

**An oral history of American trans  
lives from the 1950s to present**

Lorna C Barton

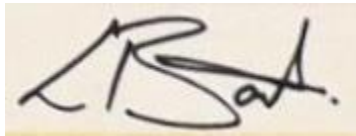
Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

History Department, University of Strathclyde, 2019

This thesis is the result of the author's original research. It has been composed by the author and has not been previously submitted for examination which has led to the award of a degree.

The copyright of this thesis belongs to the author under the terms of the United Kingdom Copyright Acts as qualified by University of Strathclyde Regulation 3.50. Due acknowledgement must always be made of the use of any material contained in, or derived from, this thesis.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature is stylized and appears to be 'A. B. S. A.' with a horizontal line through the middle of the letters.

Date: 15<sup>th</sup> March 2019

## **Abstract**

This is the first oral history thesis which investigates and complicates the established historical representation of trans individuals as portrayed in pop culture within the heteronormative and gendernormative historiography of America from the 1950s to present. From a cohort of 22 narrators of differing age and gender variance, I analyse 15 life history interviews conducted with members of the Gender Identity Center of Colorado—a place of refuge, support, friendship and understanding. The resulting oral history of trans American lives offers a historically-informed examination of gender variant individuals' lived experiences of growing up in a country that has long upheld gender normative binary roles of male and female, creating a discourse of gender variance as something deviant, monstrous, mentally unwell and therefore, warranting social condemnation. The original oral histories featured throughout this thesis strongly refutes this gender binary and America's need to uphold it and its ideals, creating rich individual and collective narratives of struggle and triumph over them.

An oral history methodology, and theoretical grounding in transgender and liminality theory are central to the lived experience of each narrator featured for gauging their emotions, exclusion from normative gender society and making sense of their present from their pasts. I argue that America's binary ideals have a powerful influence over all trans lives, gender variant identities and lived experiences. Essentially, living under a gender binary is dangerous and damaging on multiple levels. Moreover, prior to embracing their gender variant identity, many trans Americans internalised forms of top-down gender policing observed in their communities and families, experiencing shame and guilt in 'transgressing' these ideals via cross-dressing and other gender variant behaviours. They had to reach a point where they felt comfortable challenging these binary norms to live on the gender spectrum as their 'authentic' selves. As such, this thesis enhances current scholarship on trans lives, and begins to address their relative absence in the historiography on modern America.

# Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Table of Illustrations.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Glossary of Terms .....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 America’s strict mythical and ideological gender binary roles.....	1
1.2 Situating me: My place and writing reflexively in an oral history thesis .....	6
1.3 Research context: Gender Identity Center of Colorado .....	10
1.4 Subjectivity of narrators’ experience in relation to historical events.....	13
1.5 Thesis structure .....	14
<b>Chapter 2 A literature review of trans representation in modern American history, consequences and theoretical framework.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Part I: Reviewing trans representation in American medical literature from the 1950s.....</b>	<b>19</b>
2.1 Introduction .....	19
2.1.1 Trans history in the gender normative American historiography .....	21
2.2 Christine Jorgensen and public representation of trans to the 1950s news media .....	22
2.3 Constructions of trans representation in medical literature; pathology vs transgender embodiment .....	27
<b>Part II: On screen: Historical pop culture and media representations of trans individuals.....</b>	<b>48</b>
2.4 Consequences of trans representation for trans young people in the present.....	71
2.5 Theoretical Framework .....	81
2.5.1 Queer Theory .....	82
2.5.2 Liminality theory .....	94
2.5.3 Transgender theory .....	97
2.6 Queer oral history and trans oral history .....	102

2.7	Conclusion.....	104
<b>Chapter 3</b>	<b>Oral History and other methodologies in approaching trans lives ...</b>	<b>106</b>
3.1	Introduction .....	106
3.2	Epistemology.....	107
3.3	Methodology and methods of data collection: oral history.....	109
3.4	Ethics, trust and collaboration.....	113
3.5	Research Design.....	119
3.6	Setting the scene for results and analysis framework: Sharing authority and the lived experience.....	120
3.7	The narrators and trans in modern American history.....	122
3.8	Analysis .....	124
3.9	Societal and self-policing of trans.....	128
<b>Chapter 4</b>	<b>Trans women’s lived experiences .....</b>	<b>132</b>
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>Trans women’s lived experiences: A Native American narrative.....</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>Trans men’s lived experiences .....</b>	<b>214</b>
<b>Chapter 7</b>	<b>Genderqueer lived experiences.....</b>	<b>250</b>
<b>Chapter 8</b>	<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>280</b>
<b>Appendix I:</b>	<b>Reflective Diary Excerpt.....</b>	<b>291</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>.....</b>	<b>293</b>

## Acknowledgements

It is absolutely amazing to have finally arrived at my final destination in completing my PhD thesis and I would not have achieved this without initial and formative input from Dr. Susan Dewey of the University of Wyoming, who challenged my thinking and enabled me to focus on trans individuals, as well as generously gave me a place to stay throughout fieldwork. I would also like to sincerely thank my supervisor Dr. Erin Jessee, formally of the University of Strathclyde now at the University of Glasgow, who was willing to supervise me at such a late stage, but gave me incredible input, passion, patience and support, without which, I wouldn't have gotten to this end point.

Secondly, I would like to thank Professor Arthur McIvor (Second Supervisor) for all the support, feedback and infectious love for oral history. It has been an amazing privilege to be a PhD student of the Scottish Oral History Centre. A big thank you to James Morton from The Scottish Trans Alliance and Nick McGlynn of the University of Brighton 'Liveable Lives' project for their input into my trans knowledge, ethics and approach, as well as to Dr. Karen Scarpella, former Director of the Gender Identity Center of Colorado, without whom I would not have had a study, let alone narrators to share their stories. I will be forever in your debt.

Thirdly, thank you to my parents, who generously housed and fed me throughout majority of this process. You have no idea how much I appreciated your help and hospitality as I know I wasn't easy to live with at times. To my proof reader, graphic artist and soul mate Ruth; words cannot express how grateful I am to have had your help, your shoulder to cry on and emotional support throughout. I'm not entirely sure I would have survived it without you, thank you. To my friend Rita, thank you for your hospitality, ongoing generosity, love, friendship and trust. Colorado is a better place for having you and I am a better human being for knowing you. To James, reader, discussor of theory and overall an amazingly clever friend and supporter, thank you. To my late stage PhD kindred spirit, Victoria, your passion for all things drag, writing, re-writing, editing, more re-writing and laughter is what I needed to push me around the last lap of this frustrating yet worthwhile journey, thank you, thank you! Laterally, I would like to

thank my partner Stefan, for not only knowing the challenges in gaining a PhD, but in giving me the fullest love and support I needed, along with lashings of gin, and for having the unshakeable belief that I would finish successfully.

Finally, I would like to thank the individuals who contributed their life histories to this work;

B	Melissa	Julia	Asher	Corina	Nicole
Grayson	Maddie	Sequoia	Jess	Joan	Brian
Luke	Katy	Jacqui	Jenn	Suzy	Wilma
Sheri	Artemus	Sable	and	Sarah Marie	

Your stories, friendship, words, laughter and lives filled my heart with gratitude and joy, and without you I would not have had the opportunity to listen, learn or had a thesis to write. Thank you sincerely...

## Table of Illustrations

Illustration 1-1: Photograph, ‘Gender Identity Center of Colorado’, 2016 .....	10
Illustration 2-1: Photograph, ‘Miss Christine Jorgensen’, Headshot of Christine Jorgensen with her talent agency's information on the reverse, <i>Christine Jorgensen Collection</i> (Circa 1960) .....	23
Illustration 2-2: Webpage content from ‘Victims or Villains: Examining Ten Years of Transgender Images on Television’, GLAAD (2012) .....	68



## Glossary of Terms

### **Authenticity or ‘the authentic self’[self-described by narrators]**

Authenticity as from an essentialist theoretical standpoint is viewed as an assumed ‘real, presumably biologically based and measurable, binary gender paradigm from which transsexuals were deviant, feminist theory spurred the shift from an emphasis on authenticity to one based on “performativity,” – ‘where gender is seen as solely an expression of learned social behaviours and cognitions’ championed by Judith Butler.<sup>1</sup> The term - authenticity - as used in this study is a culturally specific term to America and used by narrators featured to describe themselves. It originates from the work of Professor Brene Brown, a social work researcher and is directly related to an individual’s self-perceived, truest form of self-expression. She states that ‘Authenticity is a collection of choices that we have to make every day. It’s about the choice to show up and be real. The choice to be honest. The choice to let our true selves be seen’.<sup>2</sup> It is supported and utilised by writers, trans activists and pro-trans practitioners such as Kate Bornstein and Diane Ehrensaft.<sup>3</sup>

### **Cisgender**

---

<sup>1</sup> J.L. Nagoshi., C.T. Nagoshi., and S. Brzuzy., *Gender and Sexual Identity: Transcending Feminist and Queer Theory* (New York: Springer, 2014), pp. 77 -78.

<sup>2</sup> B. Brown., *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You’re Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are* (Minnesota: Hazelden, 2010) p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> Please see Brown, *The Gifts...*; K. Bornstein., and S. Bear Bergman., *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2010) and K. Bornstein., *My gender workbook* (New York: Routledge, 1998); D. Ehrensaft, *Gender Born, Gender Made: Raising Healthy Gender-Nonconforming Children* (New York: The Experiment, LCC, 2011) and D. Ehrensaft., ‘From Gender Identity Disorder to Gender Identity Creativity: True Gender Self Child Therapy’, *Journal of Homosexuality*, 59 (2012), pp. 337–356.

A term used by some to describe people who are not transgender and identify with their birth sex. “Cis-” is a Latin prefix meaning "on the same side as," and is therefore an antonym of “trans-”.<sup>4</sup>

### **Cross-dresser**

While anyone may wear clothes associated with a different sex, the term *cross-dresser* is typically used to refer to men who occasionally wear clothes, makeup, and accessories culturally associated with women. Those men typically identify as heterosexual. This activity is a form of gender expression and not done for entertainment purposes. Cross-dressers do not wish to permanently change their sex or live full-time as women. *Replaces the term “transvestite”*.<sup>5</sup>

### **FTM Individuals**

Female-to-male transsexual people, transsexual men, transmen, or transguys — individuals assigned female at birth who identify as male. Some transmen reject being seen as “FTM”, arguing that they have always been male and are only making this identity visible to other people (instead, they may call themselves “MTM”).<sup>6</sup>

### **Gender Dysphoria**

In 2013, the American Psychiatric Association released the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V) which replaced the outdated entry “Gender Identity Disorder” with *Gender Dysphoria* and changed the criteria for

---

<sup>4</sup> ‘Media Reference Guide – Transgender Issues’ GLAAD, <http://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender>, date accessed: 14 December 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Transgender Terminology’, *Cornell University*, <https://hr.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/trans%20terms.pdf>, date accessed: 10 January 2017.

diagnosis. The necessity of a psychiatric diagnosis remains controversial, as both psychiatric and medical authorities recommend individualized medical treatment through hormones and/or surgeries to treat gender dysphoria. Some transgender advocates believe the inclusion of Gender Dysphoria in the DSM is necessary in order to advocate for health insurance that covers the medically necessary treatment recommended for transgender people.<sup>7</sup>

### **Gender Expression**

External manifestations of gender, expressed through a person's name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behaviour, voice, and/or body characteristics. Society identifies these cues as masculine and feminine, although what is considered masculine or feminine changes over time and varies by culture. Typically, transgender people seek to align their gender expression with their gender identity, rather than the sex they were assigned at birth.<sup>8</sup>

### **Gender Identity**

A person's internal, deeply held sense of their gender. For transgender people, their own internal gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. Most people have a gender identity of man or woman (or boy or girl). For some people, their gender identity does not fit neatly into one of those two choices (see non-binary and/or genderqueer below.) Unlike gender expression (see below) gender identity is not visible to others.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> 'Media Reference Guide – Transgender Issues' *GLAAD*, <http://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender>, date accessed: 14 December 2017.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Gender Identity Disorder (GID)**

*outdated, see Gender Dysphoria*<sup>10</sup>

## **Gender Identity Center of Colorado (GIC)**

The GIC based in Denver, Colorado, is a provider of quality social and clinical support to the gender variant community.

## **Gender Non-Conforming**

A term used to describe some people whose gender expression is different from conventional expectations of masculinity and femininity. **Please note that not all gender non-conforming people identify as transgender; nor are all transgender people gender non-conforming.** Many people have gender expressions that are not entirely conventional – that fact alone does not make them transgender. Many transgender men and women have gender expressions that are conventionally masculine or feminine. Simply being transgender does not make someone gender non-conforming. The term is not a synonym for *transgender* or *transsexual* and should only be used if someone self-identifies as gender non-conforming.<sup>11</sup>

## **Gendernormative**

Like heteronormative, gendernormative societies and cultures embrace and promote gender binary behaviours, activities and roles; men are masculine, tough, non-emotional, household bread winners etc; women are feminine, mothers, take care of domestic chores

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

and children, rely upon men. Gendernormative societies maintaining these ideals at all costs and are intolerant of gender variance.<sup>12</sup>

### **Genderism**

The societal, institutional, and individual beliefs and practices that privilege cisgender people and subordinate and disparage transgender and gender-nonconforming people.<sup>13</sup>

### **Genderqueer**

People who identify outside of a gender binary by seeing themselves as neither male nor female (but as a third gender or as gender fluid) as both, or as somewhere in between.<sup>14</sup>

### **Gender Variance**

Gender variance is an atypical development in the relationship between the gender identity and the visible sex of an individual.<sup>15</sup>

### **Heteronormativity**

Heteronormativity is a term used by academics and social scientists to define a cultural or social regime which ‘preferences heterosexual relationships and sexuality over all other forms of sexual expression’.<sup>16</sup>

### **MTF Individuals**

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Gender Variance (Dysphoria)’, *GIRES* (2014), <https://www.gires.org.uk/category/research-archive/>, date accessed: 15 October 2014

<sup>16</sup> S.C.N. Uhrig., *An Examination of Poverty and Sexual Orientation in the UK* (Colchester: Institute for Social and Economic Research University of Essex, 2013), p. 1.

Male-to-female transsexual people, transsexual women, or transwomen— individuals assigned male at birth who identify as female. Some transwomen reject being seen as “MTF”, arguing that they have always been female and are only making this identity visible to other people (instead, they may call themselves “FTF”).<sup>17</sup>

### **Non-binary and/or genderqueer**

Terms used by some people who experience their gender identity and/or gender expression as falling outside the categories of man and woman. They may define their gender as falling somewhere in between man and woman, or they may define it as wholly different from these terms. The term is not a synonym for *transgender* or *transsexual* and should only be used if someone self-identifies as non-binary and/or genderqueer.<sup>18</sup>

### **Sex**

The classification of a person as male or female. At birth, infants are assigned a sex, usually based on the appearance of their external anatomy. (This is what is written on the birth certificate.) A person's sex, however, is actually a combination of bodily characteristics including: chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics.<sup>19</sup>

### **Sexual Orientation**

Describes a person's enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to another person. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. Transgender people may

---

<sup>17</sup> ‘Transgender Terminology’, *Cornell University*, <https://hr.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/trans%20terms.pdf>, date accessed: 10 January 2017.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Media Reference Guide – Transgender Issues’ *GLAAD*, <http://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender>, date accessed: 14 December 2017.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

be straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer. For example, a person who transitions from male to female and is attracted solely to men would typically identify as a straight woman.<sup>20</sup>

### **Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS)**

Also called Gender Confirmation Surgery (GCS). Refers to doctor-supervised surgical interventions, and is only one small part of transition (see transition above) ...<sup>21</sup>

### **Stealth [aka. 'going stealth or 'in stealth']**

Stealth is a word or a phrase which trans communities and literature use for individuals who hide their gender identity to blend or integrate into normative society, presenting as 'the gender of their experience'.<sup>22</sup>

### **Trans**

Used as shorthand to mean *transgender* or *transsexual* - or sometimes to be inclusive of a wide variety of identities under the transgender umbrella...<sup>23</sup>

### **Transfeminine**

A term for all gender variant individuals who identify as trans and or on the feminine spectrum.<sup>24</sup>

### **Transgender (adj.)**

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> E. Van der Wal., 'Crossing over, coming out, blending in: A trans interrogation of the closet', *South African Review of Sociology*, 47:3 (2016), p. 61.

<sup>23</sup> 'Media Reference Guide – Transgender Issues' GLAAD, <http://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender>, date accessed: 14 December 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. People under the transgender umbrella may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms - including *transgender*...Many transgender people are prescribed hormones by their doctors to bring their bodies into alignment with their gender identity. Some undergo surgery as well. But not all transgender people can or will take those steps, and a transgender identity is not dependent upon physical appearance or medical procedures.<sup>25</sup>

### **Transmasculine**

This is a term used for ‘all gender variant people on the masculine spectrum or the transgender experience’ and includes: Man, MTM, FTM, Transsexual Man, Man of Transsexual Experience, New Man, Transman, Transfag, Transqueer, GenderQueer, Guy, Boi, Trans-Butch, Tomboy, Boy-Chick, Gender Outlaw, Drag King, Passing Woman, Bearded Female, Two-Spirit, Ungendered, Gender Trash, Questioning, Just Curious.<sup>26</sup>

### **Transsexual (adj.)**

An older term that originated in the medical and psychological communities. Still preferred by some people who have permanently changed - or seek to change - their bodies through medical interventions, including but not limited to hormones and/or surgeries. Unlike *transgender*, *transsexual* is **not** an umbrella term. Many transgender people do not identify as transsexual and prefer the word *transgender*...<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> G. Hansbury., ‘The Middle Men: An introduction to the transmasculine identities’, *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 6:3(2005), pp. 243- 245.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Media Reference Guide – Transgender Issues’ GLAAD, <http://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender>, date accessed: 14 December 2017.



## **Transition**

Altering one's birth sex is not a one-step procedure; it is a complex process that occurs over a long period of time. Transition can include some or all of the following personal, medical, and legal steps: telling one's family, friends, and co-workers; using a different name and new pronouns; dressing differently; changing one's name and/or sex on legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly (though not always) one or more types of surgery. The exact steps involved in transition vary from person to person...<sup>28</sup>

## **Two Spirit People**

A Native American/First Nation term for people who blend the masculine and the feminine. It is commonly used to describe anatomical women who took on the roles and/or dress of men and anatomical men who took on the roles and/or dress of women in the past (preferred term to 'berdache', an anthropological term viewed as derogative). The term is also often used by contemporary LGBT Native American and First Nation people to describe themselves.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> 'Transgender Terminology', *Cornell University*, <https://hr.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/trans%20terms.pdf>, date accessed: 10 January 2017.

## Chapter 1 Introduction

### 1.1 America's strict mythical and ideological gender binary roles

Style is the collision point between our fantasies of who we are, the larger realities we live with, and the way we're perceived by others. Style can be your best secret weapon in the task of knowing yourself and finding harmony in your world or the most canny, double-agent conspirator against you in a mass-conformist brainwashing that wishes you to regulate you into a cubicle, both literally and psychologically.<sup>1</sup>

This quote by style journalist Cintra Wilson resonates with how America's long-established mythical and ideological gender binary roles of male and female have infiltrated the society, culture, and minds of all who live there, resulting in an environment that marginalises gender variance. If the word 'style' is replaced with 'gender binary myth', the quote reads much like a trans narrative, covering all those who fall under the trans umbrella and beyond.<sup>2</sup> It plays the part of 'the larger realities we live with' and its purpose to use this societal myth to dictate, judge, police or control, and/or condemn any person who is perceived to 'transgress', cross, experiment with, straddle, or move between these perceived strict binary gender roles of male and/or female.<sup>3</sup> Gender roles aim to regulate an individual's gender variance, identity, and outward gender expression,

---

<sup>1</sup> C. Wilson., *Fear and Clothing: Unbuckling American Style* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2015), p. 8-9.

<sup>2</sup> Transgender is a frequently used umbrella term for individuals who do not conform to gender norms or cultural expectations. It can encompass cross-dressers, transvestites, drag queens, butch dykes, bull dykes, transsexuals (those who identify emotionally and psychologically as the gender opposite to their birth sex) and those who wish to transition via hormone injections and gender confirming surgery; transwoman (male-to-female), transman (female-to-male) and many more gender identities; S.S. Spicer., 'Healthcare Needs of the Transgender Homeless Population', *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, 14:4 (2010), p. 322; In this thesis however, the shorter term of 'trans' has been chosen due to discussions I had with members of the trans community in attending a UK based trans conference where the full term 'transgender' was no longer used as it was viewed as exclusionary. It was felt by the trans community that 'transgender' excluded those individuals who identified as gender fluid, genderqueer, gender-non-conforming, non-binary etc.; i.e. do not want to live as or be identified as either binary male or female.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Fear*, p. 8.

conspiring to control all persons under ‘mass-conformist brainwashing...both literally and psychologically’.<sup>4</sup> The ideology of these roles buffer the myth as it reverberates in American society and in trans lives and narratives, as oral historians Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson state ‘The mythical elements in memory, in short, need to be seen as both evidence of the past, and as a continuing historical force in the present’.<sup>5</sup> Dianne Dentice and Michelle Dietert, sociologists and gender scholars, state that, historically, what defines America’s mythical and ideological binary norms, is ‘an ongoing debate among sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, physicians, judicial systems, the government, feminists, the media and transgender activists’.<sup>6</sup>

The early decades of discussion in this thesis predate the term ‘transgender’ by 30 years; however, I decided to use *trans* in the title and throughout this thesis as it represents historical and societal changes from the previous use of medically-determined terminology to more recent activist-lead vocabulary. At present, *trans* is the preferred umbrella term, which will undoubtedly shift again in the cultural sands of terminology, language and discourse, power, labels, and being.<sup>7</sup>

This thesis investigates America’s mythical and ideological binary roles, and in turn, the powerful causal effect these roles hold over heteronormative and gender normative American individuals, families, and their gender variant children. Through in-depth analysis of 22 original oral history interviews, featuring 15 of the interviews as case

---

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Fear*, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> R. Samuel., and P. Thompson., *The Myths We Live By* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 20.

<sup>6</sup> D. Dentice, and M. Dietert., ‘Liminal Spaces and the Transgender Experience’, *Theory in Action*, 8:2 (2015), p. 72.

<sup>7</sup> Transgender, trans, trans\*, trans-; Stryker, S., Currah, P., and Moore, L. J., ‘Introduction: Trans-, Trans, or Transgender?’, *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly*, 36:3/4 (2008), pp. 11–22.

studies - plus additional archival sources - I consider how American popular culture, including the news, media, medical literature and TV from the 1950s onwards perpetuates societal, familial, and self-policing of trans individuals. In the process, this thesis gauges the dangerous and damaging effect that the gender binary has on trans people who choose to live as their authentic selves. In examining how trans individuals view themselves and how they define their identities (while attempting to adhere to the gender binary rules), this thesis also examines the power of national myth and the impact it has on the individuals on whom it is imposed. Trans bodies are targeted and marginalised by these myths - which frequently results in extreme violence and even death - especially for trans women and trans young people of colour.<sup>8</sup> While these ideas are not new to those who live these experiences, this area of oral history research is in its infancy. Thus, the examination of time period in relation to medicalised literature and its influence on pop culture, as well as the use of transgender theory and liminality theory while grounded in an oral history theory and methodology, this thesis represents an important and groundbreaking contribution to the fields of oral history, trans oral history, transgender studies, gender studies and pop culture studies.

My historical context begins in the 1950s because of converging historical factors occurring during this period: medical literature, terminology, and procedures around transsexuality and ‘sex change’ [currently gender reassignment] were initially taking shape; TV was exploding with popularity; post WWII gender roles were blurring; and America made history with its first perceived transgender celebrity, Christine Jorgensen.

---

<sup>8</sup> Samuel and Thompson, *The Myths*, p. 15; ‘Violence Against the Transgender Community in 2018’, *Human Rights Campaign*, <https://www.hrc.org/resources/violence-against-the-transgender-community-in-2018>, date accessed: 30 September 2018

Jorgensen stepped onto the world stage, sparking intrigue and international headlines, making 'transsexual' a household term - whether regarded positively or negatively.<sup>9</sup> America's interest in Jorgensen allowed some trans and gender variant individuals to feel less alone for the first time, opening the door for the first wave of the trans rights movement at the end of the 1950s.

