysis process

Lines	Observations	Data Analysis stage	Field note comments
506	Fear of what being identified as n-b.	Aggregative affect - territorialisation	
509 - 512	No control over reactions – experience and fear itself territorialises	Territorialisation	
515 - 521	Being invisible is a ?privilege i.e. being invisible is being heteronormative, it is an active pursuit not a negation or passive.	Capacity resulting from assemblage of work, activities that happen there.	Occupational alienation grants invisibility but this is not passive, it is a conscious performativity.
530 - 538	Dancing: 'no space for me here' – occupation which is gendered	Territorialising – tradition, room, instructor and participants.	
540 - 546	'need to step out of the box'. Taking the lead associated with masculinity or not takin the lead with femininity.	Territorialising but hints at line of flight	Resonates with Sam – breaking the rules through RPG.
552 – 560	They conform with the rules so not to expose themselves when dancing – feels that they are in some way tricking dance partners.	Aggregate of dance lessons and concern for others – territorialising.	
567	'horrible space to be in'		Gender is almost tactile and material.
573 – 593	Informal uniform policy at work male / female expectations. Fear of being judged, standing out if not conform – hyper visibility.	Territorialising work place.	
618	'feels like wearing fancy dress'		Abrasive expression of gender

Extract from analysis of Max's interview (correlates with transcript extract)

New Materialist methodology

Background

New Materialism is a theoretical position that informed the analysis of the interviews and how the findings would be organised. It draws on a combination of theories such as queer theory and I chose this methodology because it recognises that identity is valid and important and that we have agency (as much as society, legislation etc will allow us) as to how we can express such identity. The methodology also fits with the research's interest in how we relate to objects, activities, places and spaces affects how we feel able to express our gender. New Materialism understands that humans interact with the world around them, these are some of its key terms:

Assemblages: New Materialism understands that there are materials outside of language that have bearing upon us These materials such as buildings, human bodies, emotions, legislations and everyday objects are considered relationally in what is known as 'assemblages'.

Affects and capacities: These components of the assemblages work together to create affects and capacities. An example of this is how the individual, workplace, money and the law interact together to create emotions and actions that influence gender expression.

Territorialisation and de-territorialisation: These are terms applied to the micro-politics of the assemblage which are understood to exist as territories which either act to stabilise, 'territorialise', a state (such as gender) or de-stabilise, 'de-territorialise' and allow new ways of being and becoming. For example, within an assemblage, legislation may interact with a specific environment (such as public changing rooms) to consolidate and fix binary understandings of gender. Conversely components of the assemblage may

provide new opportunities for enacting gender. Such processes are understood to create ‘lines of flight’ where new ways of being can happen, in this case gender expression. An example of this could be components of the assemblage such as clothing and the internet which together enable new opportunities to express gender.

The interview transcripts were read and re-read (at least twice!) and three stages were undertaken:

- The first step was to identify elements of the assemblage, that is material aspects that were raised by interviewees as being important to gender expression for them. These included physical spaces, clothing and activities such as drawing.
- The second stage was to explore how these components of the assemblage interacted to create capacities such as freedom to express identity or the opposite such as self-consciousness or shame.
- The third stage was to identify aspects of ‘territorialisation’– that is when a binary, heteronormative understanding of gender is stabilised in the situations described in the interviews. Instances of ‘de-territorialisation’ were also identified that is when situations were described in the interview where gender expression could be expressed freely.

C.4 Tabulation of analysis

Stages of data analysis	Interview 1: Max
Assemblage	• Work • Clothing • Colleagues • Beach • Partner • Home • Dancing traditions • Internet • Theatre
Capacities and affects	• Controlling expression – responding to the environment • Performativity of heteronormativity • Invisibility as an endeavour • Searching for authenticity • Dysphoria at beach • Epiphany of identity • Strategising of gender expression through engagement in occupations.
Territorialisation	• Clothing at beach • Uniform at work • Dancing lessons • Work space and customs
De-territorialisation	• Home with partner • Empty landscape of beach out of season.

Example of tabulation of analysis from interview 1 with Max.

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