This thesis features stories of trans individuals, some of whom live quiet, unassuming lives, while actively disrupting the gender binary, challenging and crossing the myths of gender in America, and ultimately finding a place of authenticity on the gender spectrum.<sup>10</sup> These trans narrators tell unique stories of gender expression in which they wrestle with the negative and monstrous myths focused on trans people by medical literature, society and pop culture. These are the stories that allow them to reflect upon and directly engage with their own identity (re)construction. These are identities forged through shame, internalised transphobia, isolation, but also of hope, love, and survival. They express how the dominant discourse - the established and continued myths/tropes about trans people - can be overcome on an individual basis, preventing them from 'being absorbed or smothered by the historical [narrative] of the majority', which is trans exclusionary at best.<sup>11</sup> With each trans narrative, these voices create a collective ability to destroy harmful myths and tropes by bringing them into conversation. Sharing these

---

<sup>9</sup> A. Cavalcante., *Struggling for the Ordinary: Media and Transgender Belonging in Everyday Life* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> The term 'authenticity', or the 'authentic self' is a culturally specific term to America and used by the narrators featured in this thesis to describe themselves. It originates from the work of Professor Brene Brown, a social work researcher and is directly related to the individual's self-perceived, truest form of self-expression; I feel that as an oral historian and PhD researcher, my role in promoting a shared authority is relating to how narrators make sense of themselves, their pasts and their identities in the present, and not to editorialise or oppress how they wish to describe themselves.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel and Thompson, *The Myths*, p. 18.

narratives allows these individuals pathways to create their own meanings and identities, smashing the paths of the gender binary myth which has for so long permeated pop culture and American society.

## 1.2 Situating me: My place and writing reflexively in an oral history thesis

I have written my thesis entirely in the first person. This derives from several important aspects of my life. Firstly, my social work and oral history backgrounds have taught me that reflexivity and reflection, especially prior to and after undertaking interviews and during analysis, are essential for engaging in best practice standards and connect the guiding element of oral history research in the present.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, and most importantly, using first person allows me to engage with and include in the work, my own gender journey.

By situating myself within the research project from beginning to end, I have allowed myself to continually reflect upon not only the trans individuals with whom I worked, but my gender identity, outsider status, role as researcher, and training as a social work practitioner. This framework enables my roles of recruiter, listener, learner, supporter, and comforter – in addition to scholar and researcher. My reflexive practice has permitted me to outwardly analyse how I affected situations, interactions, and interviews. By bringing my additional skills as a researcher into conversation with my subjectivity and potential influence on the interview process - including elements from my own lived experiences - I was able to better interrogate my biases regarding trans individuals over three discriminatory levels. I enthusiastically used social work researcher Neil Thompson's anti-oppressive Personal, Cultural and Societal (PCS)

---

<sup>12</sup> B. Probst, 'The Eye Regards Itself: Benefits and Challenges of Reflexivity in Qualitative Social Work Research', *Social Work Research*, 39:1 (2015), pp. 37-48; D. Miehl and K. Moffat, 'Constructing Social Work Identity Based on the Reflective Self', *British Journal of Social Work*, 30 (2000), pp. 341-343; L. Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 2016), p. 56; H. Ferguson, 'Outline of Critical Best Practice Perspective on Social Work and Social Care', *British Journal of Social Work*, 33 (2003), pp. 1005-1024; 'Principles and Best Practices', *Oral History Association* (2009), <http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices/>, date accessed: 18 December 2015.

practice model: reflexively listening and analysing trans histories during the interviews and during analysis.<sup>13</sup> This reflexiveness in social work is known as ‘helicoptering’. Originating from the field of counselling it is described as ‘reflecting in action as a form of cognitive self-monitoring which is achieved by elevating one’s mind — ‘helicoptering’— above the interaction...’<sup>14</sup> Most powerfully to the research, reflexivity includes thoughtful consideration on how to improve myself on each of these points for the future, to become a better oral historian, researcher and person.

My reflections on the PCS model for outward use led me to consider my own lived oppressions via my personal, cultural, and societal background. Living under a Western medical culture, I did not from birth, fit into the category, biologically or physically as a ‘normal’ female because I am one of a very rare cohort of individuals born without a pituitary gland.<sup>15</sup> The biological and social implications of this led me to spend a large portion of my life questioning my gender. In not having the biological or chemical ability to secrete growth hormones, or oestrogen/testosterone, my childhood was controlled entirely by an endocrinologist; I struggled with not knowing where I fitted in or who I was. I was neither girl nor boy, neither female nor male, feeling misaligned socially along these binaries. I felt that I liminally occupied both genders throughout childhood, striving in an aching way to be and feel like a girl, but failing constantly, feeling more like a boy, which resulted in the frequent embrace of my masculinity and ‘tomboy’ activities.

---

<sup>13</sup> N. Thompson, *Anti-discriminatory practice* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 4<sup>th</sup> edn., 2006), p. 26.

<sup>14</sup> H. Ferguson., ‘How social workers reflect in action and when and why they don’t: the possibilities and limits to reflective practice in social work’, *Social Work Education*, 37:4 (2018), p. 420.

<sup>15</sup> ‘What is the pituitary gland...and what does it do?’, *Pituitary Foundation*, <https://www.pituitary.org.uk/information/what-is-the-pituitary-gland/>, accessed 9 February 2018.



In adolescence, I was administered oestrogen to put me (chemically) through puberty, all the while being subject to medical procedures encouraged by my body's liminality and biological curiosity. My confusion of gender did not end there, it produced teenage angst, isolation, depression and to an extent, dysphoria, all the while being silenced by society's gender binary ideals of womanhood. In adulthood, I continue to take hormone replacement to make me feel more 'womanly' or 'normal' as dictated by the medical community and by society's standards of femininity and maternity. However, depending on my hormone levels, I still have days when I just do not fit in to either strict binary gender, but fall somewhere on a spectrum. Having discussed my story with sociologist Aaron Devor, Trans Chair of the largest transgender archive in the world, situated at the University of Victoria in Canada, he suggested my identity may lean towards intersex, though not in the strictest sense; I technically have female sex organs, they just do not function and never will. What it means is that my emotional and psychological leanings are not strongly one or the other in the male-female binary that society says are my options for identity.

Even without a comfortable social label to cling to, I have become increasingly secure in my gender identity and in my liminality over the years. Thinking back, this was a main reason for pursuing a trans study. Although it was more of a subconscious endeavour at first, it only became clear to me when I took the time to reflect on my positioning in life, putting the last piece of the reflexivity puzzle into place. In relation to this study and the narrators I interviewed, I directly related to feeling liminal, of not fitting in, of being weird, or different, of feeling isolated and/or the only one of my kind. Most importantly, I relate to and advocate for living on a gender spectrum which encapsulates

both my gender expression and my identity, rather than under strict binary roles of male and female which the American myth and society dictate.

The importance of situating oneself in the research from an oral history point of view is extremely important; I recently listened to oral historian and academic Lynn Abrams talk about how most oral historians do not situate themselves in their research enough.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, I do not believe that research is objective, but is subjective, messy, and personal. Oral history embraces this concept fully, which makes for exciting, risky research that we can engage with and learn from. Therefore, there was no better path to approach my research, especially around intimate oral histories, than through writing in the first person.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> 'Day 1 Session 3, Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity', Lynn Abrams, SGSAH Podcast, 2018, [http://www.sgsah.ac.uk/e&t/headline\\_597982\\_en.html](http://www.sgsah.ac.uk/e&t/headline_597982_en.html), date accessed: 1 October 2018.

<sup>17</sup> P. Davies., "'Me', 'Me', 'Me': The Use of the First Person in Academic Writing and Some Reflections on Subjective Analyses of Personal Experiences", *Sociology*, 46:4 (2012), pp. 744-752.

### 1.3 Research context: Gender Identity Center of Colorado



**Illustration 1-1: Photograph, ‘Gender Identity Center of Colorado’, 2016 <sup>18</sup>**

When my thesis journey began, I undertook a social work PhD, influenced mainly by my previous training and my belief in the importance of oral history as a research methodology. I knew I wanted to use mostly unstructured life history interviews, because of the freedom they afforded me of moving backward and forward in the narratives, increasing the comfort of narrators, and enhancing the quality of information and authority shared.

I had originally aimed to interview young trans people who were not only homeless but engaging in survival sex work to earn money and/or temporarily get off the streets. Unfortunately, I encountered unforeseen roadblocks, such as the timetable attached to ethics approval processes (which were misaligned with my planned dates for

---

<sup>18</sup> L. Barton., Photograph, ‘Gender Identity Center of Colorado’, *Lorna Barton’s private collection*, 2016.

fieldwork in America) and difficulty connecting via email and social media with homeless support services who potentially catered to this population. Moreover, on the ground, I had challenges in identifying and building meaningful relationships with young people who lived in such difficult circumstances, who were vulnerable to multiple forms of discrimination and legal persecution. Consequentially, these factors derailed my plans to listen to an overlooked and important population of the trans community during my (limited) time in America.

However, I quickly changed direction to focus on the trans support service for which I volunteered 6 days a week: The Denver-based Gender Identity Center of Colorado (GIC). My intended cohort expanded from under 18s who were involved in sex work to include narrators of any age and without pre-set parameters of their life experiences. What I initially thought of as failure (not having the original cohort I'd planned on) turned into an excellent opportunity which yielded generous, rich data that involved narrators sharing their life histories, full of stories of self-discovery, trans discovery, abiding by societal expectations, and even (for some) reaching a triumphant place of acceptance.

The resulting thesis is not representative of trans/gender variant communities across the United States, but it is representative of a group which gathered at the GIC in Denver, catering psychologically and socially to trans individuals at every stage of their journey. The individuals who used the Center felt themselves less policed by the wider society outside of its doors, despite (at times) policing each other within it, either from a sense of adherence to self and socially created rules and perceptions of presentation, or attire and gender-related behaviours. This intra-Center policing seemed more prolific

with trans women and older members who used the GIC, which at times caused debate, conflict, and resistance.

Interestingly, in my role as facilitator for a number of weeks in the young adults trans group (ages 18-30), I found them much more orientated to negotiating their gender identity depending on the spaces they occupied and how far along they were in their transition, or acceptance of their gender variance. While interacting with this particular group, the most prevalent topic of discussion related to where they ‘belonged’ in society. The group admitted that despite it being an inclusive group, it was ‘trans man heavy’; weekly discussions revolved around ‘packing’, ‘packing at work’, presentation, binders and binding, haircuts, relationships and testosterone- or ‘T’ as it is known within the trans circles.<sup>19</sup> Each group member who identified as male was at a different stage in their T-taking journey. Those who had just been prescribed received applause and high fives for achieving another successful step forward in their transition, and those more long-term users described the ongoing process of their ‘second puberty’. For some of the trans men in the group, female puberty was emotionally and physically disastrous, sending them into a spiral of self-hatred, a gender dysphoric nightmare of hair growth in new places and unwanted breast growth.

From the outset of my fieldwork and volunteer work at the GIC, as an outsider and as a researcher, the GIC felt like it had a temporary sense of community or solidarity. Essentially, what could be equated as community was dependant on an individual’s terms, time limits and attendance. What I’ve termed the ‘Rainbow Download’- the assumption

---

<sup>19</sup> ‘Packing’ means stuffing ones’ trousers/pants to present an obvious male bulge; ‘binding’ dictates wearing a specially designed binder which is extremely tight and presses down the breasts giving the illusion of a flat chest.

that because you identify as LGBTQI, there is an instant all-embracing attitude of empathy, community, outreach, and solidarity for others - fails because each person is human and fallible and primarily focused on their own journey, life, and goals. Therefore, the term *trans community* is a very complex and problematic term that I am not comfortable using in this thesis. It additionally assumes that trans individuals make up a homogenous group, which it is not.

In addition, the Center, I quickly discovered, lacked diversity with regards to people of colour. The groups were of a large range, catering to most gender variant identities under the trans umbrella: trans women, trans men, a young trans group, a young adults trans group, a non-binary group and a cross-dressing group, to name a few. However, the longer I volunteered the more I became aware that the lack of trans people of colour was widely acknowledged and criticised by Center users, counselling clients, and volunteer/pro bono staff members. Interestingly, the Center was known for catering mostly to ‘white middle-aged trans women’ and despite best efforts by volunteer counsellors to change the culture, no more than a handful of trans people of colour attended the groups and programs there. As a result, trans people of colour’s voices are proportionately underrepresented in this study.

#### **1.4 Subjectivity of narrators’ experience in relation to historical events**

In using oral history, this thesis highlights the subjectivity of an individual narrator’s experiences within the interpretations of their past experiences in relation to their current lives, which are rarely linked to the historical events on which oral history

predominantly focuses.<sup>20</sup> I find it surprising that the narrators did not refer to influential historical events for the LGBTQI community in America, such as Stonewall, or even current Pride marches or changes in law and legislation regarding trans rights as human rights over the last 20 years. This could suggest feelings of exclusion from discourses which are solely focused on sexual identity. Instead they draw on intimate memories and personal portrayals of their complicated lives as influenced by America's gender ideals - of how each narrator abided and lived by them, fought them, and, depending on the narrator, became the people I had the privilege of listening to as a result of their experiences. This listening is what Thompson refers to as 'the releasing of memory' because of its possible therapeutic process in the form of powerful meanings and feelings towards those memories.<sup>21</sup>

## **1.5 Thesis structure**

Trans people's ability to overcome America's mythical gender binary is a large part of this thesis, despite it having been instilled into their lives via their families, television, the media, national laws and policies, and other heteronormative and gender-normative institutions. Each of these aspects of culture plays a major role in portraying trans individuals and defining their place within American society but change comes with brave new voices being added to the cultural discourses of gender and identity. Chapter 2 is split into two parts: Part I begins by looking at the sensationalist exposure of Christine Jorgensen as the first representation of trans individuals in American popular culture.

---

<sup>20</sup> A. Portelli., 'What Makes Oral History Different', in R. Perks and A. Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 38.

<sup>21</sup> P. Thompson., *The Voice of the Past, Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., 2000), pp. 180-181.

Throughout Part I, I examine historical trans representation within the influential area of pop culture: medicalised literature. Medicalised literature - especially psychiatric and mental health writings - have historically influenced television audience via sitcoms, talk shows, and comedies, creating and perpetuating ‘trans tropes’ of ridicule and mockery. Part II therefore will focus on historical pop culture and media representations of trans individuals in the USA. Patrick Califia, trans individual, activist and author, eloquently summarises these tropes on a societal level:

...that transgendered people are emotionally unstable or emotionally exhibitionist and display other signs of mental illness, that we are an appropriate target for ridicule or violence, that all transsexuals are male-to-female, that transsexuals can never “pass”...that all transsexuals are drug addicts or alcoholics, or that all transsexuals have AIDS or are sex workers.<sup>22</sup>

In response, Part II discusses literature presenting the impact and reality of these tropes for trans young people, especially those of colour, living and continuing to exist under the restrictive and hazardous gender binary in modern America. It additionally reflects therefore, on the necessity of trans oral histories and their impact on future research. Lastly, Part II will scrutinise the theoretical choices and overall underpinnings implemented throughout the research.

Using an oral history methodology promotes sharing authority defined by oral historian Michael Frisch as ‘the history-making offered by both interviewer and narrator’ and is discussed in depth in Chapter 3. Oral history and other methodologies in approaching trans lives, including deep listening, ‘that is, listening for meanings, not just

---

<sup>22</sup> P. Califia., *Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 2003), p. XXIX.



facts, and listening in such a way that prompts more profound reflection from the interview'.<sup>23</sup>

The selected 15 narratives for analysis and comparison feature in Chapters 4 through 7: Chapter 4 focuses on Katy, a transwoman, and the oldest narrator of the cohort, who at the time of her interview was 70 years old. Her narrative contains a normative trans narrative – that of feeling different in her body and gender since birth. However, her story spans many decades of oppression and she shares about feeling weird and outcast within her own family and community, cross-dressing, self-shame and policing, and her perceptions of the social myths around masculinity and femininity. Katy's narrative also includes her experience as a soldier during the Vietnam War, a period of her life filled with violence, tragedy, undeniable resilience, love, strength and a resistance to America's gender ideals. This resistance led Katy to an eventual place of transition and of self-actualisation. Decades later, she landed comfortably on the gender spectrum under her own volition, with top down policing and self-policing ceasing to play a part in Katy's life narrative.

In Chapter 5, Corina is the dominant narrator. As a Native American transwoman, she is one of the few voices of colour within this thesis. Her narrative contains silences of lost heritage and ethnicity, arising from her adoption at 3 months old and receiving a surname change from Feather to Duncan. Throughout her life she adhered to America's societal and gender ideological roles with catastrophic personal results connected to a self-destructive use of alcohol and porn. Corina's rich story is one of survival, perseverance,

---

<sup>23</sup> L. Shopes., 'Commentary: Sharing Authority', *The Oral History Review*, 30:1 (2003), p. 3; A. Sheftel., and S. Zembrzycki., 'Only Human: A Reflection on the Ethical and Methodological Challenges of Working with "Difficult" Stories', *The Oral History Review*, 37:2 (2010), p. 199.

and recovery. Much like Katy, she reaches a point in her journey of self-actualisation without fear of persecution, overcoming the gender binary and finding her place on the gender spectrum.

Trans man narratives are rarely amplified, and America historically perpetuates the myth/ trope that the only trans people are trans women. Therefore, Chapter 6 emphasizes the voices of three trans men; Grayson, Artemus, and Luke. Grayson's story is one of apathy and loss; having never felt like a female but waiting on a societal gender ideal that would allow him to one day bloom into a beautiful woman, he spent most of his formative years playing an inferior role to his sister, who is the epitome of the 'girl next door'. It took time for Grayson to find himself and his place on the gender spectrum, living under such familial policing and self-policing. Artemus and Luke's narratives contrast Grayson's narrative. Artemus's story is one of joy, success, and family support. Luke, at 22, believes that trans means privilege, yet he lives in a homeless hostel and crushes cans, using the cash return-deposits to buy food. The chapter concludes with all three narrators in very different places in relation to their gender identity, transness, and authenticity in relation to abiding by the gender binary and finding a place on the gender spectrum.

Chapter 7 revolves around the narratives of Jess and Asher, who identify as genderqueer.<sup>24</sup> Their stories contrast significantly; Asher experiences unconditional support from her family in relation to his identity and resistance to the instilled gender

---

<sup>24</sup> Asher uses what she describes as 'rotating pronouns: she/he/they' and out of respect for Asher, I will use these pronoun choices while writing about him. Asher did not specify the order for using pronouns in identifying them conversationally or in this thesis, instead stating, '...just call me as you see me'. However, because Asher identifies and respects herself as equal parts female, male and neutral, I will use the rotating pronouns in that order throughout.

binary. Jess however, is consumed by how America's societal ideals of gender resulting in gender dysphoria, eating disorders, control issues, and familial gender policing. Top down societal gender policing presents obsessively in Jess, from her experimentation with androgyny to aggressively pursuing transition to male, and in turn, re-transitioning to female. The consequences of Jess's attempts at adherence to the binary cause confusion and pain, perpetuating an uncomfortable relation her gender identity. Unlike Asher, who shirks the binary for living authentically, Jess continues self-polices, hoping that a geographical change will allow her to explore and embrace her genderqueer identity, ultimately allowing her to discover her place on the spectrum.

The conclusion of this thesis advances the discourse of the gender spectrum by including the narrative of Sable, a queer transwoman who challenges the gender binary and its representations not just in her story, but outwardly and publicly her daily life as an activist for trans rights. This juxtaposition of a narrative serves to wholeheartedly highlight and bolsters the thesis' main argument that the gender binary is dangerous, damaging, and at times deadly for trans individuals, as modern American history and pop culture reveals. Moving forward, I argue that America has to exorcise the gender binary myth of male and female in favour of embracing the fluidity of a gender spectrum, allowing those who live on it to find equality, authenticity and acceptance. Moreover, it should aim to privilege rather than omit the gender variant voices and their lived experiences.

## **Chapter 2 A literature review of trans representation in modern American history, consequences and theoretical framework**

### **Part I: Reviewing trans representation in American medical literature from the 1950s**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

...false beliefs about transgender people and negative attitudes towards us continue to flourish. Much of this transphobia is fuelled by right-wing, monotheistic religious prohibitions against “sex change” ...and by psychiatric establishment’s adherence to the paradigm of Gender Identity Disorder, which pathologizes transgenderism in popular culture as well as in medical and legal discourse.<sup>1</sup>

The terminology used by Patrick Califia, trans man and activist, is outdated, but his assessment of the representation of trans people in America’s modern history continues to ring true regardless of the increase in trans visibility and activism for trans rights so effective it has changed policy and law over the last decade. The second wave trans rights movement that began in the 1990s, has been marred over the last two years by a roll back on LGBT rights by President Donald Trump’s administration.<sup>2</sup> This chapter is split into two parts: Part I will examine historical trans presentation within pop culture of medical literature and Part II will focus on historical pop culture and media representations of trans individuals in the USA.

Historically trans individuals have been perceived by society as deviant, monsters, freaks and something to be mocked and policed because they transgress America’s

---

<sup>1</sup> Califia., *Sex Changes*, p. XXIX.

<sup>2</sup> S. Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2008), p. 121; *New York Times*, ‘The L.G.B.T. Trump Fallacy’, 17 April 2017; *New York Times*, ‘Trump Says Transgender Ban Is a ‘Great Favor’ for the Military’, 10 Aug 2017; *New York Times*, ‘Trump Plan Would Cut Back Health Care Protections for Transgender People’, 21 April 2018.

ingrained gender binary myth. Part II will additionally examine the consequences of these representations which impact on young trans individuals, especially those of colour in the current social climate. Lastly, Part II will scrutinise the theoretical choices implemented throughout the research.

My focus for the research begins in the early 1950s, not because trans individuals did not ‘exist’ prior to then, but because it was a time when ‘wartime shifts in traditional gender roles made the boundaries dividing men and women seem less firm’.<sup>3</sup> Men were returning from World War II (WWII) to their pre-war industrial jobs while women who were, up until this point in those jobs, forcibly returned to the kitchen.<sup>4</sup> Thus, this gender role ambiguity gave post war America what Califia argued as ‘gender paranoia’.<sup>5</sup> During this period there was a promotion of the brilliance of technology in America; the power of science via popular magazines, and the dawning of an atomic age. It saw medical science as the most promising to ‘find solutions to the most daunting human problems’ which included, the ‘sex change’ as termed then.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the 1950s served as a starting point for the public appearance of Christine Jorgensen; transwoman and unwitting trans activist. Her appearance onto the world stage in 1952, discussed in detail later in the chapter, launched transsexualism into mainstream America, encouraging society to

---

<sup>3</sup> See W.L. Williams., *The spirit and the flesh: Sexual diversity in American Indian culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); M. Garber., *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (London: Penguin Books, 1993); L. Feinberg., *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996); C. Sears., *Arresting Dress: Cross-Dressing, Law, and Fascination in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); C.R. Snorton., *Black on Both Sides: A racial history of trans identity* (Minneapolis: London University of Minnesota Press, 2017) for examples; J. Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed, A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> Califia, *Sex Changes*, p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, p. 41.

question what made a woman a woman and a man a man.<sup>7</sup> Initially however, I will put this chapter in context by focusing on trans history in modern America.

### **2.1.1 Trans history in the gender normative American historiography**

In embarking on this study, I quickly realised that there was little trans history within America's normative historiography. Dallas Denny, writer, artist and activist, confirmed my fears, stating, 'Transgender history has been largely lost, sometimes deliberately repressed, because of societal sensibilities; sometimes misinterpreted as gay or lesbian or mainstream history; and, more usually, simply ignored'.<sup>8</sup> In perusing the literature, I found a select number of authors and activists who focus on trans history in the US: namely Dr. Susan Stryker, an activist, academic and trans woman; the late Leslie Feinberg, a gender fluid trans individual, lesbian and activist; Patrick Califia, trans man and activist; Sandy Stone activist, writer and trans woman; and Dr. Joanne Meyerowitz, a cisgender academic and historian. I was disappointed that trans history was left out of the narrative of modern American history, but not surprised given America's pursuit to uphold gender binary norms. Therefore, I had to build my own knowledge and literature base for this chapter from texts, biographies, web sources, newspapers, magazines, journal articles and archival sources. In addition, much of the information in texts accessed on specific sub-sections of this chapter, seem on first glance to construct and maintain the same narrative collectively, but on closer inspection conflict or branch off into other areas viewed by the individual authors as important to the historical narrative. This suggests a

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 50.

<sup>8</sup> D. Denny., 'Transgender in the United States: A Brief Discussion' in Bockting, W. et al (eds.), *Siecus Report: The Construction of Gender, SIECUS Report*, 28:1 (1999), p. 8.

need for a comprehensive work drawing on all of the influences which contribute to each additional branch of narrative seen as crucial to the foundations of building a modern trans history of America. Here, I can only provide an overview, rather than an in-depth historical accounting of wider mass media representation, including film, social media, and drag – especially the impact of Ru Paul’s Drag Race in mainstreaming drag and trans issues, and trans pornography. I purposefully chose not to include a sub-chapter on the first and second trans rights movements because of excellent established research/narrative and writing on the subject.<sup>9</sup> The omitted representation in history however, will be discussed in Chapter 7 of this thesis under future research.

## **2.2 Christine Jorgensen and public representation of trans to the 1950s news media**

According to Meyerowitz, the post-WWII era into the 1950s was an important time for the trans medical movement and for American society as a whole; it was a time of considering the limitations to individualism, of the progress, promises and dangers of science, of what was deemed suitable behaviour for men and women, as well as the appropriate limits of sexual expression.<sup>10</sup> However, as described earlier, Califia argued that post-war America was in the grip of ‘gender paranoia’ generated by the blurring of gender roles in WWII resulting in a major campaign to return women to domesticity.<sup>11</sup> For trans individuals throughout the US, it was a period when medical terminology was

---

<sup>9</sup> See: Stryker, Meyerowitz, Califia, Spade, and Snorton in the Bibliography for examples.

<sup>10</sup> Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, p. 52.

<sup>11</sup> Califia, *Sex Changes*, p 23.

developed, established and cemented historically into both medical literature and popular culture.



**Illustration 0-1:** Photograph, ‘Miss Christine Jorgensen’, Headshot of Christine Jorgensen with her talent agency’s information on the reverse, *Christine Jorgensen Collection* (Circa 1960)<sup>12</sup>

In 1952, Christine Jorgensen burst onto the scene, having spent 2 years in Denmark undergoing a full, ‘sex change’ from, as the *New York Times* described her sensationally on 2 December 1952, as ‘Bronx boy is now a girl’.<sup>13</sup> Her reveal to the public eye was a risk. It ‘is a moment in a trans person’s life when the trans person is subjected to the pressures of a pervasive gender/sex system that seeks to make public the “truth” of the trans person’s gendered and sexed body’.<sup>14</sup> Jorgensen bravely chose to rally the cry for gender variance and was hailed as a ‘trailblazer’, admitting, ‘I was standing at a corner...when a question was being asked...It was because the world was ready for this

---

<sup>12</sup> Unknown, Photograph, ‘Miss Christine Jorgensen.’, *Digital Transgender Archive*, (1960), <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/files/zw12z543s>, date accessed: 14 May 2018

<sup>13</sup> *New York Times*, ‘Bronx ‘boy’ becomes a girl’, 2 December 1952.

<sup>14</sup> D. M. Seid., ‘Reveal’, in Transgender Studies Quarterly (eds.), *Abjection, Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1:1–2 (2014), p. 176.



step...the opening of the sexual understanding explosion. If I hadn't been there, someone else would have'.<sup>15</sup> Jorgensen according to the *New York Daily News* in 1952 became a '...Blonde Beauty...' and in Jorgensen's own words, '...a woman - see what a good woman I turned out to be, far more successful than my male self'.<sup>16</sup> The sensation and interest around Jorgensen's reveal, her new body, her male past and former military personnel career was featured in nearly every report on her in newspapers with the term 'ex-GI', a colloquial term for American soldiers in WWII. Holding onto Jorgensen's male past fuelled Califia's 'gender paranoia' around masculinity and sexuality. If an 'ex-soldier' could be transformed into a 'blonde bombshell', the epitome of white feminine allure and glamour, what did it represent for the typical man?<sup>17</sup>

This moment in time and Jorgensen's exposure to the media spotlight was described as a watershed moment in transgender history by Stryker, especially for those isolated trans young people and adults across the United States, who were exposed to pop culture, and were looking for someone who made them feel less alone.<sup>18</sup> Individuals such as Leslie Feinberg, who described being raised in the 1950s as an 'era marked by rigidly enforced social conformity and fear of difference', stated that 'Christine Jorgensen's struggle beamed a message to me that I wasn't alone...she proved that even a period of right-wing reaction could not coerce each individual into conformity'.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, p. 10.

<sup>16</sup> Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, p. 1; C. Jorgensen., *Christine Jorgensen: A Personal Autobiography* (New York: Paul Eriksson, 1967), p. 203.

<sup>17</sup> S. Stryker., *Transgender History* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2008), p. 48.

<sup>18</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*, p. 49.

<sup>19</sup> L. Feinberg., *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996) p. 3 and p. 7.

However, Jorgensen's attempt to 'project a conventional, respectable, mainstream public image' to the media and in turn for the heteronormative and gender normative members of society, resulted in her being characterised at times as a 'freak' or a 'pervert', claims that she was a female impersonator prior to her trip to Denmark, and worst of all that she was born female and it was all a hoax.<sup>20</sup> Jorgensen was made fun of on TV by comedy hosts, who according to Feinberg, 'tried to ridicule her out of humanity'.<sup>21</sup> Lewd and crud jokes about Jorgensen circulated during the 1960's by comedians such as Denmark's Victor Borge and America's Whitey Roberts.<sup>22</sup> They mostly focused on the 'indeterminacy of her sex', her genital surgeries and her sexuality.<sup>23</sup> These jokes, said Meyerowitz, derived from the 'uncomfortable recognition that common place definitions of male and female no longer seemed to work'. Jorgensen attempted to separate herself from them, 'charming the reporters who treated her well and cut off the ones who rudely questioned her'.<sup>24</sup> Again, Feinberg described, 'just the mention of her name provoked vicious laughter...I understood that the jokes rotated around whether Christine Jorgensen was a woman or a man'.<sup>25</sup> Despite this, 'Jorgensen remained in the news...she appeared on television talk shows, starred in her own nightclub show, and her 1967 autobiography was adapted and released as a motion picture, titled *The Christine Jorgensen Story*, in 1970'.<sup>26</sup> Her attractiveness, magnetism and 'engaging personality' seized America's imagination, and touched the lives of trans individuals all over America and

---

<sup>20</sup> Califia, *Sex Change*, p. 24; Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, p. 52.

<sup>21</sup> Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors*, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, p. 77.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>25</sup> Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors*, p. 6-7.

<sup>26</sup> E. Skidmore., 'Constructing the "Good Transsexual": Christine Jorgensen, Whiteness, and Heteronormativity in the Mid-Twentieth-Century Press', *Race and Transgender Studies*, 37:2 (2016), p. 270.

internationally. Margie, transwoman and narrator in Andre Cavalcante's text *Struggling for the Ordinary: Media and Transgender Belonging in Everyday Life*, recalled seeing Jorgensen's autobiography in paperback at her local drugstore:

I was a teenager, and I was at a local drugstore that had magazines and paperbacks. I saw the Christine Jorgensen story...I took it home and read it. I was just flabbergasted. I was like, this is me. I knew, "hey there's one other person in the world like me." Reading those pages gave me comfort.<sup>27</sup>

Both past and present, Jorgensen 'has remained the most prominent individual within historical treatments of transsexuality'.<sup>28</sup>

According to Skidmore, Jorgensen was not the only public representation of transsexuality in the mid-twentieth century and the significance of her whiteness brought her attention to the media over trans people of colour.<sup>29</sup> She states that during April 1966, for example, African American transwoman Delisa Newton adorned the cover of *Sepia* magazine, which featured her autobiography as a two-part series. In a similar ilk to Jorgensen's press coverage, *Sepia* highlighted Newton's lonely childhood and her desire to be a good wife one day. However, unlike Jorgensen's story, which appeared in many typical news magazines, 'such as *Time* and *Newsweek* and widely circulated newspapers such as the *Los Angeles Times*', Newton's story featured in only the African American press and tabloid newspapers, such as the *National Insider*.<sup>30</sup> 'The disparity between the media reception of Jorgensen and Newton highlights the significance of race within media representations of transsexuality and suggests that such public narratives of transsexuality

---

<sup>27</sup> A. Cavalcante., *Struggling for the Ordinary: Media and Transgender Belonging in Everyday Life* (New York: New York University Press, 2018) p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Skidmore, *Constructing*, p. 270.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 271.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*.

are not simply about gender but also about race, class and sexuality'.<sup>31</sup> The importance of the inclusion of trans people of colour into the narrative and trans history in recent American history is integral to contesting the image of the 'good transsexual', established with Jorgensen in the 1950s, 'aided in the ability of certain transbodies to become visible and articulate their acceptability, other gender variant bodies were subjugated in the mainstream press, and as such, are more difficult for researchers to uncover'.<sup>32</sup> Jorgensen provided a view of American mainstream media during the 1950s onwards, intersecting its own need to sensationalise and feed gender normativity to the masses. It decided what and who it represented as appropriate for mainstream media attention and visibility; whiteness over trans people of colour. This power and deciding factor add to the silence and gap within the overall trans historiography in the US.

### **2.3 Constructions of trans representation in medical literature; pathology vs transgender embodiment**

Historical commentary and analysis of medical literature and popular doctors and sexologists from the early 1900s by modern trans and cisgender authors is substantial. However, their pursuit to analyse medical professionals depends upon their individual rationale and assumed expertise, which in turn presents a lack of established narrative of each doctor and/or sexologist within the historical context. These authors therefore create variations in each historical narrative bringing a difficulty in establishing which sources have credibility; awareness of bias, their investigative lens, motivation, how trans individuals are represented and where the gaps in the literature really lie. Consequentially,

---

<sup>31</sup> Skidmore, *Constructing*, p. 271.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p. 296.

I have attempted to research, compare, contrast and navigate this issue by using a broad range of authors who examine medical history and trans from different points of history and through their own accrued knowledge/ academic specialism(s). In addition, there is little research on the medical narrative around trans men/ treatment and transition. One notable exception is trans man Reed Erikson, whose research foundation and its impact on current trans services, has been extensively researched by sociologist Aaron Devor and interdisciplinary historian Nicholas Matte.<sup>33</sup> In addition, even though operations on Intersex patients are almost identical to gender reassignment surgeries (GRS), I will not be discussing Intersex in this review.<sup>34</sup>

The power of medicine and medical opinion has always dominated the lives of trans individuals. Deriving from a European research context during the 1800s and early 1900s it forged representation for trans people within American popular culture during the 1950s. A representation which historically and, in some circles, continue to be viewed as deviant, as Dallas Denny argues:

Under the medical model which prevailed from the mid-nineteenth century until the rise of this transgender sensibility in the mid-1990s, individuals whose gender presentation varied from binary norms were considered not merely different, but deviant.<sup>35</sup>

Medical history viewed gender variance as fundamentally breaching the gender norms within society and therefore they and their ‘condition’ were pathologised as problematic and unsavoury, as though diseased or disabled. As David King states, ‘they

---

<sup>33</sup> A. Devor., and N. Matte., ‘Building a Better World for Transpeople: Reed Erickson and the Erickson Educational Foundation’, *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 10:1 (2007), pp. 47-68.

<sup>34</sup> B. Reay., ‘The transsexual phenomenon: A counter-history’, *Journal of Social History*, 47:4 (2014), p. 1044.

<sup>35</sup> Denny, *Transgender*, p. 8.

are deviations from the usual pattern of gender identity development or gender role behaviour...'.<sup>36</sup> A broad range of literature exists on trans and the medical field in a historical context, including sex research, sexology, psychiatry and psychology, all of which take an *interest* in theorising the underlying cause of the trans identity. All of these prominent medical 'experts' however were white, cisgender [unless otherwise stated] and male. This is problematic in itself, as it reveals not only a major bias in observing the trans person and their lived experience, but questions how much expertise they possessed when analysing gender variant lives.

In line with this, it is foundational to highlight the pre-1950s researchers who were influential in forging trans representation in the US and to present the level of social power medicine had and continues to have in declaring 'truth'. A truth which has no repercussions in relation to agenda or political leaning of those undertaking the research, nor in the inevitable fallout for the gender variant population who live under those hegemonic representations. Historically, political bias seems to be less important when the subject of said research is viewed societally as transgressing the norm, whether in the intersecting framework of gender, class, race and/or sexuality. Selective opinion, the myth of the gender binary and research has prevailed over time perpetuating a pathologised and negative representation of trans individuals. This is regardless of researchers such as Magnus Hirschfeld or Harry Benjamin advocating for trans surgery over psychiatry as a 'cure' for transsexualism and painting a picture of acceptance and tolerance for trans people within American society, all be it a sympathising one. Notably,

---

<sup>36</sup> D. King., *The Transvestite and the Transsexual: Public categories and private identities* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1993), p. 2.

early trans research had a fundamental link to homosexuality, which, despite a number of researchers separating out from gender identity - among them Havelock Ellis, who argued against the prevailing correlation between cross dressing and same-sex desire - continues to dominate as a pathology in American popular culture and opinion.<sup>37</sup>

One of the earliest researchers and pioneers for trans advocacy was Magnus Hirschfeld. Born in Prussia in 1868, Hirschfeld was a homosexual sex researcher, and a central figure in the emergent fields of sexuality and gender history research.<sup>38</sup> He gained his medical degree at the University of Berlin in 1892 and founded the Scientific Humanitarian Committee in 1892 with the sole purpose to help homosexuals and other individuals whose sexual variances were viewed as pathological.<sup>39</sup> Hirschfeld argued that all human beings individually embodied a distinct blend of sex characteristics, secondary sex-linked features, erotic inclinations, psychological proclivities and behaviours and practices which were viewed as culturally adopted.<sup>40</sup> He linked sexuality to gender identity and in 1910 coined the term 'transvestite', which of its time, is the only original word still used in contemporary vocabulary.<sup>41</sup> The term appeared within his major text, *The Transvestites: The Erotic Drive to Cross-Dress* described as seminal in the field having classified cross-dressing as a practice, rather than a fetish linked to homosexual practice, and established Hirschfeld as one of the earliest advocates for trans people.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> H. Ellis., *1928 Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, Volume 7 (New York: FA Davis & Co, 1938); M.P. Galupo., S.B. Henise., and N.L. Mercer., "“The labels don't work very well”: Transgender individuals' conceptualizations of sexual orientation and sexual identity.' *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 17:2 (2016), p. 94.

<sup>38</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*, p. 38.

<sup>39</sup> Califia, *Sex Changes*, p. 13; Stryker, *Transgender History*, p. 39.

<sup>40</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*, p. 38.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> M. Hirschfeld., 'Selections from The Transvestites: the erotic drive to cross-dress' in S. Stryker and S. Whittle (eds.), *The Transgender Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 28; S. Hines.,

He argued that much like homosexuality, ‘sexual intermediaries; trans individuals, were one of countless numbers who resided on a spectrum from a hypothetical ‘pure male’ to ‘pure female’ and this diversity was part of biology and of nature, arguing that society should mirror this reality.<sup>43</sup> This spectrum led to the establishment of a classification system which cemented the tradition of associating conflicts in gender identity with homosexuality, which as stated earlier, prevails in American popular culture despite its proven inaccuracy.<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, there was no discussion or descriptions about the way in which trans individuals were represented within German or European society as a whole at this time, other than assumptions made through the obvious terminology that was gradually being moulded by Hirschfeld’s research. Most alarmingly, Hirschfeld was targeted by Adolf Hitler in the 1930s, who described him as ‘the most dangerous Jew in Germany’, causing him to end his work and flee Germany. By 1933 his institute was ransacked and destroyed by fascist vigilantes and as consequence Hirschfeld’s books and resources from his library were burned.<sup>45</sup> German-born doctor, and eventual ‘transsexual’ expert Harry Benjamin, was a younger colleague of Hirschfeld, and embraced Hirschfeld’s arguments in his own fundamental medical text *The Transsexual Phenomenon* published in the 1960s.

During the 1940s, a North American based General Medical Practitioner and so-called sexologist, David O. Cauldwell, ‘developed a substantial alternative career as a

---

*Transforming Gender: Transgender practices of identity, intimacy and care* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2007), p. 10.

<sup>43</sup> Hirschfeld, *Selections*, p. 28.

<sup>44</sup> Califia, *Sex Changes*, p. 13; See T.O. Nieder., E. Elaut., C. Richards., and A. Dekker., ‘Sexual orientation of trans adults is not linked to outcome of transition-related health care, but worth asking’, *International Review of Psychiatry*, 28:1 (2016), pp. 103-111.

<sup>45</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*, p. 40.



writer of populist ‘family’ advice columns for the tabloid new media (including the journal of Sexology...), which catered to the more prurient interest in life’.<sup>46</sup> He was believed to have coined the term transsexualism, though the term was popularised by Harry Benjamin.<sup>47</sup> Cauldwell’s columns applied to a wide variety of health topics, but frequently dealt with ‘the themes of transvestic cross-dressing and gender-variant lives’, especially in his article *Psychopathia Transexualis* published in 1949. It concluded that ‘transsexualism is a genetically inherited predisposition, which, combined with a dysfunctional childhood, results in mental immaturity’ and readily subscribed to pathologising the one transsexual person featured in the article: ‘Earl’, a trans man or ‘female to male transsexual’ as described then.<sup>48</sup> There was no further information about ‘Earl’ or the rarity at the time of trans men being featured in research as it was widely believed at that time that transvestitism/ transsexualism was a ‘male affliction’. Featured in Hausman’s *Changing Sex...*, Cauldwell argued that, ‘the term “psychopathic transsexual” could be applied to those individuals deemed ‘unfavourably affected psychologically’ who decide ‘to live and appear as a member of the sex to which he or she does not belong’. The term ‘means, simply that one is mentally unhealthy and because of this the person desires to live as a member of the opposite sex’.<sup>49</sup> Hausman argues that Cauldwell considered being mentally unwell a forerunner and cause of the pathological condition. Thus, he characterised a 20<sup>th</sup> century version of a 19<sup>th</sup> century sexologist, by finding pathology in what was perceived as sexually irregular behaviour, while

---

<sup>46</sup> D. O. Cauldwell, ‘Pyschopathia Transexualis’, in S. Stryker and S. Whittle (eds.), *The Transgender Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 40.

<sup>47</sup> King, *The Transvestite*, p. 43; B.L Hausman, *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology and the Idea of Gender* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 119.

<sup>48</sup> Cauldwell, ‘Pyschopathia’, p. 40; Hausman, *Changing Sex*, p. 119.

<sup>49</sup> Hausman, *Changing Sex*, p. 119.

connecting the behaviour to other perverted, social endeavours, and representing the unwell subjects' degenerate propensities as a group of symptoms signifying an inborn defect. Contrastingly, Cauldwell believed that sex change was an impossibility, arguing that removing healthy tissue, such as breast or ovarian, would be criminal. He also described the action as 'mutilative' and the person's frame of mind as having a 'loss of equilibrium'.<sup>50</sup> Cauldwell's argument and this refusal to remove healthy tissue was echoed in the arguments of Karl Bowman and Alfred Kinsey during a legal case, namely the 'mayhem case', the same year [1949].<sup>51</sup> Stryker argues the decision of this case, 'had long lasting repercussions for the course of transgender access to medical services in the United States'.<sup>52</sup> The legal advice produced, which was taken from Bowman and Kinsey, but on the objection of Harry Benjamin, expressed that 'genital modification would constitute 'mayhem' (the wilful destruction of healthy tissues) and would expose any surgeon who performed such an operation to possible criminal prosecution'.<sup>53</sup> Stryker has commented on the repercussions for trans individuals who fought to gain access to surgery for years after, and states that only Harry Benjamin's friend and colleague, Elmer Belt, performed sex change operations, but they were under secrecy during this time.<sup>54</sup>

Cauldwell described himself as a free thinker and followed Hirschfeld's writing; Ekins and King state, 'Noting his sympathy towards the homosexual nurses he met in his work at the clinic following graduation, he remarked:

'I was developing a growing sympathy for humanity...and felt that it was nobody's business how they expressed their love – nor towards whom. I'd

---

<sup>50</sup> Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, p. 42.

<sup>51</sup> Hausman, *Changing Sex*, p. 119.

<sup>52</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*, p. 44.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, p. 45.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*.

studied Hirschfeld on homosexuality, and my attitude was an open one. Who was who to dictate how anyone should satisfy the sexual demands, or live his love life?’<sup>55</sup>

This freethinking outlook seems in conflict with his pathologising of trans individuals and yet, he is described in several sources as taking the role of advocate for helping the public to become enlightened on trans issues and encouraging gender variant individuals to accept themselves as was rather than seek a cure or surgery.<sup>56</sup> How this conflict, or indeed partially positive acceptance, effected trans representation is unknown and therefore presents a gap in the literature.

Meyerowitz expressed that as part of his column writing, Cauldwell received letters from trans individuals who wished to have surgery. One particular individual was a cross dresser of thirty-three years old, who stated they had been living as a woman for fourteen years and expressed that, ‘Everything leads to the fact that I have developed a burning desire to be made into a woman. I’ve read of a number of such instances. The reports were in the daily press and must have been true’. On reading this Cauldwell expressed annoyance in his correspondents’ requests for surgery, blaming medicine featured in popular magazines for encouraging ‘fantastic hopes’ as well as ‘tales of magic cures and magical accomplishments of surgeons’, denouncing, ‘lurid stories of sex transmutation’.<sup>57</sup> These very emotional and public expressions from Cauldwell regarding trans individuals who wished to pursue a physical change in their gender could only have had negative effects on gender variant readers, and representation of trans identity within

---

<sup>55</sup> R. Ekins., and D. King., ‘Pioneers of Transgendering: The Popular Sexology of David O. Cauldwell’, *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 5:2 (2001), [http://www.symposion.com/ijt/cauldwell/cauldwell\\_01.htm](http://www.symposion.com/ijt/cauldwell/cauldwell_01.htm).

<sup>56</sup> King, *The Transvestite*, p. 153; Ekins and King, ‘Pioneers’.

<sup>57</sup> Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, p. 45.

American popular culture. Meyerowitz states that Cauldwell's work was not featured within academic literature and from other literature I have read, he is solely mentioned as the individual who coined transsexualism. Therefore, there is a definite gap within the literature to evaluate how much influence his columns and writings had within popular culture in America in the 1940s and 1950s regarding trans representation.

According to the literature and introduced earlier, 1950s America established itself as the most prominent decade of exposure for trans research, the founding of terminology and introducing 'sex change' operations, which had previously only been available in Europe and South America. This prominence came to fruition from initial experimental surgeries during the early part of the century, but featured no established diagnosis, treatments or standards of care; during the First World War, Gilman states that, soldiers who sustained wounds to the genitals received experimental reconstructive surgeries, which enabled surgeons to imagine the possibility of sex change surgery.<sup>58</sup> A convergence of these experiments, the furthering of surgical and medical technique, advances in the field of endocrinology, an increase of published medical and psychiatric theories plus research literature and texts all contributed. Contrastingly, the portrayal of transsexuals as having a condition, disability, deviant streak or mental illness in need of a cure, also contributed and cemented an overall negative representation of trans individuals. This despite vested efforts by individual doctors, such as Harry Benjamin, an advocate for GRS to repel it.<sup>59</sup> This representation however maintained its longevity;

---

<sup>58</sup> Z. Davy., *Recognizing Transsexuals: Personal, Political and Medicolegal Embodiment* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011), p. 18; See S. L. Gilman., *Making the Body Beautiful: A Cultural History of Aesthetic Surgery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>59</sup> Hausman, *Changing Sex*, p. 24.

transgender was viewed as a mental illness until June 2018, when the World Health Organization (WHO) removed transgender or “gender identity disorders”...classified under “mental and behavioural disorders” to...appear in a new category of “gender incongruence” under ‘conditions related to sexual health’.<sup>60</sup> There could be the argument that unless transgender moves towards a biological category, trans individuals will continue to be oppressed into a semblance of medical performativity and assumed presentation to access health care beyond 2018. This performativity is supported as recent as transwoman and author, Petra L. Doan’s 2016 journal article, in which she states:

The transsexual narrative is an important component in the therapeutic rite of passage in order to be approved for hormones and surgery under the specific criteria of the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychological Association). The resulting narratives often reinforce gender normativity because medical approval sometimes requires transsexuals to display an essentialist construction of gender.<sup>61</sup>

According to Stryker, during the 1940s and 1950s, the Langley Porter Clinic, situated at the University of California, San Francisco, established itself as a notable centre of research on variant sexuality and gender.<sup>62</sup> At the time, it was operated under Karl Bowman, a prior president of the American Psychiatric Association and during WWII. He undertook research focusing on homosexuality in the military, specifically with gay men as test subjects.<sup>63</sup> These gay men had been ‘found out’ during their time of

---

<sup>60</sup> ‘Growing recognition of transgender health’, World Health Organization, 2018 <http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/94/11/16-021116/en/>, date accessed: 30 June 2018; ‘WHO takes transgenderism out of mental illness category: New catalogue lists ‘gender incongruence’ under ‘conditions related to sexual health’’, *The Guardian*, 20 June 2018; Also see, Robles, R. et al., ‘Removing transgender identity from the classification of mental disorders: a Mexican field study for ICD-11’, *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 3:9 (2016), pp. 850 – 859.

<sup>61</sup> Petra L. Doan, ‘The tyranny of gendered spaces – reflections from beyond the gender dichotomy’, *Gender, Place & Culture*, 17:5 (2010), p. 636.

<sup>62</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*, p. 41.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

service and were held in a military psychiatric prison at the Treasure Island Naval Base in San Francisco. After the war, Bowman continued his research when he commenced as principal investigator for a state-wide funded scheme under the *California Sex Deviates Research Act of 1950*. This investigation, Stryker explains, was to principally uncover the ‘causes and cures’ of homosexuality and included castrating male sex offenders in California prisons and conducting tests on them by dispensing varying sex hormones to examine modifications in their sexual behaviour. During Bowman’s work, he encountered people whom would now be referred to as ‘transsexuals’. Bowman played a major part in the 1949 ‘mayhem case’ in California and as discussed earlier had major consequences for trans individuals to access surgeries for years to come.<sup>64</sup>

The 1950s brought Harry Benjamin to the forefront in the field of endocrinology research and a budding expert in transsexualism. He not only spent his early career developing his trans knowledge but launched himself as an advocate for trans individuals.<sup>65</sup> Benjamin promoted the possibility for sex change surgery to be undertaken on American soil, which had never been widely available in America, bar experimental operations on injured soldiers during WWII, and to those trans individuals who could discreetly afford it.<sup>66</sup> Benjamin, was Hirschfeld’s younger colleague and Benjamin continued to build on Hirschfeld’s work and campaigned for sexual reform during in the 1950s, advocating for trans individuals to be treated and aided in transitioning via ‘sex change’ operations; from one biological sex to the other to feel better both physically and mentally. Benjamin’s work was highly regarded within the field, with the likes of

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p. 41-43.

<sup>65</sup> Califia, *Sex Changes*, p. 52.

<sup>66</sup> Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, p. 5.

universities such as Stanford and John Hopkins establishing on campus gender identity clinics which specifically catered to sex changes and treating transsexuals and used Benjamin's major medical text, *The Transsexual Phenomenon* in 1966, as guidance for choosing candidates for sex change and treatment.<sup>67</sup>

Within the text, Benjamin separated out transvestitism from transsexualism, arguing that they were related 'on a continuum, with transvestites showing milder symptoms, and the transsexual being most troubled'.<sup>68</sup> The Stanford Clinic had a 'screening process which included a "rehabilitation" period with workshops on appropriate grooming.<sup>69</sup> A comical representation of trans individuals who accessed Stanford's Gender Identity Clinic during the 1960s and 1970s was eluded to in a symposium proceeding at the Stanford Medical Center in 1973 by Laub and Gandy:

The Stanford clinic was in the business of helping people...the final decisions of eligibility for gender reassignment were made by the staff on the basis of an individual sense of the 'appropriateness of the individual to their gender choice'. The clinic took on the additional role of 'grooming clinic' or 'charm school' because, according to the judgement of the staff, the men who presented as wanting to be women didn't always 'behave like women...'.<sup>70</sup>

Trans individuals to this clinic received personal coaching in 'passing' and confirming to gender ideals of womanhood by cisgender staff, of whom the gender or qualification in giving out charm lessons is unknown. It additionally assumes a solid adherence of the clinic in the promotion of America's binary myth of male and female

---

<sup>67</sup> S. Stone, 'The "Empire" Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto', *Camera Obscura*, (1993), p. 9.

<sup>68</sup> Califia, *Sex Changes*, p. 52.

<sup>69</sup> Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, p. 225.

<sup>70</sup> Laub, D. R., and Gandy, P., 'Proceedings of the Second Interdisciplinary Symposium on Gender Dysphoria Syndrome', in S. Stone, 'The "Empire" Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto', *Camera Obscura*, (1993), p. 9.

roles to those who breach[ed] them. This assumption presents a gap in the literature. It would have been beneficial to have gained oral histories of trans individuals exposed to this treatment and to find out about how they were made to feel. I suspect, both welcome, as patients, but patronised for their gender presentation and general embodiment in the superior presence of a cisgender and gender normative medical expert. In addition, knowing how it would affect each gender variant person's (re)construction of identity to live authentically would have been an excellent contribution to knowledge. Moreover, there is a lack of trans man representation in this quote, perpetuating the myth that trans individuals were only trans women.

The 1960s contributed ongoing research originating at medical institutions and universities in establishing gender clinics to provide 'sex change' surgeries. Used as a method for understanding transsexuality further, research brought fame for those trans individuals who received them, perpetuating sensationalised attention from the newspaper media. As a result, access to surgical procedures increased. They brought ready admittance for transsexuals during a time in American history when increasingly liberal attitudes focused on individual choice. Human rights movements were being energised and motivated by social change and justice and a complex process of examining and re-determining sex was occurring within a culture which was becoming increasingly captivated by a 'sexual revolution'.<sup>71</sup> Non-academic clinics at the time supplied surgeries on demand, but when the first academic clinics opened, such as Stanford's Gender Identity Clinic, they refused to perform surgery on demand due to the apparent professional risks

---

<sup>71</sup> Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, p. 7.



involved in performing surgery on ‘sociopaths’.<sup>72</sup> Additionally, the term ‘transsexual’ was only designated to those individuals undergoing surgery, leaving transvestitism in the realms of cross-dressing and deviance.<sup>73</sup> Interest in transsexuality from fields such as psychology, sexology and psychiatry grew, bringing new research which emphasised dysfunctional socialisation as the causation for the transsexual ‘condition’.<sup>74</sup> According to King, the term, ‘condition’ is not necessarily linked to pathology, but could be preceded with:

Good, bad, health or pathological...[if] we speak of a condition, we say a person has or suffers from a certain condition. The possessive case suggests in the background an illness or disease, something which one can have...a degree of seriousness and permanence is also implied; the common cold is unlikely to be described as a condition, but diabetes or muscular dystrophy are.<sup>75</sup>

Sandy Stone discusses the results of psychiatrists and surgeons having singularly referred to Harry Benjamin’s text, *The Transsexual Phenomenon*, regarding assessment criteria for trans individuals to gain help. According to Johns Hopkins University, after 3 years of using Benjamin’s criteria, a steady flow of suitable candidates approached the clinic for help. However, they were unaware that the trans community had their own copies of Benjamin’s book and as a result, had learned how to mimic the criteria to obtain the help they needed:

It took a surprisingly long time – several years - for the researchers to realise that the reason the candidates behavioural profiles matched Benjamin’s so well was that the candidates, too, had read Benjamin’s book. Which was passed from hand to hand within the transsexual community

---

<sup>72</sup> Stone., ‘The “Empire”’, p. 8.

<sup>73</sup> Hines, *Transforming Gender*, p. 11.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> King, *The Transvestite*, p. 20.

and they were only too happy to provide the behaviour that led to acceptance for surgery.<sup>76</sup>

It is clear that learning and expressing this one train of performativity is an interesting twist in maintaining America's idealistic mythical gender roles of male and female, and policing trans individuals in their representation in the narrative established by American popular culture.

Establishing one way of performing to access treatment and surgery denies those who fall across the gender spectrum, which Hirschfeld promoted and endorsed. However, gender dysphoria is a powerful catalyst to push trans individuals into oppressive situations, such as the willingness to perpetuate these representations to gain agency and power in what they want and need for (re)constructing their authentic lives.

Stone argues that this medicalised representation - the gender normative view of the good transsexual - was taken into the psyche of trans individuals forming and policing their identity. Not only this, it prevented them from speaking about the 'erotic sense of their own bodies' - transsexual males, trans women, sexual pleasure, use of their penis for pleasure or orgasm through penile pleasure. Stone states, 'into the 1980s, there was not a single preoperative male-to-female transsexual for whom data was available who experienced genital sexual pleasure while living in the "gender of choice"'.<sup>77</sup> That natural desire for natural pleasure betrayed the feminine, submissive role in the eyes of medicine, which could cause disqualification for surgery. Along similar lines, Meyerowitz states that 'doctors also expected their patients to live as heterosexuals and, better yet, to marry

---

<sup>76</sup> Stone, 'The "Empire"', p. 9.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

after surgery'.<sup>78</sup> Trans women who were preoperative and had sex with women 'did not qualify for treatment' as those who 'had sex with men, sex alone or no sex at all'. At a meeting in 1971 Harry Benjamin and his associates 'all agreed that a large amount of heterosexual activity [before surgery] did not indicate a good surgical candidate'.<sup>79</sup> Essentially, their position resulted the rejection of individuals who did not conform to America's gender and sexual normative ideals. This period in the 1970s lead to trans individuals hiding their sexuality in the 1980s in order to gain medical care, as Stone argued above.

Denny states, that by the end of the 1970s, the United States had more than 50 gender clinics. However, Barry Reay contests this, stating it was closer to 20.<sup>80</sup> As indicated above, the majority of clinics were university affiliated, therefore, were equally centres for research as for treatment:

Most of the scientific articles published about transsexualism in the 1970s originated from these clinics, and were concerned with, not surprisingly, the diagnosis, treatment, and management of transsexual patients. The literature of the time reflects the above biased selection criteria, concerns with sexual normativity, and represented trans individuals as, 'immature, hysterical, or other-wise dysfunctional'.<sup>81</sup>

There is not specific representation of trans people of colour in any of the literature, whether they were accepted or 'treated'. This leaves a gap and silence in the literature.

---

<sup>78</sup> Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, p. 225.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Reay, 'The transsexual', p. 1044.

<sup>81</sup> Denny, *Transgender*, p. 10.

According to Reay, in 1977, Jon K. Meyer, the director of Johns Hopkins medical clinic, and Donna J. Reter presented to the annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association that there was a “normalization” of sex reassignment’ and had ‘almost routine acceptance’.<sup>82</sup> However, by the late 1970s, trans individuals began to experience a political backlash, which seeped into the realms of the medical field. Denny described 1979 as ‘a watershed year for transsexuality’.<sup>83</sup> Positively, *The Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association's Standards Of Care For Gender Identity Disorders*, (renamed, *The World Professional Association for Transgender Health Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender-Nonconforming People* in 2012) were published and utilised internationally by sexologists, psychiatrists, endocrinologists to inform their practice and consensus about transsexuality.<sup>84</sup> To contrast this was the release of feminist Janice Raymond’s book, *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She Male*, in which she ‘attacked transsexualism as a plot by male physicians to render women obsolete’. Raymond vehemently campaigned to ‘deny transsexuals the right to surgical and hormonal treatment’.<sup>85</sup> To add to Raymond’s campaign, Meyer and Reter published an article in direct opposition to their earlier presentation. It appeared in the *Archives of Gender Psychiatry* of an ‘outcome study which purported to show “no objective advantage” to sex reassignment surgery for

---

<sup>82</sup> Reay, ‘The transsexual’, p.1044.

<sup>83</sup> Denny, *Transgender*, p. 10.

<sup>84</sup> ‘The Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association's Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorders’, *Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association* (Sixth Version, 2001), <http://www.cpath.ca/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/WPATHsocv6.pdf>, date accessed: 18 September 2017; ‘Standards of Care for the health of transsexual, transgender, and gender nonconforming people’, *World Professional Association for Transgender Health*, (7<sup>th</sup> Version, 2012), <http://www.teni.ie/attachments/92d213ab-8474-4f34-a931-ab95489b2afe.PDF>, date accessed: 17 November 2017

<sup>85</sup> Denny, *Transgender*, p. 10.

male-to-female (MTF) transsexuals'. Meyer timed the release of the article when John Money, the clinic's primary proponent, was out of the country. Meyer 'popularized his findings through press releases that attracted the attention of every major newspaper and magazine'.<sup>86</sup> However, his methodology was viewed as amateurish and the paper condemned as a 'plot to discredit gender reassignment', but this did not stop the announcement that Hopkins would no longer undertake sex-reassignment surgery, leading to its closure, along with several other gender programmes.<sup>87</sup>

By 1980, transsexualism was given the official status of 'gender identity disorder' in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychological Association* (DSM), one, which Stone muses, 'after years of research, did not involve much more than the original sense of "being in the wrong body"-- and consequent acceptance by the body police, i.e., the medical establishment, [and providing] clinically "good" histories...'<sup>88</sup> In medical terms it identified those 'Individuals who for a continuous period of two years had felt themselves to be of the wrong physical sex, to that which they were assigned at birth, were diagnosed as "transsexual."<sup>89</sup> It was only applied to those who wished to change their body to the opposite sex. The term, gender dysphoria, was also used, coined by Fisk in 1973; 'Gender dysphoria is the term used to describe those suffering from a conflicting gender identity'.<sup>90</sup> In opposition was Raymond's continued onslaught of anti-trans rhetoric and policy recommendations, which replicated arguments by 'ex-gay

---

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. p. 10; Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, p. 268-269.

<sup>88</sup> Stone, 'The "Empire"', p. 2; p. 10.

<sup>89</sup> Z. Davy, "Transsexual recognition: embodiment, bodily aesthetics and the medicolegal system", (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2008), p. 23; Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, p. 254.

<sup>90</sup> Z. Davy, "Transsexual recognition: embodiment, bodily aesthetics and the medicolegal system", (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2008), p. 23.

ministries, antiabortion activists, bigots and fearmongers of many stripes’, and continued throughout the 1980s according to Stryker. It ‘became common to denounce transsexuality as a “mutilating” practice’ and ‘the level of vitriol directed against transgender people actually increased’.<sup>91</sup>

There is significant silence regarding direct representation in medical literature of trans individual during the 1980s and 1990s. Stryker briefly states that with transsexuality being deemed a psychiatric disorder, the ‘problem’ of it was viewed as contained and solved, with routine protocols and procedures in place to medically manage trans populations.<sup>92</sup> In addition, the rise of the AIDS pandemic in 1981 had an overwhelmingly negative impact on the trans community: those who used sex work for survival, or shared needles for injecting hormones, or ‘that participated in the gay male sexual subcultures where the epidemic first gained widespread attention in the United States’ were hardest hit.<sup>93</sup> Due to the continued trans backlash, insurance companies viewed transitioning as cosmetic, among other things rather than integral to an individual’s survival and self-actualisation.<sup>94</sup> Access to health care was limited for those trans individuals who lived in poverty, social isolation, with the stigmatisation of having to reveal their HIV status to health care providers.<sup>95</sup> The gap or silence in the literature during the 1980s could be viewed as a stall or ignored. However, it could also be understood that trans individuals’ representation traversed into the rise of HIV/AIDS, taking on further stigmatisation, or drowned out by it.

---

<sup>91</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*, p. 110.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. p. 112.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. p. 113.

<sup>94</sup> Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, p. 269; Stryker, *Transgender History*, p. 112.

<sup>95</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*, p. 113.

Similarly, the 1990s to 2000s had a certain silence with regards to medical representation, the most significant and valued change was replacing the term ‘Transsexualism’ in the 1994 *American Psychiatric Association’s DSM (Version 4)* for ‘Gender Identity’, signifying ‘a person who has a strong cross-gender identification and who suffers from Gender Dysphoria’.<sup>96</sup> Contrastingly, Benjamin’s Standards of Care were updated in 1998 containing significant and controversial changes, which included, ‘...new requirements for obtaining hormones and, for the first time, a position on surgery on individuals who are HIV-positive’.<sup>97</sup> Thus continuing to reflect the trans backlash.

Significant change in medical representation in the United States has only occurred in the last 10 years or so, due to the consistent, unrelenting second wave trans rights movement that was initiated in the 1990s. The most significant victory for trans rights regarding healthcare access was made by the Obama Administration who brought in a Transgender Policy in under the Affordable Care Act (‘Obama Care’) in 2016, stating that the provision would be covered by, “almost all practicing physicians in the United States” because they accept some form of federal remuneration or reimbursement’.<sup>98</sup> Further to this, The National Center for Transgender Equality, in its *Know Your Rights: Healthcare* guidance, states that the Affordable Care Act ‘prohibits sex discrimination, including anti-transgender discrimination, by the vast majority of insurance companies and health care providers’.<sup>99</sup> However, under the Trump administration, America’s

---

<sup>96</sup> Z. Davy, “Transsexual recognition: embodiment, bodily aesthetics and the medicolegal system”, (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2008), p. 23.

<sup>97</sup> Denny, *Transgender*, p. 10.

<sup>98</sup> *New York Times*, ‘Trump Plan Would Cut Back Health Care Protections for Transgender People’, 21 April 2018.

<sup>99</sup> The National Center for Transgender Equality, ‘Know Your Rights: Healthcare’, (2017), <https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/kyr/KYR-Healthcare-June2017.pdf>, date accessed: 15 January 2018.

Healthcare.gov website was changed in 2018 to state, ‘Many health plans are still using exclusions such as “services related to sex change” or “sex reassignment surgery” to deny coverage to transgender people for certain health care services. Coverage varies by state’.<sup>100</sup> This information reflects Trump’s eagerness to reverse and repeal the Affordable Care Act, but also to de-value trans existence as illegitimate, forcing it back to the pathology and deviance of the 1950s. This is especially reflected in the use of outdated and sensationalist terminology such as ‘sex change’ and ‘sex reassignment’ when the term Gender Reassignment Surgery is widely used.

Lastly, Trump’s de-valuing of trans rights and worth are not only reflected in the government’s own representation on their website, but much like with Jorgensen, continue in the media. News outlets, such as CNBC, viewed politically as left of centre, surprisingly wrote a story in March 2018 headlined, ‘Employee health insurance, Obamacare make sex change a new reality for 1.4 million Americans’.<sup>101</sup> It is clear that notwithstanding the second wave trans rights movement, the development of trans representation in medical literature, a sensationalist image of trans individuals still stands. This reflects King’s statement, which refers specifically to the 1970s but, like Califia’s statement which opened this chapter, still rings true today, that:

as one moves out from the few specialists in these areas, through specialists in other psychosexual areas, psychiatrist, other medical professionals to lay members of society, it becomes probably that such ‘knowledge’ of cross-dressing and sex changing as does exist [1970s] is framed less and less by the medical literature and more and more by the mass media.<sup>102</sup>

---

<sup>100</sup> Healthcare.gov, ‘Transgender health care’, <https://www.healthcare.gov/transgender-health-care/>, date accessed: 28 July 2016

<sup>101</sup> ‘Employee health insurance, Obamacare make sex change a new reality for 1.4 million Americans’, CNBC, 27 March 2018 <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/03/27/work-health-insurance-obamacare-coverage-spur-sex-change-surgery-boom.html>, date accessed: 13 May 2018.

<sup>102</sup> King, *The Transvestite*, p. 97.



## **Part II: On screen: Historical pop culture and media representations of trans individuals**

The 1950s brought America its ‘first transsexual celebrity’ of Christine Jorgensen, who made ‘sex change’ into a household term.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, the 1950s generated increasing popularity for television via a media environment which embraced a broadcasting model; where TV was designed and produced by a small, elite, group of creators, imparting what seemed appropriate to a mass audience. Audiences were viewed solely as ‘white, heterosexual, and middle class’ in this imagined mass, who possessed little or no ability to ‘communicate with producers of media and with each other’.<sup>104</sup> Despite this conformity, the decade was described by Teresa Alves as ‘full of dissonance, co-opting into American mainstream culture that of Southerners, Jews, Blacks and Women’.<sup>105</sup> Gender and transsexuality however, began and ended seemingly with the exposure of Christine Jorgensen with media producers showing ‘little interest in [the] sex-change media craze’. In turn, Jorgensen felt that 1950s TV had ‘barred her’.<sup>106</sup> Meyerowitz states that Jorgensen’s observation was not actually true, as she was given an interview with Mike Wallace and an appearance with Arthur Murray during this decade. Even so ‘1950s television shows rarely reported on sex change...because of its links to sexuality’ a ‘topic considered too risqué for family-orientated entertainment’. This

---

<sup>103</sup> Snorton, *Black on Both Sides*, p. 140; Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, p. 51.

<sup>104</sup> Cavalcante, *Struggling for Ordinary*, p. 27.

<sup>105</sup> T. Alves., “‘Some Enchanted Evening’--Tuning In the Amazing Fifties, Switching Off the Elusive Decade’, *American Studies International*, 39:3 (2001), p. 38

<sup>106</sup> Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, p. 88.

perception continued until the late 1960s, when Jorgensen was denied an interview on the *Joey Bishop Show*.<sup>107</sup>

Unlike cinema/ film representation of trans individuals - which has received increasingly attention from academic and mainstream sources alike<sup>108</sup> - there has been little research examining trans representation on television between 1950 and 2000. Occasional trans characters have existed, being portrayed as mentally unwell, murderers, jokes, victims, deviants, monsters, liars and sex workers and thus the trans trope on TV was born.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, according to GLAAD's *Victims or Villains: Examining Ten Years of Transgender Images on Television*, published in 2012, of 102 episodes of 'scripted television that contained transgender characters...54% of those were categorized as containing negative representations at the time of their airing. An additional 35% were categorized as ranging from "problematic" to "good", while only 12% were considered ground-breaking, fair and accurate...'<sup>110</sup> This indicates that the trans trope was displayed and portrayed until as recently as 5 years ago. It represents a significant silence in the history of research on trans representation. Yet, like GLAAD mentioned above, many trans advocate and activist websites, trans blogs and trans journalists have listed trans representation on TV during this time period. To that end that I will briefly highlight television show representations in each decade to give insight into the chosen tropes. It is important to highlight that most trans representation on TV was that of trans women,

---

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> For a comprehensive guide and history to trans representation in US Cinema see Bell-Metereau, R., *Transgender Cinema (Quick Takes: Movies and Popular Culture)* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2019); and Phillips, J., *Transgender on Screen* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

<sup>109</sup> 'Victims or Villains: Examining Ten Years of Transgender Images on Television', GLAAD, (2012), <https://www.glaad.org/publications/victims-or-villains-examining-ten-years-transgender-images-television>, date accessed: 29 September 2017.

<sup>110</sup> GLAAD, *Victims or Villains*.

confirming the cultural assumption that only men were and to an extent still are transsexuals.<sup>111</sup>

The first seemingly trans character on TV was portrayed by cisgender male and professional female impersonator T.C. Jones in The Alfred Hitchcock Hour's episode, *The Unlocked Window* in 1965.<sup>112</sup> The Hitchcock Hour was promoted to audiences as being filled with terror, horror and suspense, which bodes negatively for the first representation of a trans character facing American audiences. With regards to the political leanings of the show, Hitchcock was known for attempting to produce shows and films which were 'politically innocent'.<sup>113</sup> However, this observed innocence is contracted as Hitchcock introduced and concluded each of these shows himself and was seen to present a moral fable to the audience, one which assured them '...that crime does not pay'.<sup>114</sup>

Stephen Tropiano, scholar of cinema and television, describes the episode as 'chilling'; two nurses, Stella and Betty are terrorised by a 'psychopath' as they care for a 'sickly man in a remote house'.<sup>115</sup> Hearing on the radio a nurse killer is on the loose the two nurses lock themselves in. Stella takes a phone call by the killer who states he is watching the two nurses. Stella becomes hysterical, hears a man's laughter in the hallways and realises it is coming from her colleague Betty. Betty attacks Stella. On

---

<sup>111</sup> Califia, *Sex Changes*, p. XXIX.

<sup>112</sup> NBC, *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour: An Unlocked Window*, 15 February 1965.

<sup>113</sup> T. Leach, 'It's the Cold War Stupid: An obvious history of the political Hitchcock', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 27:1 (1999), p. 11.

<sup>114</sup> N. Seligmann., "'If I Won't Be Myself, Who Will?'" The Making of a Star Persona in Alfred Hitchcock Presents and The Alfred Hitchcock Hour', in W. Schwanebeck (eds.), *Reassessing the Hitchcock Touch* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 131.

<sup>115</sup> S. Tropiano, *The Prime Time Closet: A History of Gays and Lesbians on TV* (New York: Applause Theatre Cinema and Books, 2002) p. 57.

choking her, Betty's wig is removed, and it is confirmed she is in fact a man in a nurse's uniform. Interestingly, the viewer never finds out why Betty murders nurses. Tropiano states that as Betty is a transvestite, 'one can speculate he suffers from some sort of gender identity disorder', or as he continues in mockery, 'maybe he just likes how he looks in white'.<sup>116</sup> Tropiano concludes by stating that there is a direct link between 'sexual perversion and murder' in this episode.<sup>117</sup> It is interesting that Tropiano links sexuality to gender and perversion, much like the trope of so called medical experts regarding cross-dressing and transsexuality. To return to Hitchcock's moralising that crime does not pay, the question is, was the crime he referred to in this episode the murder of young nurses or the cross-dressing by the character? There is no other literature or research available to compare Tropiano's commentary, but it would have reflected the societal thoughts of the time, and for decades after, on the mindset and deviance of trans individuals.

Politically the 1960s was a time for change. The first transsexual organisations emerged and according to Stryker and Meyerowitz, the mid to late 1960s had an air of transformation due to several large scale social movements, such as the African American civil rights movement, Chicanos and Native Americans movements, the anti-war movement, and the women's movement.<sup>118</sup> The baby boomers were coming into young adulthood and the war in Vietnam was beginning to escalate.<sup>119</sup> The documentary, *Screaming queens: The riot at Compton's Cafeteria*, focuses on the beginning of the early days of the trans rights movement in San Francisco, which was part of the most 'militant

---

<sup>116</sup> Tropiano, *The Prime Time*, p. 57.

<sup>117</sup> Tropiano, *The Prime Time*, p. 58.

<sup>118</sup> Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, p. 232; Stryker, *Transgender History*, p. 64.

<sup>119</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*, p. 63.

phase of the transgender movement for social change, from 1966 to 1969, and was part of the overall social upheaval of the decade'.<sup>120</sup> In line with the Betty trope, the news reel at the beginning of *Screaming Queens* dictates that the Tenderloin housed the 'drag queens and transvestites', who frequented the corner of Turk and Taylor streets where Compton's twenty four hour cafeteria catered to late night crowds of hustlers, drag queens, cruisers and runaway teens.<sup>121</sup> The incident in the cafeteria of a policeman attempting to physically remove a drag queen led to, according to Stryker, 'direct action in the streets by transgender people' which 'resulted in lasting institutional change'.<sup>122</sup> The Compton's Cafeteria Riot happened in 1966, followed by the more prevalent and infamous riots at the Stonewall Inn, during the summer of 1969 in New York.

During the 1970s, the appearance of trans characters on TV increased. From 1975 to 1977, Lori Shannon, cisgender male and a female impersonator known widely in San Francisco at the time, played the character Beverly LaSalle in three episodes over two years in TV comedy, *All in the Family*.<sup>123</sup> This 'socially conscious' comedy focusing on the realities of 'blue collar life' and, '...told the bittersweet tale of Archie Bunker, an uneducated, working-class bigot in Queens, N.Y., his loving wife Edith (the "dingbat"), his liberal, hippie son-in-law Mike (the "meathead") and his beloved daughter Gloria'.<sup>124</sup> The sitcom was a story of a politically divided family, with the parents clinging to

---

<sup>120</sup> *Screaming queens: The riot at Compton's Cafeteria* (2005), Directed and produced by Silverman, V., Stryker, S., Walsh, J., Constantinou, S., In Schmidt, L., Koskinen, H, (Frameline).

<sup>121</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*, p. 64.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> SBS-TV, *All in the Family: Archie the Hero*, 29 September 1975; SBS-TV, *All in the Family: Beverly Rides Again*, 6 November 1976; SBS-TV, *All in the Family: Edith's Crisis of Faith: Part 1*, 18 December 1977.

<sup>124</sup> *International Business Times*, 'Those Were The Days: How Norman Lear And 'All in the Family' Permanently Changed US Television And Society', <https://www.ibtimes.com/those-were-days-how-norman-lear-all-family-permanently-changed-us-television-society-1270575>, 21 May 2013.

‘...family and community for survival, which often meant depending on members of the same ethnic group, religion, and race, while excluding others...[reinforcing] human tendency towards bias and prejudice, while their children grew up without such constraints, fully embracing the ideals of freedom and equality’.<sup>125</sup>

Trans character Beverly first appears having fainted in the back of Archie’s borrowed taxi. He takes Beverly to hospital and in wanting to thank him, Beverly gets his address from the hospital and goes to Archie’s house. Edith, receives Beverly, welcoming her into her house, reading her as a beautiful woman. Beverly tells Edith in several different ways that ‘he’ is a ‘female impersonator’, a ‘transvestite’ and removes their wig stating in a deep male voice, ‘you can call me Mr’ to make both Edith and Archie understand. However, Elena Nicoulaou of Gender Nation, states, ‘Beverly’s actual gender identity is never fully elucidated, and the characters use the pronoun “he.”’<sup>126</sup> While certainly relying on tropes and making jokes about gender, *All in the Family* nonetheless featured one of the first sympathetic portrayals of a gender non-conforming character’.<sup>127</sup> Beverly’s fate however is one of violence and tragedy.

In her third appearance in *All in the Family* Beverly appears in the episode *Edith’s Crisis of Faith: Part 1*. ‘Beverly and Edith’s son-in-law, Mike, are mugged. Beverly is murdered. According to Mike, the assailants had “figured out what he [Beverly] was”, and Beverly died because “he was different”. Edith has a breakdown and questions why

---

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> E. Nicoulaou., ‘Gender Nation: The Evolution Of Trans Representation In Hollywood’, *Refinery29* (2017), <https://www.refinery29.uk/2017/11/181207/transgender-movies-tv-shows#slide-2>, date accessed: 19 February 2018.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

God would allow her friend to die so gruesomely'.<sup>128</sup> Eleven Groothuis, trans activist, writes in 'Methodological Killing; Losing Trans Film Characters Devalues them IRL' that trans characters have been killed off in film for over 100 years because they are viewed as villainous, monstrous, and 'otherwise "undesirable."' <sup>129</sup> Paradoxically, though they are made sympathetic in their death because their character is used to 'make a point about the marginalization of trans people. But because trans characters are secondary in these narratives, the message is that trans lives are not important and that real-world violence against mostly trans women of color is normal'.<sup>130</sup> Groothuis appealed to today's audiences, 'Artists and viewers need to aggressively question what impact these images have on how we perceive trans people, both alive and dead. Don't support storytelling that sees death as the ultimate transgender trope'.<sup>131</sup>

The mid to late 1970s produced at least eight TV shows featuring non-recurring trans characters including Dr. Pat Caddison, played by cisgender male actor Robert Reed of Brady Bunch fame in two episodes of CBS's medical drama, *Medical Center*, called, 'The Fourth Sex'. CBS was viewed as a politically left leaning television network and *Medical Center* was described by Washing Post writer Lawrence Laurent as "the proper blend of medical tension, attractive performers and what passes on television for painstaking production."<sup>132</sup> It was the longest running medical show in television

---

<sup>128</sup> SBS-TV, *All in the Family: Edith's Crisis of Faith: Part 1*, 18 December 1977; Nicoulaou, 'Gender Nation'.

<sup>129</sup> 'Methodological Killing; Losing Trans Film Characters Devalues them IRL', *Bitch Media* (2017), <https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/stop-killing-trans-people-on-screen>, date accessed: 9 May 2018

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> *The Washington Post*, 'TV star Chad Everett dies at 75; best known for role in 'Medical Center'', [https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/tv/chad-everett-star-of-tv-drama-medical-center-dies-at-75/2012/07/25/gJQA5aw19W\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.41c17f94ab5c](https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/tv/chad-everett-star-of-tv-drama-medical-center-dies-at-75/2012/07/25/gJQA5aw19W_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.41c17f94ab5c), 25 July 2012.

history, only surpassed by ER [Emergency Room]. Main actor Chad Everett who played main character Dr. Joe Gannon, in an interview with the St. Petersburg Times, stated that the show was ahead of its time, addressing ‘many subjects that were considered controversial at the time. “We took on unfair insurance and employment practices”, he said, “and we did shows on alcoholism, transsexualism and homosexuality, among others.””<sup>133</sup> Certainly in these two episodes, his statement is true.

Everett’s character, Dr. Gannon is the only one to support his friend Dr. Pat Caddison’s coming out as trans and her request for GRS. Caddison’s wife Heather feels betrayed by the man she still views as her husband. Therefore, she is not supportive of Caddison’s pursuit of transition:

Heather: Are you saying you’re a homosexual?

Dr. Caddison: I’m a transsexual...I’m a male by the reason of my anatomy.

But emotionally, I’m not...Emotionally, I’m a woman.<sup>134</sup>

Tropiano comments that a differentiation is not made between gender and sexuality. Instead, the show’s producers felt it would cause confusion for the audience and continue the trope of trans and gender identity linking directly with sexuality.<sup>135</sup>

On having initial checks prior to surgery, Caddison finds out she has a heart murmur and may not get GRS. Her reaction is to drive her car into a tree. Despite this Caddison states she was not attempting suicide and Gannon supports the go ahead of her risky GRS because of the future mental wellbeing of his patient. According to Tropiano, the script writing in these episodes handles the subject matter sensitively, if

---

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Tropiano, *The Prime Time*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, p. 29.



melodramatic, avoiding sensationalism, even in Heather and the audience seeing Pat as herself, post operatively, for the first time.<sup>136</sup> On meeting Pat, Heather removes her wedding ring, enters the room and apologises for how she had treated Pat. The episode ends with Pat feeling it best to leave the country to practice as a female doctor. Pat leaves by the ‘side exit’ of the hospital and disappears into a taxi. It is a melancholic ending to the episode, with reserved facial expression from the doctors who treated Pat as she heads into the distance and into the unknown.<sup>137</sup>

To contrast *Medical Center*’s treatment of a trans character, was a pop culture comedy series called, *M\*A\*S\*H\** which appeared on TV sets across America in 1972 until 1983, based on a ‘mobile army surgical hospital during the Korean War’.<sup>138</sup> It famously featured the character Corporal Klinger, who in early episodes attempted to be thrown out of the army under a Section 8 discharge, conditions which deemed personnel unfit for duty due to underlying mental health reasons, by cross-dressing as a woman while on duty.<sup>139</sup> Klinger continued the societal trope to audiences that gender variant individuals weren’t real people, but rather, like Beverly La Salle in *All in the Family*, comic relief. Worse than this in *M\*A\*S\*H\** they were portrayed as untruthful, underhanded, sneaky and unpatriotic. Unlike Beverly, Klinger was not a sympathetic character, nor even viewed in some trans circles as a trans character. As argued by Gwendolyn Ann Smith, transgender activist and writer, ‘You are equating trans people

---

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, p. 30.

<sup>137</sup> CBS, *Medical Center: The Fourth Sex (Parts 1 and 2)*, 8 September 1975.

<sup>138</sup> CBS, *M\*A\*S\*H\**, 17 September 1972 – 28 February 1983.

<sup>139</sup> ‘Klinger was not trans in *M\*A\*S\*H\** so stop bringing him up’, *SDGLN.com* (2017), <http://sdgln.com/commentary/2017/07/28/klinger-was-not-trans-mash-so-stop-bringing-him>, date accessed: 15 March 2018

with being “men in dresses” who are trying to be deceptive and have a mental disorder’.<sup>140</sup>

However, she did acknowledge that, to some trans individuals, ‘Klinger was one of the few glimmers of trans anything on TV in the 1970s’.<sup>141</sup>

The 1970s TV also produced a second positive trans representation, that of a trans woman of colour, on television network CBS’ sitcom *The Jeffersons* episode, ‘Once a Friend’.<sup>142</sup> *The Jeffersons* was:

...the longest-running series with a predominantly African American cast, the show was one of the first to portray a successful black family, paving the way for future sitcoms like “The Cosby Show” and “The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air.” It was also the first series to prominently feature an interracial couple with the characters Helen and Tom Willis, using its makeup of colorful personalities to create humorous commentary about race in the United States at the time.<sup>143</sup>

The episode features cisgender female actor Veronica Redd who plays Edie Stokes, an old Navy friend of the main character George, who is excited to meet up with them while they are in town. George is surprised to see that Eddie is now Edie, a trans woman, living her truth. George mis-genders and mis-names Edie throughout the episode with Edie forthrightly telling George by the end ‘as a friend’, to call her Edie, which he does, out of respect and love. Unlike in *The Jeffersons* parent sitcom, *All in the Family*, Edie is a transgender woman, rather than Beverly La Salle’s ‘female impersonator’, and the episode ends contrastingly in acceptance and friendship rather than murder and

---

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> CBS, *The Jeffersons*: Once a Friend, 1 October 1977.

<sup>143</sup> *The Huffington Post*, ‘The Jeffersons’: How Sherman Hemsley And The Sitcom Changed The Landscape Of American Television’, [https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/the-jeffersons-show-legacy\\_n\\_1701026?guccounter=1&guce\\_referrer\\_us=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvLnVrLw&guce\\_referrer\\_cs=Keu7uS52sEk0uMqbJPUaHw](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/the-jeffersons-show-legacy_n_1701026?guccounter=1&guce_referrer_us=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvLnVrLw&guce_referrer_cs=Keu7uS52sEk0uMqbJPUaHw), 25 August 2012.

tragedy. This representation was viewed so positively that in 2014 GLAAD named it, ‘one of the first positive portrayals of a transgender woman in entertainment media’.<sup>144</sup>

At the time Edie’s portrayal was a radical step for TV. The 1970s and 1980s were described by Stryker as ‘The Difficult Decades’ for the trans right movement as the momentum it gained in the 1960s was virtually halted by a second wave feminist backlash in the 1970s. The 1970s political climate continued to revolve around racial unrest in streets across the nation with members of the Black Panther Party murdered by police in Chicago, anti-war demonstrations ending in protesters being killed at Kent State University in Ohio by National Guard troops, and an upscaling of the FBI’s domestic surveillance programme infiltrating many anti-establishment movements and groups.<sup>145</sup> For trans individuals in San Francisco during this period, a ‘genital mutilating serial killer began preying on transgender sex workers in the Tenderloin’ with some trans community members believing the police were involved. However, this was never confirmed, and a suspect never caught.<sup>146</sup> Influential feminist writers such as Germaine Greer and Janice Raymond, as described earlier, depicted trans women as anti-feminist imitations of femininity.<sup>147</sup>

However, the movement itself and its impact on the everyday lives of trans children, young people and young adults during the 1970s, was seemingly lacking. There is little or no awareness, connection or acknowledgement to the movement as a whole.

---

<sup>144</sup> ‘Transforming Images: Four Decades of Trans-Inclusive Entertainment’, GLAAD (2014), <https://www.glaad.org/transforming-images-four-decades-trans-inclusive-entertainment>, date accessed: 15 March 2018.

<sup>145</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*, p. 92.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, p. 106.

The lack of awareness or engagement does not seem to be for a lack of need or necessity, but there is definitely an overall dearth of trans voice and positive social representation reaching into their lives. The singular voice which seems to impact them from TV shows, maintained normative gender roles and held up America's ideals of male and female. In addition, this voice impacted communities, society and parents, but also gender variant children. In ignoring the political movement, TV shows and Networks, including the left leaning CBS, continued to peddle:

...that transgendered people are emotionally unstable or emotionally exhibitionist and display other signs of mental illness, that we are an appropriate target for ridicule or violence, that all transsexuals are male-to-female, that transsexuals can never "pass"...that all transsexuals are drug addicts or alcoholics, or that all transsexuals have AIDS or are sex workers.<sup>148</sup>

1980s trans representation and the still felt reverberations of a trans rights backlash from the late 1970s prompted an inward focus for trans communities, supporting members with mutual aid rather than undertaking expansive social activism.<sup>149</sup> 1981 produced the initial visibility of the AIDS pandemic and the rest of the decade was in turn dominated by its sweeping consequences and undeserving victims. Ronald Reagan and his conservative policies and views were voted into power and the 1980s proudly promoted individualism, yuppie greed, materialism and consumerism and the end of the Cold War.<sup>150</sup>

Representation in the 1980s had a recurring theme; male or female character has friend or ex-boyfriend from college who is now a transsexual, met with varying reactions;

---

<sup>148</sup> Califia, *Sex Changes*, p. XXIX.

<sup>149</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*, p. 113.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

a prime example, *WKRP in Cincinnati*, a CBS ‘...comedy about an old-fashioned radio station transitioning into a hip rock station’ with an ‘oddball’ cast, featured an episode, ‘Oceanview Hotel’.<sup>151</sup> Herb, the main character seems shocked when a woman, Nikki, played by cisgender woman Linda Carlson, flirts with him in a hotel bar. He asks her back to his hotel suite where, after much conversation and a kiss, Nikki tells Herb, ‘I was once a man’. Not only this, she was his best friend from college, and was once masculine and athletic. On hearing this news, Herb reacts by lying on the bed in the foetal position listening to Nikki sincerely state, ‘I felt like a freak then Herb, I was in the wrong body, but now I like me. I accept who I am’. Despite this touching and sensitive dialogue by Nikki, she is the butt of Herb’s jokes and transphobia as Herb runs from the suite screaming at his colleague, ‘Nikki’s a man and I kissed him full on the lips’.<sup>152</sup>

In 1981’s *Charlie’s Angels*, ‘a TV programme written by men, but pitched as a ‘feminist twist on the cop show’ is ‘The story of three female LAPD officers who go private, working for the invisible boss of Charles Townsend Associates’.<sup>153</sup> In the episode, ‘Angel on the line’, a female patron at a dating club is killed in the parking lot after being threatened. The Angels’ go to the club to track down the murderer. Trans character, Margo, played by cisgender male actor Bruce Watson, works as a hypnotist at the club. Female pronouns are used by all who interact with Margo. She speaks to Kelly, one of the Angels about a male patron who seems suspicious. The next day an Edward Ford meets with Kelly, it is clear to the viewer that Margo is also Edward, and Edward is

---

<sup>151</sup> J Kiesewetter, ‘40 years of ‘WKRP in Cincinnati’’, <https://eu.cincinnati.com/story/entertainment/2018/09/21/wkrp-cincinnati-show-premiered-40-years-ago/1377495002/> consulted 30/09/18

<sup>152</sup> CBS, *WKRP in Cincinnati: Hotel Oceanview*, 29 November 1980.

<sup>153</sup> *The Guardian*, ‘Girl power gets its wings’, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/1999/oct/03/2>, 3 October 1999.

suspected as the murderer. Kelly meets with Margo later at the club, only for Margo to instantly change from a friendly woman to a deranged attacker with no rhyme or reason, attempting to stab Kelly to death. As the scuffle ensues outside, Margo is hit by the Angels' car and is revealed as a man dressed as a woman - the Angels' snatch the wig from Margo's head and leave her cowering in a dirty puddle. Kelly is clearly shocked at the reveal. There is no further discussion about Margo's identity apart from the episode closing with Charlie telling the Angels' of her psychiatric evaluation as well a report being written on 'her disturbed little mind'.<sup>154</sup> There are no published commentaries on this episode, nor the way Margo was both positively and negatively portrayed by the show's producers and the impact it had on the audience towards trans individuals. Themes of college friend/sweetheart trope of shock and horror, then the butt of jokes, especially around 'sex change' and 'penis removal' continued until the mid-1980s.<sup>155</sup>

One TV documentary challenging the established tropes and the belief that trans individuals were only trans women was Home Box Office's (HBO's) *What Sex am I?*<sup>156</sup> HBO as a network began life in 1972 as a cable channel which showed hockey but is now hailed as a liberal pay TV network with multi-Emmy award winning shows.<sup>157</sup> The left leaning politics of HBO shines in this 1985 documentary. Featuring Christine Jorgensen, it paints a sympathetic view of trans individuals. The *New York Times* reported:

---

<sup>154</sup> ABC, Charlie's Angels: Angel on the Line, 14 February 1981.

<sup>155</sup> For examples see: *The Love Boat*, episode 'Gopher's Roommate' cisgender female actor, in 1982; *Gimme a Break!* episode, 'Melissa', cisgender female actor, in 1983, *Night Court*, episode, 'Best of Friends' cisgender male actor Jim Bailey, in 1985; ABC, *The Love Boat: I Don't Play Anymore/Gopher's Roommate/Crazy for You*, 23 January 1982; NBC, *Gimme a Break!*: Melissa, 17 November 1983; NBC, *Night Court: Best of Friends*, 7 November 1985.

<sup>156</sup> HBO, *What sex am I?*, March 1985.

<sup>157</sup> *The Financial Times*, 'It's Not Just TV: How HBO revolutionized television', 2011.

“WHAT SEX AM I?” looks sympathetically at transsexuals and transvestites, exploring the meaning of gender. How is it defined? The Home Box Office documentary, neither salacious nor exploitative, finds ambiguities. It suggests that gender is, and probably should be, beyond definition.<sup>158</sup>

The opening music is comical and circus-ish, but the narrator quickly establishes that transsexuals are at odds with their bodies.<sup>159</sup> Overall it continues to be viewed as one of the first documentaries to highlight ‘civil injustices encountered by transmen’ in its feature of Steve Dain. Dain was a former high school teacher whom after GRS over a summer break returned only to be arrested on the first day of school due to a lapse in communication between the school administration and a new vice principal.<sup>160</sup> Over time, Dain successfully sued the school district to remain in teaching, and despite losing initial court cases, won. However, he had to leave teaching behind to become a chiropractor because no school district would employ him. This documentary however, positively represented and gave exposure to trans men to the American TV audience. Dain’s visibility increased to the trans community to the point of becoming an ambassador for FTM issues.<sup>161</sup> Additionally, according to archival documents from the *Digital Transgender Archive*, he regularly supported and counselled trans men on their gender dysphoria, discrimination by employers, access to healthcare and attended FTM conferences as a key-note speaker into the 1990s.<sup>162</sup>

---

<sup>158</sup> *New York Times*, ‘HBO’S “WHAT SEX AM I?”’, <https://www.nytimes.com/1985/04/18/movies/hbo-s-what-sex-am-i.html>, 18 April 1985, p. 00026.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*, pp. 114-115.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>162</sup> ‘Correspondence from Lou Sullivan to Jude Patton (June 26, 1985)’, Correspondence, 1985, *Digital Transgender Archive*, <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/files/0c483j46q>, date accessed: 04 March 2019); ‘Correspondence from Lou Sullivan to Rupert Raj (June 26, 1985)’, Correspondence, 1985, *Digital Transgender Archive*, <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/files/6108vb31r>, date accessed: 04 March 2019; FTM International, ‘A Vision of Community: The First All-FTM Conference

Trans representation in the 1990s and 2000s was more complex. 1990 began with *Twin Peaks*: an unconventional crime drama about a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Agent, Dale Cooper, who is sent to a small logging town, Twin Peaks in Washington State, to investigate the murder of popular prom queen, Laura Palmer. Character and transwoman Denise Bryson, played by cisgender male actor David Duchovny features in three episodes in season 2 [reprising the role for one episode in season 3, in 2017 to mixed reaction].<sup>163</sup> Utterly contrasting the established and well-worn comedic trope, Denise, whose position is high ranking in the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) not only maintains her senior position in the DEA after transition, but in meeting Dale Cooper and local police in Twin Peaks, who had previously known her as Dennis, explains her circumstances and they fully accept her, using female pronouns.<sup>164</sup> However, despite establishing positive gender variance, she continues to be a victim of comedy; creator and director David Lynch uses long camera shots over her towering manly height as well as long pauses in conversation from characters when she leaves the room. Thus, leaving their feelings and views of Denise open to interpretation for audiences. In addition, Denise tells Cooper that she transitioned due to feeling relaxed in women's clothing while posing as a transvestite for an undercover operation, expressing that the feelings surprised her. Still, the likes of the *Daily Beast* online media

---

of the Americas', Poster, 1995, *Digital Transgender Archive*,

<https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/files/j96020756>, date accessed: 04 March 2019.

<sup>163</sup> Showtime, *Twin Peaks: Part 4*, 21 May 2017; 'Is David Duchovny's *Twin Peaks* Role Good for Trans Representation?' *The Advocate* (2017), <https://www.advocate.com/television/2017/5/26/david-duchovnys-twin-peaks-role-good-trans-representation>, date accessed: 29 July 2018.

<sup>164</sup> ABC, *Twin Peaks: Masked Ball*, 12 December 1990; ABC, *Twin Peaks: The Black Widow*, 12 January 1991; ABC, *Twin Peaks: Checkmate*, 19 January 1991.



outlet, praises this role for being stand out in the 1990s during a sea of negative representation.<sup>165</sup>

The well-worn tropes of the preceding decades continued jokes throughout the 1990s in using cisgender actors and issuing penis. There are however, a few exceptions to the rule, such as cisgender, female actor Olympia Dukakis representation of transwoman, Mrs. Madrigal in Armistead Maupin's original columns in the *San Francisco Chronicle* to novel to TV adaptation, *Tales of the City*.<sup>166</sup> Featured on the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), which is viewed as left leaning, the series follows the lives of LGBT characters in San Francisco during the 1970s. Mrs Madrigal is the mysterious landlady of the boarding house on 28 Barbary Lane and is beautifully and sensitively portrayed, in not just her relationships with her tenants but her male love interest.<sup>167</sup> On being interviewed more recently about her role and not being a trans actor, Dukakis said:

She [Mrs.Madrigal] fought so hard and paid such a price to be authentic. She struggled for that and she arrived...And sometimes in doing that there are prices to pay...I told the producers that I'd read about these [gender reassignment] operations. There were only two biographies out at the time. But I said, "I've got to talk to somebody who's been through this experience. I feel so distanced from it". So, while we were in San Francisco, they introduced me to a woman who had been a man and who was a gender therapist...She [gender therapist] wanted to be true to who she was...I just started to cry. She put my head in such a different space, a place that I understood and knew as a human being.<sup>168</sup>

---

<sup>165</sup> 'What Made Twin Peaks' Denise Such a Radical Trans Character on TV', *Daily Beast* (2017), <https://www.thedailybeast.com/what-made-twin-peaks-denise-such-a-radical-trans-character-on-tv>, date accessed: 1 August 2018.

<sup>166</sup> *The Guardian*, 09 June 2007, 'Sex and the city: Armistead Maupin's tales of single life in San Francisco in the 1970s and 80s...', <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/jun/09/fiction.armisteadmaupin>.

<sup>167</sup> PBS, *Tales of the City*, 3 January 1994.

<sup>168</sup> *Queerty*\*, 'Olympia Dukakis On Gay Fans, Feisty Lesbians And Her Need To Speak Out Against Homophobia', 27 January 2015, <https://www.queerty.com/olympia-dukakis-on-gay-fans-feisty-lesbians-and-her-need-to-speak-out-against-homophobia-20150127>, date accessed: 1 March 2019.

There is a dearth of feedback on Dukakis' role of Madrigal the trans community or its impact on gender normative audiences. However, according to Queerty\*, the leading gay and lesbian entertainment site, the LGBT+ community has embraced her for her portrayal.

In addition to *Tales of the City*, self-titled 'supermodel of the world' drag queen Ru Paul, features in two episodes of *Nash Bridges*, namely 'Javelin Catcher' and 'Cuda Grace'.<sup>169</sup> *Bridges* is described as a 'high-action drama about a San Francisco police investigator who deserves his reputation as a top-notch cop, but who's not always so successful when it comes to his personal life'.<sup>170</sup> In 'Javelin Catcher', Ru Paul plays Simone Dubois, a 'representative for transsexual sex workers', who helps Bridges track down a gangster attempting to pick up 'transsexual prostitutes'.<sup>171</sup> In 'Cuda Grace' Simone teaches main characters Rick and Evans about femininity, grace and poise as they enter a trans beauty pageant under cover to catch a killer. When they initially cross-dress at rehearsals, Simone accosts them stating, 'ya'll aren't coming within ten city blocks of this pageant dressed like that. Now this pageant is very important to the public relations and, and public image of my community'.<sup>172</sup> This is a really powerful statement from Simone, coming not only from a trans person, but from a person of colour who is addressing two white cops. Simone's intervention causes both characters to reflect on their female attire and take their part in the pageant seriously. The scene ends in Simone taking both men shopping for dresses to which neither negatively react.

---

<sup>169</sup> CBS, *Nash Bridges: Javelin Catcher*, 19 April 1996; CBS, *Nash Bridges: Cuda Grace*, 3 April 1998.

<sup>170</sup> TV.COM, *Nash Bridges*, <http://www.tv.com/shows/nash-bridges/>, date accessed: 29 September 2018.

<sup>171</sup> CBS, *Nash Bridges: Javelin Catcher*, 19 April 1996

<sup>172</sup> CBS, *Nash Bridges: Cuda Grace*, 3 April 1998.

Later in the episode, Evans embraces his female personae on stage, but Rick finds it difficult to deal with, having ‘shaved parts of himself he never knew existed’.<sup>173</sup> It is an odd juxtaposition of characterisation to have one male cop who embraces his feminine side and one who repels it, underlining the trope of trans individuals being comedic and deviant. Despite Rick’s mockery, Simone gives him a powerful pep talk after Evans accuses Rick of being jealous of his beauty and show stealing in the pageant. It is touching to see a very otherwise masculine character listen to a trans person on how to love themselves just as they are. Rick then too seems to the viewer to embrace his female personae. However, this respect for the trans community is short lived: Rick believes he has identified the killer as one of the pageant participants, Chastity, and is sure she is a ‘real’ woman. Rick in full drag, seduces Chastity in a dressing room to confirm his suspicions, only to come running out, half dressed, lipstick smudged, shouting in horror. The audience is clearly told by these actions that Chastity is indeed a transwoman, and the heterosexual, hyper-masculine, transphobic Rick is disturbed by his experience, despite his gender play and pep talks from Simone. The episode closes with Rick catching the killer and Evans being crowned Miss Congeniality in the pageant, for which he seems very grateful.<sup>174</sup> Again, there is no commentary on the level of trans exposure in this episode to the audience, nor the embracing of one masculine police officer’s feminine side, resulting in respect, friendship and comradeship he clearly forged with the trans community he was essentially protecting.

---

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

The 1990s brought, according to Stryker, ‘rapid evolution and expansion’ for the trans community; 1990 was when the term ‘transgender’ was solidified as a ‘catchall term for nonnormative forms of gender expression and identity’.<sup>175</sup> Unfortunately, television did not begin to promote regular positive gender variance until the mid-2000’s onwards, when the second wave trans rights movement, was in full swing encouraging and promoting changing attitudes regarding America’s historical ‘gender paranoia’.<sup>176</sup> Since the mid-2000s, certain shows and documentaries have promoted a radical rethinking of trans representation.

GLAAD undertook a retrospective look at trans presentation from 2002 to 2012, finding, ‘Over the ten-year period examined, offensive representations and storylines were found on every major broadcast network and seven different cable networks, demonstrating that the problem remains widespread’.<sup>177</sup> The following illustration captures additional negative representations found by GLAAD during this time period:

---

<sup>175</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*, p. 123.

<sup>176</sup> Califia, *Sex Changes*, p. 23.

<sup>177</sup> ‘Victims or Villains: Examining Ten Years of Transgender Images on Television’, GLAAD (2012), <https://www.glaad.org/publications/victims-or-villains-examining-ten-years-transgender-images-television>, date accessed: 29 September 2017.

- Transgender characters were cast in a "victim" role at least 40% of the time.
- Transgender characters were cast as killers or villains in at least 21% of the catalogued episodes and storylines.
- The most common profession transgender characters were depicted as having was that of sex workers, which a fifth of all characters were depicted as (20%).
- Anti-transgender slurs, language and dialogue was present in at least 61% of the catalogued episodes and storylines.

Some of the exploitive and negative representatives included:

- *CSI* (CBS), which not only featured a transgender serial killer who murdered his own mother, but scenes in which transgender murder victims were openly mocked by the show's lead characters while examining their bodies and crime scenes.
- *The Cleveland Show* (Fox), in which a man vomits onscreen for a lengthy period of time after discovering he had slept with a transgender character. The episode also contained anti-trans language and defamatory characterizations.
- *Nip/Tuck* (FX), which featured a storyline about a transgender woman who regretted her transition, a transgender sex worker being beaten, and an entire season about a psychopathic trans woman depicted as a baby-stealing sexual predator who sleeps with her own son.

**Illustration 0-1:** Webpage content from ‘Victims or Villains: Examining Ten Years of Transgender Images on Television’, GLAAD (2012)

Despite these numbers, they state there have been numerous high points also. Episodes on shows such as *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC), *Cold Case* (CBS), and *Two and a Half Men* (CBS) established that trans storylines could be very well represented in both comedy and drama.<sup>178</sup> GLAAD coincided their report along with 2012s *Transgender Awareness Week* and the *Transgender Day of Remembrance*, stating that despite there being progress in trans representation, more work needed to be done.<sup>179</sup>

2014 according to *Time Magazine*, was a ‘transgender tipping point’ regarding media visibility of trans people, putting it at an ‘all time high’.<sup>180</sup> In the article

---

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Gillig, T.K., Rosenthal, E.L., Murphy, S.T., and Folb, K.L., ‘More than a Media Moment: The Influence of Televised Storylines on Viewers’ Attitudes toward Transgender People and Policies’, *Sex Roles*, 78:7–8 (2018), p. 516.

‘Decolonizing Transgender’, Eric Stanley argues for casting trans women of colour on television and instant streaming services. A key example is Laverne Cox’s casting as trans inmate Sophia Burset in Netflix’s *Orange is the New Black* (OITNB). OITNB is a drama of the black comedy genre and is based around a white privileged New Yorker who ‘ends up in a women’s prison when a past crime catches up with her’.<sup>181</sup> Stanley states that character representation, such as Burset ‘...is vital if we are to disrupt the structuring logics of anti-trans and anti-black visual culture.’<sup>182</sup> Since 2015, Cox has been nominated for an Emmy for her role as well as won multiple GLAAD awards.

Amazon’s *Transparent*, is a comedy drama focusing on a Jewish family but mainly, ‘...the Pfefferman family patriarch [who] makes a dramatic admission, [causing] the entire family’s secrets start to spill out, and each of them spin in a different direction as they begin to figure out who they are going to become’.<sup>183</sup> The lead trans character Maura was played from 2014 until his sacking for sexual misconduct in 2017, by cisgender actor Jeffrey Tambor.<sup>184</sup> Tambor won two Emmys for this role, and in accepting his accolade in 2016 stated that he felt being a cisgender male, playing a trans character was problematic and that Hollywood should give trans actors a chance.<sup>185</sup> Despite a cisgender actor having held the main role, trans women actors such as Candace

---

<sup>181</sup> ‘*Orange is the New Black*’, Netflix, <https://www.netflix.com/gb/title/70242311>, date accessed: 15 September 2018

<sup>182</sup> Ibid; Boellstroff, T., Cabral, M., Cardenas, M., Cotten, T., Stanley, E.A., Young, K., & Aizura, A. Z., Decolonizing Transgender: A Roundtable Discussion. *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1:3 (2014), p.425.

<sup>183</sup> ‘*Transparent*’, Amazon, <https://www.amazon.com/Transparent-Season-1/dp/B00I3MPZUW>, date accessed: 15 September 2018.

<sup>184</sup> *The Guardian*, ‘Jeffrey Tambor: the problem with his post-#MeToo comeback’, 24 May 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2018/may/24/jeffrey-tambor-the-problem-with-his-post-metoo-comeback>.

<sup>185</sup> *The Washington Post*, ‘Jeffrey Tambor won an Emmy for playing a transgender woman, but even he thinks that’s problematic’, 18 September 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2016/09/18/jeffrey-tambor-won-an-emmy-for-playing-a-transgender-woman-but-even-he-thinks-thats-problematic/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.99bb12bf9b7b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2016/09/18/jeffrey-tambor-won-an-emmy-for-playing-a-transgender-woman-but-even-he-thinks-thats-problematic/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.99bb12bf9b7b).

Cayne, Alexandra Billings, Trace Lysette, Zackary Drucker and Hari Nef were cast in supporting roles, and the show additionally employs transgender writers.<sup>186</sup> The disturbing sacking of Tambor – under allegations of ‘sexual misconduct’ - has left *Transparent*’s future uncertain, which is a blow to a show that promotes trans identities as natural and accepted.<sup>187</sup>

2015 saw The Wachowski Sisters, Lana and Lilly (formerly known as the Wachowski Brothers), who both transitioned during the last 10 years, release their Netflix creation *Sense8*. This tense drama ‘in which eight people can telepathically experience each other's lives’, featured multiple LGB characters and trans character Nomi Marks, played by trans actor Jamie Clayton, but was sadly cancelled in 2018 due to low viewership.<sup>188</sup>

There have been further improvements to representation made on increasing numbers of LGBTQ+ characters, ‘[o]f 895 series regular characters counted on 118 primetime scripted shows on the broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, The CW, FOX, and NBC), 43 characters are LGBTQ’. This was an increase of 35 shows from 2015-16.<sup>189</sup>

However, GLAAD go onto state in their 2016/17 report *Where We Are on TV*:

While streaming series have made a small improvement from last year, GLAAD would still like to see these services introduce more racially diverse LGBTQ characters going forward, as 71 percent of their LGBTQ regular and recurring characters are white. And even though streaming services are leading the way among all platforms in including transgender

---

<sup>186</sup> Amazon, *Transparent*, 2014-.

<sup>187</sup> *IndieWire*, ‘Transparent’s’ Uncertain Future: Amazon Still Unsure How Series Will End Following Jeffrey Tambor’s Exit’, 11 June 2018, <https://www.indiewire.com/2018/06/transparent-season-5-jeffrey-tambor-amazon-1201973430/>.

<sup>188</sup> Netflix, *Sense8*, 2015-2018

<sup>189</sup> ‘Where we are on TV ’16-’17: GLAAD’s Annual Report on LGBTQ Inclusion’, *GLAAD* (2016), <https://www.glaad.org/whereweareontv16>, date accessed: 3 August 2018, p. 6

characters, we would also like to see them begin to include more trans men, as all seven of the trans characters counted are women.<sup>190</sup>

## **2.4 Consequences of trans representation for trans young people in the present**

With trans representation gradually changing, how has an almost gender-normative, cisgender normative message impacted on trans young people over the last two decades? The impact of negative historical representation via pop culture, continues to have relevance in the lives of trans young people, eking from continued stereotypes and trans tropes. A proportion of trans young people, particularly those of colour are unable to escape America's idealistic gender roles, instead their challenge often leads to rejection and deprivation: familial rejection, societal rejection, homelessness and incarceration, which will all be discussed. There is also an element that within this section, the majority of research, if not all, derives from the medical community, social work, public health, social care support group and homelessness organisations. It highlights the importance of the need to hear the lived experiences of gender variant individuals, and how important and impacting it is on outside research, such as these sources.

According to the research, trans young people in the US are marginalised by structural and institutional inequalities concerning gender, race and class.<sup>191</sup> Trans youth of colour are disproportionately represented within the research regarding economic inequalities and involvement in the juvenile justice system.<sup>192</sup> In relation to this, research states that trans young people of colour come from low economic, working class

---

<sup>190</sup> Ibid. p. 11.

<sup>191</sup> S.D. Snapp., J.N. Hoenig., A. Fields, A., and S.T. Russell., 'Messy, Butch, and Queer: LGBTQ Youth and the School-to-Prison Pipeline', *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 30:1 (2015), p. 61.

<sup>192</sup> J. Reck., 'Homeless Gay and Transgender Youth of Color in San Francisco: "No One Likes Street Kids"—Even in the Castro', *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 6:2-3 (2009), p. 239; V.A. Rosario., 'African-American Transgender Youth', *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, 13:4 (2009), p. 299.



households situated in poorer areas of cities and towns.<sup>193</sup> They are also reported to experience some of the highest levels of adversity in their daily lives due to the intersectionality of transphobia, poverty and racism.<sup>194</sup> Unlike their cisgender counterparts, trans young people have greater levels of complexity and social visibility having adopted gender classifications which fall outside of America's mythical binary norms of male and female.<sup>195</sup> Studies have reported that trans young people contend with all the issues of their cisgender and LGB counterparts encounter, including being 'thrown away'; forced to leave the family home, resulting in homelessness.<sup>196</sup> The main motivators for family rejection revolve around trans young people being caught 'trying out' or revealing their identified gender, frequently facing physical and sexual violence at the hands of their families in the process of leaving.<sup>197</sup> Studies suggest that trans young

---

<sup>193</sup> L.F. Graham., 'Navigating Community Institutions: Black Transgender Women's Experiences in Schools, the Criminal Justice System, and Churches', *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 11 (2014), p. 275.

<sup>194</sup> N. Peterson., 'The Health and Rights of Transgender Youth', <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/publications-a-z/2282-the-health-and-rights-of-Trans-youth>, consulted 30/05/2015; Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality in 1989 to describe bias and violence against black women stating 'I consider intersectionality a provisional concept linking contemporary politics with postmodern theory. In mapping the intersections of race and gender, the concept does engage dominant assumptions that race and gender are essentially separate categories. By tracing the categories to their intersections, I hope to suggest a methodology that will ultimately disrupt the tendencies see race and gender as exclusive or separable. While the primary intersections I explore here are between race and gender, the concept can and should be expanded by factoring in issues such class, sexual orientation, age, and color.'; K. Crenshaw., 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color', *Stanford Law Review*, 43:6 (1991), pp. 1244–1245.

<sup>195</sup> Individuals who identify **with** their birth gender; A.H. Grossman., and A.R. D'augellii., 'Transgender Youth: Invisible and Vulnerable', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 51:1 (2006), p. 112.

<sup>196</sup> H. Building., 'Familial backgrounds and risk behaviors of youth with throwaway experiences', *Journal of Adolescence*, 21 (1998), p. 242; B.N. Cochran., A.J. Stewart., J.A. Ginzler., and A.M. Cauce., 'Challenges Faced by Homeless Sexual Minorities: Comparison of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Homeless Adolescents With Their Heterosexual Counterparts', *American Journal of Public Health*, 92:5 (2002), p. 774; J.C. Oparah., 'Feminism and the (trans)gender Entrapment of Gender Nonconforming Prisoners', *UCLA Women's Law Journal*, 18 (2012), p. 257.

<sup>197</sup> N. Ray, 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans Youth: An Epidemic of Homelessness', [http://www.thetaskforce.org/static\\_html/downloads/reports/reports/HomelessYouth\\_ExecutiveSummary.pdf](http://www.thetaskforce.org/static_html/downloads/reports/reports/HomelessYouth_ExecutiveSummary.pdf), consulted 28/11/16; J M., Grant, L A. Mottet, J Tanis, J Harrison, J L. Herman, and M Keisling, 'Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey', [http://www.thetaskforce.org/static\\_html/downloads/reports/reports/ntds\\_full.pdf](http://www.thetaskforce.org/static_html/downloads/reports/reports/ntds_full.pdf), consulted 18/01/15; V.

people can be ‘thrown away’ as young as 12 years old.<sup>198</sup> Studies additionally report that trans young people and LGB youth in the US are more likely than cisgender young people to mobilise and migrate towards larger cities such as New York, Chicago and San Francisco, where they hope to seek out and find acceptance in established gay communities.<sup>199</sup> Kovats-Bernat in his research involving street children in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, refers to the street children’s experience of being thrown away from home, and from their community as a form of ‘displacement’.<sup>200</sup> I believe this term displacement can also be applied to trans young people: being rejected and mobilising; undertaking rural to urban migration, from a fear of further victimisation or abuse from their families or communities, but to also seek out a place of safety and solidarity in which to work out who they are and they navigate their place on the ‘transgender map’.<sup>201</sup>

Youth homelessness in the US today is a pressing political and social issue as a result of young people’s level of vulnerability, the complexity of their needs and the social stigma surrounding homelessness as a status.<sup>202</sup> In recent research studies from the US, numbers of homeless youth ages 12-25 are approximated to be anywhere between 575,000

---

Yu., ‘Shelter and Transitional Housing for Transgender Youth’, *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, 14:4 (2010), p. 340-345.

<sup>198</sup> H. Building., ‘Familial backgrounds and risk behaviors of youth with throwaway experiences’, *Journal of Adolescence*, 21 (1998), pp. 241–252; Ray, ‘Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans Youth: An Epidemic of Homelessness’.

<sup>199</sup> K.E. Gibson., ‘*Street Kids: Homeless Youth, Outreach, and Policing New York’s Streets* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); N S. Quintana, J Rosenthal, and J Krehely, ‘On the Streets: The Federal Response to Gay and Transgender Homeless Youth’, <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2010/06/pdf/lgbtyouthhomelessness.pdf>, consulted 22/04/16.

<sup>200</sup> J.C. Kovats-Bernat., *Sleeping Rough in Port-au-Prince: An Ethnography of Street Children and Violence in Haiti* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2006), p.55.

<sup>201</sup> Wilson, ‘I am’, p. 436.

<sup>202</sup> Kidd, S., ‘Youth Homelessness and Social Stigma’, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 36 (2007), pp. 291–299

and 2.8 million nationwide.<sup>203</sup> Further to this, studies report that up to 40% of homeless youth in the US are made up of LGBT young people.<sup>204</sup> What proportion of these numbers are specifically trans young people is unknown but speculative statistics suggest that they are, over represented within the LGB demographic of youth homelessness.<sup>205</sup> Some studies additionally state that numbers are approaching epidemic proportions, but this is US specific.<sup>206</sup>

Research from the US further demonstrates that trans young people can be wary of social services, as a result of negative past experiences including involvement in the foster care system and children/ juvenile homes.<sup>207</sup> Studies report that the levels of need of trans young people at times surpass that of LGB and cisgender youth, because of their health, wellbeing and social needs. These include coping with familial rejection, reduced peer support, acceptance of trans identity and access to adequate healthcare, increased

---

<sup>203</sup> Quintana et al, 'On the Streets: The Federal Response to Gay and Transgender Homeless Youth'; Walsh, S.M., and Donaldson, R.E., 'Invited commentary: National Safe Place: meeting the immediate needs of runaway and homeless youth', *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 39:5 (2010), pp. 437–45; H. Hussey, 'Beyond 4 Walls and a Roof: Addressing Homelessness Among Transgender Youth', <http://static1.squarespace.com/static/54873880e4b028ad7a710b0e/t/5513f2dce4b053108e5da8dd/1427370716570/TransHomeless.pdf>, consulted 06/06/16; Winn, 'U.S. State Department of Health and Human Services: Learning from the Field: Programs Serving Youth who are LGBTQ2-S and Experiencing Homelessness';

<sup>204</sup> Ray, 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual...'; L Winn, 'U.S. State Department of Health and Human Services: Learning from the Field: Programs Serving Youth who are LGBTQ2-S and Experiencing Homelessness'; Hussey, 'Beyond 4 Walls and a Roof: Addressing Homelessness Among Transgender Youth'; Quintana et al, 'On the Streets: The Federal Response to Gay and Transgender Homeless Youth'.

<sup>205</sup> Hussey, 'Beyond 4 Walls and a Roof: Addressing Homelessness Among Transgender Youth'.

<sup>206</sup> Ray, 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans Youth: An Epidemic of Homelessness'; L E. Durso, and G J. Gates, 'Serving Our Youth: Finding from a National Survey of Services Providers Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth Who are Homeless or At Risk of Becoming Homeless', <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Durso-Gates-LGBT-Homeless-Youth-Survey-July-2012.pdf>, consulted 28/01/15; Hussey, 'Beyond 4 Walls and a Roof: Addressing Homelessness Among Transgender Youth'.

<sup>207</sup> M.V. Gwadz., M.C. Clatts., N.R. Leonard., and L. Goldsamt., 'Attachment style, childhood adversity, and behavioral risk among young men who have sex with men', *The Journal of Adolescent Health: Official Publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine*, 34:5 (2004), pp. 402–413; A. Irvine., "'We've Had Three of Them": Addressing The Invisibility of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Gender Non-Conforming Youths in the Juvenile Justice System', *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law*, 19:3 (2010), pp. 675–701.

feelings of depression and suicidal ideation. Recent studies suggest that social workers and hostel workers do not have adequate training, awareness or understanding of these needs and are therefore unable to fulfil their duties, letting trans young people down. Social workers admit that when trans young people are housed with foster carers, who are not themselves trans or retain an understanding of trans needs, they frequently run back to the streets or are thrown away when their gender identity becomes clear.<sup>208</sup> According to Ray and Yu this is also the case for youth homelessness units and shelters in the US, which are predominantly federally funded and run by religious groups.<sup>209</sup> These groups are required to provide a safe, protected space for all young people, not just cisgender youth. However, trans young people, on the whole, receive stigmatising, transphobic, discriminatory and exclusionary reactions by shelter staff due to a lack of training/ understanding making them feel safer on the streets.<sup>210</sup>

Trans young people become quickly acquainted and inducted into the street level economy as a method of survival. One current study found that homelessness is one of the most common catalysts in engaging in survival sex for trans young people.<sup>211</sup> One US based study reported that of 51 trans youth of colour interviewed, 59% were involved in regular sex work.<sup>212</sup> The street economy is also referred to as the ‘informal economy’;

---

<sup>208</sup> Ray, ‘Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual...’.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid; Yu., ‘Shelter and Transitional’, pp. 340-345.

<sup>210</sup> L. Mottet., and J. Ohle., ‘Transitioning Our Shelters: Making Homeless Shelters Safe for Transgender People’, *Journal of Poverty*, 10:2 (2008), pp. 77–101; Yu, ‘Shelter and Transitional’, pp. 675-701.

<sup>211</sup> M. Dank, J. Yahner, K. Madden, I. Bañuelos, L. Yu, A. Ritchie, ... Conner, B., ‘Surviving the Streets of New York: Experiences of LGBTQ Youth, YMSM, and YWSW Engaged in Survival Sex’, <http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/2000119-Surviving-the-Streets-of-New-York.pdf>, consulted 05/12/2015.

<sup>212</sup> A.A. Singh., ‘Transgender Youth of Color and Resilience: Negotiating Oppression and Finding Support’, *Sex Roles*, 68:11-12 (2013), p. 691.

not earning through legitimate and legally regulated sources.<sup>213</sup> With specific regard to sex work, it can be referred to as the ‘shadow economy’.<sup>214</sup> However, this term encapsulates all forms of sex work from pornography to high class escorts under what Sanders refers to as a ‘four-point continuum’: legal formal, legal informal, illegal informal, illegal criminal.<sup>215</sup> In this case trans young people under the age of 18 involved in survival sex would fall under the ‘illegal criminal’ continuum according to laws in the US because of their child/ minor status.<sup>216</sup> They are not viewed by the law or society as having consent or being old enough to have agency or choice, but victims.<sup>217</sup> I believe that this in itself is a harmful contradiction which sees laws, systems and policies designed to protect young people from having to engage in sex work denigrate them further by forcing them into a cycle of survival/ arrest/ incarceration, homelessness, criminal (in) justice and progressively lower societal standing and life trajectories.

Survival sex is viewed by governments, agencies and trans young people themselves as a high risk activity with research indicating that they are more likely to be involved in sex work and take higher physical risks, such as unprotected sex with clients, than LGB and cisgender young people.<sup>218</sup> It also provides some homeless trans young people with emotional, social and economic needs.<sup>219</sup> Young trans women especially are

---

<sup>213</sup> Gwadz et al., ‘The initiation of homeless youth into the street economy’, *Journal of Adolescence*, 32:2 (2009), p. 358.

<sup>214</sup> T. Sanders., ‘Selling sex in the shadow economy’, *International Journal of Social Economics*, 35:10 (2008), pp. 704–716.

<sup>215</sup> Sander, ‘Selling sex’, p. 705.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> J. Musto., ‘Domestic minor sex trafficking and the detention-to-protection pipeline’, *Dialectical Anthropology*, 37:12(2013), p. 262.

<sup>218</sup> Ray, ‘Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual...’; Walls, and Bell, ‘Correlates of Engaging in Survival Sex among Homeless Youth and Young Adults’, pp. 423-436; Hussey, ‘Beyond 4 Walls and a Roof: Addressing Homelessness Among Transgender Youth’.

<sup>219</sup> Hussey, ‘Beyond 4 Walls and a Roof: Addressing Homelessness Among Transgender Youth’.

reported to have a need to be affirmed in their gender identity by their clients.<sup>220</sup> Trans young people in sex work are at risk of being ‘found out’ if they have not previously advertised themselves to clients as trans, or are not physically ‘passing’ as the gender they are expressing. Research indicates that trans young people experience high rates of physical and sexual violence while involved in sex work and that the perpetrators include law enforcement officers and clients.<sup>221</sup> This violence likely intersects with transphobia and racism, with some violent attacks ending in murder; According to Trans Europe’s Trans Murder Monitoring Project, in the year preceding 2014, 226 trans individuals had been murdered worldwide, and a total of 1,612 since 2008.<sup>222</sup> In the US 104 trans individuals have been murdered since 2008 and 90 within Europe.<sup>223</sup> A large proportion of these murders were against trans women, many of whom were women of colour.<sup>224</sup> It is unconfirmed in the research whether a proportion of the victims were involved in sex work.

According to some studies, young trans women, are more likely to engage in survival sex to make money to access ‘street hormones’; unregulated, illicit hormone injections, as well as silicon injections for the purpose of facial feminising and gender identity.<sup>225</sup> The risk in using street hormones in contracting HIV is moderately high as a

---

<sup>220</sup> T. Poteat., A.L. Wirtz., A. Radix., A. Borquez., A. Silva-Santisteban., M.B. Deutsch., D. Operario., ‘HIV risk and preventive interventions in transgender women sex workers’, *Lancet*, 6736:14 (2014), pp.1-13.

<sup>221</sup> R.L.Stotzer., ‘Violence against transgender people: A review of United States data’, *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 14:3 (2009), pp. 170-179.

<sup>222</sup> ‘TDOR Press Release October 30 2014’, *Trans Europe* (2014), <http://www.transrespect-transphobia.org/uploads/downloads/2014/TDOR2014/TvT-TDOR2014PR-en.pdf>, date accessed: 20 November 2014

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Peterson, ‘The Health and Rights’.

<sup>225</sup> Ray, ‘Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual...’; Grossman and D’augelli, ‘Transgender Youth’, pp. 111–128; Spicer., ‘Healthcare Needs of the Transgender’, pp. 320–339; Dank et al., ‘Surviving the Streets of New York’.

result of the commonality of needle sharing with other trans young people.<sup>226</sup> Further to this, the unregulated nature of the injections can also cause long term health and organ damage because of the unknown quantities or quality of the hormone they are injecting, as well as the accuracy of the hormone in the syringe to counteract the body's natural secretion of oestrogen or testosterone.<sup>227</sup> There is a research gap regarding street or illicit hormones and access to them for trans young people in the US, and not just involving their long term physical effects, but their prices, availability and relationship to trans young people and sex work.

Young people experience a much higher rate of victimisation and violence while homeless, especially trans young people, who may not 'pass' as the gender they identify with. This makes them a target not only while engaging in survival sex but to other homeless youth, the public, law enforcement officers and the Juvenile Justice System (JJS). Police in the US target homeless young people for what's known as 'quality of life crimes'; trespassing, loitering, pan handling, public urination and prostitution.<sup>228</sup> Trans young people are not only over represented in youth homelessness statistics but are additionally over represented in the demographics for young people involved in the JJS in the US.<sup>229</sup> However, causal factors for involvement in the JJS include a combined

---

<sup>226</sup> 'Gender Dysphoria DSM-5', *American Psychiatric Association* (2013), <http://www.dsm5.org/documents/gender%20dysphoria%20fact%20sheet.pdf>, date accessed: 19 January 2015; Poteat et al, 'HIV risk and preventive', pp. 1-13.

<sup>227</sup> Hussey, 'Beyond 4 Walls and a Roof: Addressing Homelessness Among Transgender Youth'.

<sup>228</sup> Marksamer, 'And by the Way', pp. 72-92; Hussey, 'Beyond 4 Walls and a Roof: Addressing Homelessness Among Transgender Youth'.

<sup>229</sup> Marksamer, 'And by the Way', pp. 72-92; H. Squatriglia., 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth in the Juvenile Justice System: Incorporating Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity into the Rehabilitative Process', *Cardozo Journal of Law and Gender*, 14 (2008), pp. 793-817; Ventimiglia, 'LGBT Selective Victimization: Unprotected Youth on the Streets', p. 439-453; Graham, 'Navigating Community', pp. 274-287.

result of the regulating and increased policing of public spaces, which highlights the presence and visibility of all young people, not just trans people.<sup>230</sup> The transgressing of heteronormative gender roles through the ‘non-heteronormative body’ and representation of queerness results in police profiling trans young people.<sup>231</sup> This in turn makes them more visible and guarantees frequent police attention and harassment.<sup>232</sup> It is important to briefly acknowledge that prior to becoming involved with the police and JJS processes while experiencing homelessness, many trans young people initially become involved at an earlier stage; while they are still living at home and attending school.<sup>233</sup>

Squatriglia states that there is a direct connection to trans young people's gender identity/ non-conformity and entry into the JJS. In dressing to and expressing their gender non-conforming identities publicly, trans young people cause friction in their heteronormative and gender conforming environments of community and school.<sup>234</sup> Further to this they are flagged as being troublesome, rebellious and delinquent in not abiding by school dress-codes or policies.<sup>235</sup> According to Marksamer 90% of trans youth across the US describe feeling unsafe at school; their need to express their gender identity leaves them open to both discrimination, perpetrated by school policy, teachers and students alike, as well as vulnerability in the form of being verbally and physically harassed or assaulted.<sup>236</sup> Furthermore, in a study undertaken by E A. Greytak, J G.

---

<sup>230</sup> Dwyer, ‘Policing Lesbian, Gay’, pp. 415 – 433; Gibson, ‘*Street Kids*’.

<sup>231</sup> A. Dwyer., “‘We’re Not Like These Weird Feather Boa-Covered AIDS-Spreading Monsters’: How LGBT Young People and Service Providers Think Riskiness Informs LGBT Youth-Police Interactions’, *Critical Criminology*, 22:1 (2014), p. 73.

<sup>232</sup> Ventimiglia, ‘LGBT Selective’, pp. 439–453.

<sup>233</sup> Marksamer, ‘And by the Way’, pp. 72–92; Squatriglia, ‘Lesbian, Gay’, pp. 793–817.

<sup>234</sup> Squatriglia, ‘Lesbian, Gay’, pp. 793–817.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Marksamer, ‘And by the Way’, p. 74.



Kosciw, and E. M. Diaz involving principal's perspectives of bullying, safety and harassment in US state schools, principal's admitted that their anti-bullying strategies, educational resources and support systems were the least inclusive of trans young people in all minority identities recorded within their schools.<sup>237</sup> Marksamer additionally found 55% of trans youth in the US reported experiencing physical harassment at the hands of their peers which can have an effect on self-esteem, mental health and reduce the likelihood of maintaining or succeeding at school.<sup>238</sup>

Research from the US reports that family rejection, problems at school and harassment within their community can increase the risk of trans young people of being arrested and held in a locked youth detention facility by their birth sex, unless diagnosed with gender dysphoria, for the duration of delinquency proceedings.<sup>239</sup> The duration of detention is entirely dependent on the age of the young trans person and the viewed severity of their offending behaviour or 'vulnerability' by the JJS. Therefore, a young trans person could begin their involvement at 14 years old and be held in detention until they are released at 18 for defying dress codes or standing up to their bullies within their communities and schools. This discrimination however, relates back to my argument that involvement in the Juvenile Justice processes prior to experiencing homelessness, makes trans young people even more of a regular target for a repeated cycle of survival through the street economy/ visibility in public places/ arrest/ incarceration and homelessness.

---

<sup>237</sup> E A. Greytak, J G. Kosciw, and E M. Diaz, 'Harsh Realities: The Experiences of Transgender Youth in Our Nation's Schools', <http://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/Harsh%20Realities.pdf>, consulted 30/02/15.

<sup>238</sup> Marksamer, 'And by the Way', p. 74.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

This brief research has presented a stark consequence for young trans people growing up in a pop culture where representation peddles negative tropes, stereotypes and the gender binary, despite efforts from certain TV stations, streaming services, directors and actors to change those tropes. According to research, trans young people, especially those of colour and without parental support are thrown away, are vulnerable, marginalised and discriminated against on a structural level because of America's gender binary ideals. Thus, leads to their involvement in survival sex and the criminal justice system. However, the gap in this research is the lack of the lived experience and narratives of trans individuals, which highlights the need for narratives told by and for trans people to help mitigate the negative impact of trans misrepresentation. Furthermore, gender variant narratives have the power to challenge and complicate the established research narrative.

## **2.5 Theoretical Framework**

During the initial stages of my study – and in response to the literature reviewed - I preliminarily chose three theoretical frameworks – queer theory, transgender theory and liminality theory - to explore in relation to their suitability for a trans focused study. These frameworks - I felt at the time – were not only grounded in gender as a socially constructed concept but housed theoretical foundations relating directly to trans embodiment, trans identity, and could square disparities which individuals faced on a daily basis within American society - particularly from the 1950s to present. However, during further exploration of these theories and my experience of fieldwork and in-depth discussions with narrators and colleagues, I amended my framework to reflect the study's development and eventual resting place as a primarily oral history study, with a theory

base in transgender and liminality theory with queer theory landing on the periphery. I have included summaries of these original frameworks to evidence this development, their evolution and impact on my study and its conclusions.

## **2.5.1 Queer Theory**

### **2.5.1.1 Historical developments**

Originally, I gravitated to queer theory for this study because of its theoretical grounding in post-structuralism of the 1970s and 80s based in the works of various critical theorists such as Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida and Michael Foucault. Post-structuralism rejects the concept of any absolute, singular, universal, ‘truth’ and is critical approaches that make claims to uncover truths, such as religion and science. The theorists themselves are critical of ‘theories based on grand narratives that attempt to explain all of human experience in terms of one specific structure, like the theories of Freud (the internal structure of the unconscious) or Marx (the social structure of the class system)’.<sup>240</sup>

Post-structuralists view knowledge as contextual and partial or what is known is only part of the picture and grounded in where, who and when we are. Moreover, knowledge is not viewed as neutral or objective, but is dependent on power, systems of power and its ability to shape power between people. Derrida’s work is a prime example as he analyses texts to uncover which binary oppositions are being privileged – male/female, masculine/feminine, straight/gay, butch/femme, white/black, good/bad, and real/unreal for example - all of which underwrite a focus on meaning through language

---

<sup>240</sup> M.J. Barker., and J. Scheele., *Queer A Graphic History* (London: Faber & Faber, 2016), p. 34.

and the composition of identity within heteronormative and a gender normative society.<sup>241</sup> Overall, these binaries can be viewed as either ‘central’ (using categories such as man, white, good, straight, real) or ‘marginal’ (using categories such as woman, black, bad, gay, unreal). Pulling from this same tradition, queer theory is said to question the ‘presumptions, values and viewpoints’ of these binary positions of central versus marginal, especially questioning those viewpoints which typically remain unquestioned.<sup>242</sup> Furthermore, queer theory retains tangible, historical and current links with feminist theory.

Annamarie Jagose establishes that ‘before queer theory became the most recognizable name for anti-identitarian, anti-normative critique – feminist scholarship had already initiated a radically anti-foundationalist interrogation of the category of women.’<sup>243</sup> While feminist theory willingly accepts and confronts the socially constructed aspects of gender and sexual expression, for numerous feminist theorists, both historical and current, the essentialising of gender identity indicates that the theory is restricted in understanding that both gender and sexual identity may also exist as social constructs able to be subverted, questioned and self-constructed.<sup>244</sup> Gayle S Rubin - a cultural anthropologist, activist and theorist of sex and gender politics - declared that if feminism was outlined as a theory of gender oppression, within which sexuality was

---

<sup>241</sup> Ibid; J. Derrida., ‘The law of genre’, in W.J.T. Mitchell (eds.), *On Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) pp. 51–77.

<sup>242</sup> P. Dilley, ‘Queer Theory: Under Construction’, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 12:5 (1999), p. 458.

<sup>243</sup> A. Jagose., ‘Feminism’s Queer Theory’, *Feminism & Psychology*, 19:2 (2009), p. 160.

<sup>244</sup> J.L. Nagoshi., S. Brzuzy., and H.K Terrell., ‘Deconstructing the complex perceptions of gender roles, gender identity, and sexual orientation among transgender individuals’, *Feminism & Psychology*, 22:4 (2012), p. 407.

presumed to be linked to gender identity, it was dubious whether such a theory of gender oppression could also offer a valid theory of sexual oppression.<sup>245</sup>

It is arguable, therefore, that queer theory developed from feminist and deconstructivist approaches that, ‘posited “normative” and “deviant” sexual behaviours and cognitions as social constructs. This work furthered the social constructivist approach that developed in rebellion against the “essentialist” ideas that were established during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in Western societies.’<sup>246</sup> Queer theory’s purpose was, in essence, to create a potential moral and intellectual base for challenging ‘heteronormative assumptions, beliefs and enforcements’ which attempted to socially subordinate women to men and discriminate against those ‘who deviated from traditional heteronormative sexual and gender identity.’<sup>247</sup>

### **2.5.1.2 The coining of queer theory and its rejection**

David Halperin states that the term ‘queer theory originally came into being as a joke’. Teresa de Lauretis – academic and critical theorist - created the phrase as a conference title in 1990. She wished to use the title to provoke and unsettle an apparent apathy within gay and lesbian studies. Lauretis wished to use queer theory to ‘challenge the erstwhile domination of the field by the work of empirical social scientists’, ‘to open a wider space within it for reflections of a theoretical order, to introduce a problematic of multiple differences into what had tended to be a monolithic, homogenizing discourse of

---

<sup>245</sup> G. Rubin., ‘Thinking sex: Notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality’, in H. Ablove., M.A. Barale., and D.M Halperin (eds.), *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 34.

<sup>246</sup> J.L. Nagoshi., C.T. Nagoshi., and S. Brzuzy., *Gender and Sexual Identity: Transcending Feminist and Queer Theory* (New York: Springer, 2014), p. 21.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid*, p. 15.

(homo)sexual difference, and to offer a possible escape from the hegemony of white, male, middle-class models of analysis.’ Beyond that, Halperin states that ‘she hoped both to make theory queer (that is, to challenge the heterosexist underpinnings and assumptions of what conventionally passed for “theory” in academic circles) and to queer theory (to call attention to every- thing that is perverse about the project of theorizing sexual desire and sexual pleasure).<sup>248</sup> However, within three years of being adopted by academia, institutions and scholars, Lauretis had rejected the term queer theory, believing that it was not being used politically or critically in the way she had intended.<sup>249</sup>

As a theoretical category, queer theory is viewed as being impossible to pin down as it does not retain a fixed structural definition and since its rapid ascent during the 1990s and beyond, it has had a tendency of concealing that it is not a theory at all as it has no set of systematic principles. It is instead a robust collection of theories.<sup>250</sup> Queer theory’s rejection self-definition has been recognised by some as ‘one of its tactical strengths’, however it is difficult to capture by those who wish to use it practically, in everyday life.<sup>251</sup> Nikki Sullivan famously states ‘it is a discipline that refuses to be disciplined.’<sup>252</sup> Instead, queer theory can be viewed as a field - or as Sullivan states above, a discipline that serves as ‘a zone of possibilities in which the embodiment of the subject might be experienced

---

<sup>248</sup> D.M. Halperin., ‘The Normalization of Queer Theory’, *Journal of Homosexuality*, 45:2–4 (2003), pp. 339–340.

<sup>249</sup> Barker and Scheele, *Queer*, p. 65.

<sup>250</sup> N. Sullivan., *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), pp. IV-VI.

<sup>251</sup> ‘Queer Theory: The Origins of Queer theory’, *Science Encyclopaedia* (2019), <https://science.jrank.org/pages/10938/Queer-Theory-Origins-Queer-Theory.html>, date accessed: 4 November 2019.

<sup>252</sup> Sullivan, *A Critical*, p. V.

otherwise’, according to Lee Edelman.<sup>253</sup> However, within this, there are theories which are viewed as inaccessible because of language, a tendency to contradict each other, again, making it problematic in its practical application.<sup>254</sup> Moreover, Riki Wilchins’ argues that in ‘retreating into academia arcana’ queer theory has become progressively less beneficial to those people who need it, namely ‘psychosexual minorities’ and those in activism attempting to change society.<sup>255</sup>

### 2.5.1.3 Judith Butler and queer theory

According to academic Sally Hines ‘The development of poststructuralist feminist theory and queer theory through the 1990s brought issues of gender and sexual plurality to the fore. In taking the discursive formations of gender and sexuality as their starting point, these approaches have engaged directly with transgender’.<sup>256</sup> Continuing, Hines states that Judith Butler’s work is central to this, arguing that Butler views ‘sex’ not as biological but as a social and cultural production. ‘Poststructuralist feminist interventions were key to developing analytical frameworks that moved beyond an understanding of gender as a binary opposition (man/woman)’.<sup>257</sup> Queer theory made similar progress with regards to sexuality:

[Steven] Seidman traces the influence of social constructionism on lesbian and gay studies; pointing out the agenda of lesbian and gay studies to ‘[ . .

---

<sup>253</sup> ‘Queer Theory: The Origins of Queer theory’, *Science Encyclopaedia* (2019), <https://science.jrank.org/pages/10938/Queer-Theory-Origins-Queer-Theory.html>, date accessed: 4 November 2019; Edelman, L., *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 114.

<sup>254</sup> J. DiGrazia., and M. Boucher., ‘Writing InQueeries: Bodies, Queer Theory, and an Experimental Writing Class’, *Composition Studies*, 33:2 (2005), pp. 25-44; Barker and Scheele, *Queer*, p.14.

<sup>255</sup> R.A. Wilchins., *Queer Theory, Gender Theory: An Instant Primer* (Los Angeles: Alyson Books 2004) p.1.

<sup>256</sup> S. Hines., ‘Introduction’, in S. Hines, and T. Sanger (eds.), *Transgender Identities: Towards a Social Analysis of Gender Diversity* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 4.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

. ] explain the origin, social meaning, and changing forms of the modern homosexual'. As feminists mapped the social factors that impacted upon the experience of women, lesbian and gay scholars examined the social production of a modern homosexual identity. Queer theory, as Seidman notes, shifted the focus from an explanation of modern homosexuality to a discursive interrogation of the hetero/homosexual binary; bringing a shift from 'a politics of minority interest to a politics of knowledge and difference'.<sup>258</sup>

Hines states that it is 'the politics of indifference' that brought theories of sexuality in direct discussion with transgender. Throughout the 1990s queer theory contended the representation of identity categories as authentic, rather viewing identities as unstable and multiple. Queer theory's politics of difference pursued the disbanding of naturalised dominant identities and challenged the 'pathologisation' of minority identities.<sup>259</sup> Throughout the 90s, trans scholars engaged with theories, including queer theory, primarily focusing on medical discourse and practice for the most part. Hines argues that queer theory was at times discordant with the realities of trans lives. A number of trans writers, such as Sandy Stone and Kate Bornstein, reflected 'a queer subjectivity in positioning themselves outside of gender, [however] many trans scholars have been critical of queer theory's lack of material analysis'.<sup>260</sup> Stephen Whittle – trans man and academic – critically reflects:

It is all very well having no theoretical place within the current gendered world, but that is not the daily lived experience. Real life affords trans people constant stigma and oppression based on the apparently unreal concept of gender. This is one of the most significant issues that trans people have brought to feminism and queer theory.<sup>261</sup>

---

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid, p.5.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.



This theme of critique continues with Viviane Namaste - trans individual, activist and scholar - who in her 1996 book chapter 'Tragic Misreadings: Queer Theory's Erasure of Transgender Subjectivity' argues that those critics in queer theory who write pages on the 'inherent liberation in the transgression of gender codes' have little to comment on regarding the perilous situation of the transsexual woman 'who is battered, and who is unable to access a woman's shelter because she was not born a biological woman.'<sup>262</sup> Furthermore, Namaste expresses concern with queer theory's need to choose trans individuals as an 'object' of study, othering and undermining their lives in the process, a common theme with many of the critics of queer theory.<sup>263</sup>

Namaste further argues that Judith Butler's work, especially *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, was complicit in the development of queer theory and according to Jay Prosser - trans man and academic - 'transformed transgender into a queer icon, in the process becoming something of an icon of the new queer theory itself', furthering this in stating that 'queer studies can be seen to have been crucially dependent on the figure of transgender.'<sup>264</sup>

In her text, Butler uses drag as a pivotal example, arguing that it 'exposes the imaginary relations of compulsory homosexuality' and are not imitating 'real' women but

---

<sup>262</sup> K. Namaste., 'Tragic Misreadings: Queer Theory's Erasure of Transgender Subjectivity', in B. Beemyn and M. Eliason (eds.), *Queer Studies: A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Anthology* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), p. 184.

<sup>263</sup> For examples see: K. Namaste., 'Undoing Theory: The "Transgender Question" and the Epistemic Violence of Anglo-American Feminist Theory', *Hypatia*, 24:3 (2009), 11-32; J. Halberstam., 'Reflections on Queer Studies and Queer Pedagogy', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 45:2-4 (2003), 361-364; K. Namaste., 'The use and abuse of queer tropes: Metaphor and Catachresis in queer theory and politics', *Social Semiotics*, 9:2 (1999), 213-234.

<sup>264</sup> J. Prosser., 'Judith Butler: Queer Feminism, Transgender, and the Transubstantiation of Sex', in S. Whittle., and S. Stryker., (eds.), *The Transgender Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 259; J. Prosser., *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 21.

performing the ways in which “women” can only be secured through a process of metalepsis where the effects of meaning are taken to be the cause of its articulation.’<sup>265</sup> She states that ‘*drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency.*’<sup>266</sup> In examining this, Namaste expresses that Butler does not take into consideration the context where these gender performances occur, namely spaces and places defined by gay male culture. Despite relating these spaces to heterosexual hegemony, she declines to examine the spaces directly and their own complicated relations to gender performance and gender.<sup>267</sup> As a result, Butler is criticised for essentially reducing drag queens to entertainment and titillation. Namaste writes, ‘the limiting of drag queens to the stage...suggests that drag is something you do; it is not someone you are.’<sup>268</sup> Eve Sedgwick concurs with Namaste’s argument in her work *Tendencies* relating ‘drag performance and homoerotic identity formation and display.’<sup>269</sup> Identifying drag as purely a homoerotic identity, however - according to Namaste – shows an inability in Butler’s work to connect directly to the lived experience and everyday lives of individuals who identify themselves as drag queens, transgender and/ or transsexual. ‘Indeed’ Namaste argues, ‘queer theory refuses transgender subjectivities even as it looks at them’.<sup>270</sup>

To return to Butler’s quote above in its original Italic, Prosser discusses its relation to trans individuals and *Gender Trouble*’s tendency to be read as a book about

---

<sup>265</sup> Ibid, p.186.

<sup>266</sup> J. Butler., *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 137.

<sup>267</sup> Namaste, ‘Tragic Misreadings’, p. 187.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> E.K. Sedgwick., *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 221.

<sup>270</sup> K. Namaste., ‘The Politics of Inside/Out: Queer Theory, Poststructuralism, and a Sociological Approach to Sexuality’, *Sociological Theory*, 12:2 (1994), p. 229.

‘transgendered subjects’. He argues, ‘In this sentence (particularly given that the italics appear in the original), transgender’s function is unambivalently and emphatically that of the elucidating example of gender performativity.’<sup>271</sup> Stryker’s 2007 edited text *The Transgender Studies Reader*, furthers this by examining the impact of Butler’s works *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* directly on trans lives via queer theory, expressing that Butler:

has been criticized in some transgender scholarship and community discourse for suggesting that gender is a “mere” performance, on the model of drag, and therefore somehow not “real.” She is criticized, somewhat misguidedly, for supposedly believing that gender can be changed or rescripted at will, put on or taken off like a costume, according to one’s pleasure or whim. At stake in these critical engagements is the self-understanding of many transgender people, who consider their sense of gendered self not to be subject to their instrumental will, not divestible, not a form of play. Rather, they see their gendered sense of self as ontologically inescapable and inalienable—and to suggest otherwise to them is to risk a profound misrecognition of their personhood, of their specific mode of being.<sup>272</sup>

This reductionism towards gender being a performance navigates the intellectual and academic standing to one which impacts directly onto the lives of those trans individuals engaging in queer theory. It has impact on their sense of self, identity and authenticity in their everyday lives, bringing with it its own level of oppression and othering.

To highlight Namaste’s concerns over transgender being an ‘object’ of study within queer theory, Prosser identifies and expresses concern for the ‘implication of this harnessing of transgender as queer for transsexuality’. He asks, ‘what are the points at

---

<sup>271</sup> Prosser., ‘Judith Butler’, pp. 257, 261.

<sup>272</sup> S. Stryker., ‘(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies’, in S. Whittle., and S. Stryker., (eds.), *The Transgender Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p 10.

which the transsexual as transgendered subject is not queer?’ stating that ‘the splits and shifts between the deployment of transgender and that of transsexuality within Butler’s work are revealing on this count.’<sup>273</sup> In *Gender Trouble* it is clear that ‘the transgendered subject is used to deliteralize the matter of sex’. However, in ‘*Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”*’, the transsexual in particular symbolizes a carefully sustained ambivalence around sex’. Prosser argues that in Butler choosing to ‘elucidate the limits of the transgendered subject’s deliteralization of sex through the figure of a transsexual’ she indicates powerfully of the theoretical separation between queer and transsexual ‘and, indeed, of queer theory’s own incapacity to sustain the body as a literal category.’<sup>274</sup> Not only does Butler’s work reduce identity to performativity, it cannot relate to the lived experience nor can it support the materiality of trans embodiment. Moreover, the lack of material experience regarding the embodied self continues to be neglected by some branches of queer theory, in the uptake of the category of transgender. Queer theory has critically ‘exceptionalized’ trans people, ‘serving as *figures* for a kind of anti-binary subversion of gender that left sexual subjectivity off the hook for accounting for itself as a default cis category.’<sup>275</sup> This led to its being criticised again for ‘its inability to encompass the transgender experience’.<sup>276</sup>

Butler’s 2004 text *Undoing Gender* Halberstam states, is very much at odds theoretically with *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, approaching ‘gender variance

---

<sup>273</sup> Prosser, ‘Judith Butler’, p. 261.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> G. Benavente., and J. Gill-Peterson., ‘The Promise of Trans Critique: Susan Stryker’s Queer Theory’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 25:1 (2019), p. 24.

<sup>276</sup> Nagoshi, Nagoshi and Brzuzy, *Gender and Sexual Identity*, p. 73.

as an ethical project'.<sup>277</sup> In doing so Butler strives in *Undoing Gender* to disperse this particular characterization of her work 'as the embodiment of a version of queer theory that dismisses transsexuality as false consciousness while casting transgenderism as the apex of queer subjectivity'. Halberstam continues, 'she has often been positioned as a queer feminist with questionable views on trans politics and she places gender transitivity at the very heart of political life'.<sup>278</sup> Within *Undoing Gender* Butler writes:

The suggestions that butch, femme, and transgendered lives are not essential referents for a refashioning of political life, and for a more just and equitable society, fails to acknowledge the violence that the otherwise gendered suffer in the public world and fails as well to recognize that embodiment denotes a contested set of norms governing who will count as a viable subject within the sphere of politics.<sup>279</sup>

Her focus then within this text is on the topic of 'livable lives' within the spheres of transsexuality, transgender and intersexuality, rather than the transgender body and its difficult relationship to a stable identity. Instead, she discusses the marginalisation of trans bodies from the 'category of 'human''.<sup>280</sup> Human, according to Butler, is the category everyone desires. She articulates a politic of survival and recognition, calling readers to consider how they begin to construct a world where those who 'understand their gender and desire to be non-normative' can exist 'without the threat of violence from the outside but without the pervasive sense of their own unreality, which can lead to suicide or suicidal life'.<sup>281</sup> Despite linking herself to a 'politic of freedom', Halberstam argues that with this comes presumably 'the impossibility of living as an 'unreal' person without

---

<sup>277</sup> J. Halberstam., 'Transgender in a Global Frame', in S. Horlacher., (eds.), *Transgender and Intersex: Theoretical, Practical, and Artistic Perspectives* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 171.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> J. Butler., *Undoing Gender* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004) p.28.

<sup>280</sup> Halberstam, 'Transgender in a', pp. 171-172.

<sup>281</sup> Butler, *Undoing*, p. 219.

wanting to kill oneself—of course, all kinds of people live removed from the authenticating assurance of the real, many do much more than survive, many refuse and resist the notion of the real.’<sup>282</sup>

In her 2015 text, Butler attempted to refine her position on trans as an identity and embodiment further, as well as providing answers to her critics via *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. She was subsequently interviewed by Sara Ahmed for *Sexualities* journal in which she continued to express her position.<sup>283</sup> Even still, Halberstam eloquently states that trans activists retain a ‘transgender suspicion of Butler’ more than 20 years after her texts and consequent commentaries and critiques were written.<sup>284</sup> He claims that trans and transsexual issues with Butler’s work have resulted in a ‘recommitment to essentialism and realness...’ with the likes of Jay Prosser, Ki Namaste, Henry Rubin and Stephen Whittle associating performativity and constructivism with playfulness and abstract theory, while claiming a ‘serious and deep commitment to the gendered body.’<sup>285</sup> He states that this suspicion of Butler by trans people draws from what has consequentially become a shared mistrust between trans people and academic researchers. Trans communities via forums have contained warnings to theorists and researchers regarding the hazards of theorising ‘about and across transgender bodies’.<sup>286</sup> There are political complications and oppositions in the

---

<sup>282</sup> Halberstam, ‘Transgender in a’, p. 172.

<sup>283</sup> J. Butler., *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); S. Ahmed., ‘Interview with Judith Butler’. *Sexualities*, 19:4 (2016), 482–492.

<sup>284</sup> Halberstam, ‘Transgender in a’, p. 166.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid, p. 167

contemporary landscape states Halberstam, which reach beyond the opposition ‘between ‘real transsexuals’ and ‘playful’, ‘performative queers’’.<sup>287</sup>

This section has examined the suitability of queer theory in an oral history study involving trans and gender variant individuals. Throughout, I have used the work of the likes of Prosser, Halberstam, Namaste and Hines to present that queer theory has an inability to truly account for the lived experiences of trans people because it further problematises their embodiment, identity, and ultimately others them as a subject for all gender trouble. Although these works may suggest this problematising as historical, it continues within contemporary society as explicitly set out in the work of Judith Butler as discussed above – impacting trans lives, especially those in activism retaining a suspicion of Butler and the relevance of queer theory to their experiences. The purpose of this research remains to exclusively consider the lived experiences of trans and gender variant individuals and as such attempts are made to minimise othering, challenging America’s poor representation within its contemporary history and society, particularly trans women and trans people of colour. With all these factors considered, I have discarded queer theory as a primary theory for this study.

### **2.5.2 Liminality theory**

I principally chose to include liminality theory in my research because of its direct collation to the trans experience of existing as a ‘transitional being’ or existing in ‘liminal phases’ of what Victor W. Turner, father of liminality theory, states as ‘...likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness’.<sup>288</sup> The liminal stage or space in this

---

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> V.W. Turner., *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1969), p. 95.

study is used to define a sense of self (psychologically), while physically remaining in an ambiguous state of 'betwixt and between'; in the case of trans individuals it suggests a state of physical and social suspension of living between the categories of their society, and can include, for some, the space lived while awaiting hormone replacement therapy or gender affirming surgery.<sup>289</sup> Those who identify their gender variance as fluid, genderqueer, or neutral, occupy what Turner describes as a 'marginal' state, one in which they 'are simultaneously members (by ascription, optation, self-definition or achievement) of two or more groups whose social definitions and cultural norms are quite distinct from, and often even opposed to, one another'.<sup>290</sup>

Turner's terminology, however, is outdated and derogatory for those who identify on the gender spectrum as neutral, fluid, or nonconforming. While they straddle the established gender myth of male and female - socially and culturally - in America by choosing how they present and assumingly perform gender, their place on the gender spectrum should not be viewed as one of exclusionary. Nor should it encourage opposition or occupy a space of periphery but rather one of legitimacy and acknowledgment. Those gender-variant individuals who inhabit a fluid space should have the power to name their space(s) themselves, or not name them at all. As Telyn Kusalik, a 'mixed-gender' individual featured in Kate Bornstein's *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation* states 'I am perfectly comfortable, in fact more comfortable, not choosing a

---

<sup>289</sup> V.W. Turner., 'Betwixt and between: The liminal period in rites of passage', in L.C. Mahdi., S. Foster., and M. Little., (eds.), *Betwixt and between: Patterns of masculine and feminine initiation* (Illinois: Open Court Publishing, 5<sup>th</sup> edn., 1987) pp. 3-19; M. Wilson., 'I Am the Prince of Pain, for I Am a Princess in the Brain': Liminal Transgender Identities, Narratives and the Elimination of Ambiguities', *Sexualities*, 5:4 (2002), pp. 425-448.

<sup>290</sup> V.W. Turner, *Drama, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1974), p. 133.



fixed identity location; my own gender in particular is still mysterious to me'.<sup>291</sup> Furthermore, I agree with Doan's statement on gender fluidity, that it 'is the ability to freely and knowingly become one or many of a limitless number of genders, for any length of time, at any rate of change. Gender fluidity recognizes no borders or rules of gender'.<sup>292</sup> In taking this a step further, it could be argued that despite America's male and female (mythical) binary ideals, gender-variant people (re)construct their own desired gender expression, create their own social and cultural identities, and, as Turner states, create 'stability' - chromosomally and physically - while occupying a space of gender fluidity.

All trans individuals occupy liminal space at one point or another or at numerous times throughout their self-discovery/identity (re)construction, not only in defining their sense of self within society but where they fall within their gender variant identity and outward expression.<sup>293</sup> Turner, however, fails to comment on the length of the liminal phase, nor on the magnitude of it/ them, or of an individual's feelings towards living within a liminal phase. Although, he does assert that it represents a 'state of progressive movement'.<sup>294</sup> The ebb and flow of a liminal status is varied, complex and depends on individuals feelings towards their transness - including shame, denial, consequences – and false embracing of birth sex: masculine/feminine identities in order to hide, while abiding by the social and cultural limitations of their birth sex, as well as many other elements. Liminality theory situates trans individuals' struggles within their liminal space and moving through it within their stories. Its lack of permanent structure and flexibility

---

<sup>291</sup> T. Kusalik., 'Identity, Schmidentity', in K. Bornstein and S. Bear (eds.), *Gender Outlaws: The next generation* (Berkeley: Seal Press), pp. 44-49.

<sup>292</sup> P. L. Doan., 'The tyranny of gendered spaces – reflections from beyond the gender dichotomy'. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 17:5 (2010), p.639.

<sup>293</sup> Wilson, 'I am', p. 425-448.

<sup>294</sup> Turner, 'Betwixt and Between', p. 46.

provide a perfect space for trans narratives to be voiced and to be heard. It also has the unique ability to problematise the dominant gender binary myth held as ideology in American society, making this an ideal theory for this study.

### **2.5.3 Transgender theory**

According to Susan Stryker, the foundational creator and developer of transgender theory - and subsequently developer of trans studies - rather than viewing genders as classes or categories that contain one kind of thing by definition like queer theory, transgender theory raises unavoidable questions about the masked rules and normativities that constitute qualifying for categorical membership. Genders are 'potentially porous and permeable spatial territories (arguable more than two), each capable of supporting rich and rapidly proliferating of embodied difference'.<sup>295</sup> This approach stands in opposition to the theoretical categories posed by queer theory and was developed in reaction to them.

Gender - according to feminist writer Bernice Hausman - is essentially an epistemology for understanding and knowing the operation of culture in classifying identities.<sup>296</sup> It is how individuals identify people; it arranges relationships with others and expounds meaning through natural and social events. People base their place in society through belonging to one gender binary or the other. This natural arrangement of relationships is viewed as essentialist.<sup>297</sup> It is this essentialism and binary that transgender theory complicates and challenges, especially for those whose identity pertains to a fluid

---

<sup>295</sup> S. Stryker., P. Currah., and L.J. Moore., 'Introduction: Trans-, Trans, or Transgender?', *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly*, 36:3/4 (2008), p. 12.

<sup>296</sup> B.L. Hausman., 'Recent Transgender Theory', *Feminist Studies*, 27:2 (2001), p 476.

<sup>297</sup> Nagoshi and Brzuzy, 'Transgender Theory', p. 432.

or liminal embodiment. Stryker describes this in her powerful essay ‘My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix - Performing Transgender Rage’ which reflects the need to categorise and continue to declare gender within the established binary system:

...bodies are rendered meaningful only through some culturally and historically specific mode of grasping their physicality that transforms the flesh into a useful artefact. Gendering is the initial step in this transformation, inseparable from the process of forming an identity by means of which we're fitted to a system of exchange in a heterosexual economy.<sup>298</sup>

Furthermore, Stryker’s essay reflected her frustrations and ‘rage’ at the devaluation of trans lives via essentialist attributions of unnaturalness and artificiality which were being displayed in early queer theory as a ‘cisnormative bias’. She further posits that this devaluation continues in current queer theory.<sup>299</sup> She argues:

Shame, as I understood it to be articulated in early queer theory [see queer politics of gay shame as written by Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick]<sup>300</sup>, was predicated on the prior consolidation of a gendered subject, and emanated from the subjective perception that was one a “bad” instantiation of something that one recognized and accepted oneself as being. But what if one balked at that gendering interpellation and was thus compelled to confront not bad feelings but the hegemonic materio-discursive practices that produce the meanings of our flesh to render us men or women in the first place? I was not ashamed that in the name of my own psychological life I needed to struggle against the dominant mode of gender’s ontologization – I was enraged.<sup>301</sup>

---

<sup>298</sup> S. Stryker., ‘My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 1, (1994), p. 249.

<sup>299</sup> S. Stryker., ‘More Words about “My Words to Victor Frankenstein.”’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 25:1 (2019), p. 40.

<sup>300</sup> J. Butler., ‘Critically Queer’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 1 (1993), pp. 17-32; E. K. Sedgwick., ‘Queer Performativity: Henry James’s *The Art of the Novel.*’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 3 (1993), pp. 1-16.

<sup>301</sup> Stryker, ‘More Words’, p. 40.

In response to her frustrations with these dimensions of queer theory, Stryker developed transgender theory - and later the field of trans studies, encapsulating transgender theory – which she felt, especially with regards to trans lives of colour, proposed a different way of how queerness could be imagined and constituted by ‘attending to other registers of difference than sexuality.’<sup>302</sup> It presented a way in which sexuality could be separated from gender, stating that “transgender phenomena are not intrinsically sexual (having more to do, more often than not, with regulatory schema of bodily integrity, visual coherence, and bureaucratic intelligibility than with wanton ways of fucking).”<sup>303</sup>

Stryker imagined how transgender theory as an expansive theory articulated how women occupied spaces and contained women who were not only cisgender, white and heterosexual, but contained women born without female anatomy striving to be themselves, individuals ‘reared’ as women who actually possessed intersex bodies, how they contained women who lean towards masculinity and ‘conventional masculine behaviours’ but did not identify as men. [Stryker imagined transgender theory as being both expansive and inclusive, aimed at exploring the ways that women who were not only cisgender, white, and heterosexual occupied spaces. The theory is predicated on the belief of the legitimacy and inclusion of the identities of women born without female anatomy striving to be themselves, individuals ‘reared’ as women who actually possessed intersex

---

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> G. Rubin., ‘Blood under the Bridge: Reflections on “Thinking Sex.”’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 17:1 (2011), p. 36.

bodies, women who lean towards masculinity and ‘conventional masculine behaviours’ but did not identify as men.]

In addition, she posited the question: ‘Do transgender phenomena not show us that some who unproblematically occupy the space of social manhood have vaginas rather than penises, or that some men can choose to wear dresses without surrendering their social identities as men?’.<sup>304</sup> Stryker states:

the interrelatedness and mutual inextricability of various “trans-“ phenomena’ which include examples in which “transgendered” bodies occupy the same gender-spaces as nontransgendered ones, and transgender characteristics can be attributed, as a form of disciplining, to bodies that might not subjectively identify as being transgendered.<sup>305</sup>

The lived experiences and social realities of trans embodiments, communities and subjectivities via transgender theory allows the exploration of gender in breaking free of America’s socially restrictive binary male and female roles and feminism’s essentialist roots, while questioning this ‘system of exchange in a heterosexual [and especially in a gender normative and homonormative] economy’.<sup>306</sup> Not only this, transgender theory acknowledges the fluidity of gender in the spaces between the binary - which according to Roen - can be viewed as liminal, especially in a cross-cultural setting which does not embrace a ‘western medical constructions of transsexuality’: assigning gender at birth via the child’s biological sex.<sup>307</sup> Moreover, Nagoshi and Brzuzy argue that there is a need for recognition of the importance of the physical embodiment of intersecting identities of gender liminal individuals, just as there is a need to understand the narratives of lived

---

<sup>304</sup> Stryker et al, ‘Introduction’, p. 12.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

<sup>307</sup> K. Roen. ‘Transgender Theory and Embodiment: The Risk of Racial Marginalisation’, *Journal of Gender Studies*, 10:3 (2001), p.254.

experiences integrated into the socially constructed, self-constructed, and embodied aspects of identity. They go on to argue that transgender theory highlights how ‘transgressing’ narratives of those with oppressed intersectional identities can be empowered and integrated in their lived experiences.<sup>308</sup>

Stryker argues that, ‘trans-’ should be viewed along a vertical axis – ‘one that moves between the concrete biomateriality of individual living bodies and the biopolitical realm of aggregate populations’ - and gender ‘not as an established territory...but rather a set of variable techniques or temporal practices (such as race and class) through which bodies are made to live.’<sup>309</sup> Viewing gender as a temporal practice, especially in regards to race and class has evoked trans individuals of colour to adopt transgender theory as a working theory in direct relation to trans lives because of the exclusionary history of theories and queer movements towards trans individuals and communities - ‘...queer movements that have left trans people behind, as well as histories of trans resistance...have long reminded queer movements of their trans-exclusionary, trans-antagonistic, and marginalizing outcomes.’<sup>310</sup> This adoption includes the use of transgender theory in examining the experiences of Sylvia Rivera at the Christopher Street Parade, New York City in 1973 where she shouted at a crowd of predominantly cis gay and lesbian individuals who had turned out for the parade regarding her utter frustrations at the ‘nascent queer rights movement that was building momentum from the activism of black and trans women of color but did not actually fight for their lives...’. Transgender

---

<sup>308</sup> Nagoshi and Brzuzy, ‘Transgender Theory’, p. 437.

<sup>309</sup> Stryker et al, ‘Introduction’, p. 14.

<sup>310</sup> G. Benavente., and J. Gill-Peterson., ‘The Promise of Trans Critique: Susan Stryker's Queer Theory’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 25:1 (2019), pp. 25-26.

theory can similarly be used to examine the more recent murder of fourteen-year-old Latisha King, at the hands of her classmates – which exposed ‘the convergence of transphobic and antiblackness’ effecting a complete erasure of her ‘transness and blackness’ at her trial; King was violently and deliberately ‘misread as a gay boy’ in order to enable the ‘panic defence’. During the proceedings her voice, as well as her name and image were expunged from the public record. This left grief and anger in equal amounts for those who wishes to honour her life.<sup>311</sup> Benavente and Gill-Peterson argue that transgender theory continues to be a theory for action, knowledge production and trans embodiment, especially for those of colour. However, they both admit that much like queer theory, transgender theory and subsequently trans studies are ‘marked by a major absence of prominent trans of color women in its most visible ranks and domains’.<sup>312</sup>

It is from this accessibility of transgender theory, its ability to intersect within its own terms and fluidity that makes it an excellent theory for a trans focused study, especially in its ability to directly challenge the established gender binary system while producing knowledge of trans embodiment, binary transgression and the concern of the individual lived experience. In addition, due to its acknowledgment fluidity in the liminal spaces between the naturalised binary, transgender theory and liminality theory make a viable and unique pairing for this study.

## **2.6 Queer oral history and trans oral history**

---

<sup>311</sup> Benavente and Gill-Peterson., ‘The Promise of Trans Critique’, p. 26.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid, p. 27.

Queer oral history is a field of enquiry originating in lesbian and gay histories during the 1970s where practitioners in the field ‘mapped’ an oral history methodology onto their research - ‘Aligning with Portelli, who argued that “oral sources are a necessary (not a sufficient) condition for the history of nonhegemonic classes,” practitioners of lesbian and gay history held that collecting and interpreting oral histories were absolutely necessary—and even urgent—to their project.’<sup>313</sup> The project referred to was the San Francisco Gay History Project originating in 1979 which stated ‘Oral histories are particularly vital to a reconstruction of gay history since written records of our past rarely exist or have been censored or destroyed.’<sup>314</sup> According to the article ‘What Makes Queer Oral history different’ contemporary practitioners of queer oral history draw on early work to influence their practice as well as ‘Portelli’s critique of positivism and objectivity, his emphasis on narrativity, and finally, his understanding of epistemologies as ongoing and incomplete all draw from post-structural theory and reflect strands of feminist methodology. These theories and methodologies remain central to queer theory and studies’.<sup>315</sup> Queer oral history therefore has a grounding in sexuality, sexual embodiment and desire.<sup>316</sup>

In addition, Horacio N. Roque Ramirez and Nan Alamilla Boyd in their textbook *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History* describe starting a queer oral history ‘with an agreement between a narrator and a researcher to record memories of

---

<sup>313</sup> K.P. Murphy., J.L. Pierce., and J. Ruiz., ‘What Makes Queer Oral History Different’, *The Oral History Review*, 43:1 (2016), p. 4

<sup>314</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>316</sup> Boyd, N.A., and Ramirez, H.N.R., ‘Introduction: Close Encounters: The Body and Knowledge in Queer Oral History’ in N.A. Boyd and H.N.R Ramirez (eds.), *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 9-13.



queer gender, sexualities, and desires. If there is not a narrator to claim that sexual space of queer historical being and its retelling, and queer researcher to hear, record and draw out yet more details, desire, and meaning from it, no queer oral history is possible.’<sup>317</sup> There has to be an admission that this thesis’ methodological intentions are not queer because I do not identify as queer, nor did I make Ramirez and Boyd’s agreement with the narrators interviewed - that the productions/recordings of interviews would be interpreted in a queer context or using queer methodologies. Instead my enquiry originates in trans and liminality theory, prioritising gender – the narrators were privy to my own gender journey and identity prior to interview whether having discussed it with them within a group setting, one to one discussions, or answering questions while in my volunteer role at the GIC – as stories of growing up trans or gender variant in a historically intolerant society is the focus of this study, with sexuality as a secondary focus if and when it came up in interviews.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This chapter was split into two parts: Part I examined trans historical representation from the 1950s - spanning 70 years - within the area of medicalised literature. This part revealed that the medical field are cause of and contribute to creating and maintaining trans tropes within the mass media. Part II concentrated on historical pop culture and media representations of trans individuals in the USA on television. These sections revealed that both the medical and mass media field of television are connected with regards to maintaining trans tropes. However, it suggests that television

---

<sup>317</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

has greater power than medicine to maintain stereotypes or make social change. The maintenance of tropes and America's continuance in promoting its mythical gender ideals of male and female has an impact on all trans individuals, especially young trans people growing up in modern America, which was additionally briefly highlighted in Part II. These tropes are negative and harmful, especially for those of colour. The gaps in the literature are innumerable but have included the need to positively represent trans people of colour and trans men more fully to society in order to promote positive change and prevent societal and self-policing of gender identity. It has also presented the need to collect and present trans narratives to not only complicate and challenge the established research narrative, but to diminish trans misrepresentations. Finally, Part II examined the theoretical framework for this thesis and explored the use of transgender theory and liminality theory in their suitability and limitations of use to the study. It was found after much research and discussion that both theories were compatible in conjunction with each other and within an oral history study. Furthermore, they highlighted the plight of the individual lived experience, which is central to this study and research.

## **Chapter 3 Oral History and other methodologies in approaching trans lives**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter profiles the epistemological, theoretical, and methodological frameworks that inform this study and considers the ethical considerations directly associated with its development. Oral history appealed to me as a primary method of data collection when building this study principally because it intersected well with my background discipline of social working, but this did not ensure that my PhD journey a smooth road. For example, in my original study I hit major road blocks in recruiting young trans people who had experiences in both homelessness and in sex work. Flexibility and alterations to the recruitment parameters were necessary, and I employed them to better develop my research into an oral history study. Using oral history as a methodology and featured elements of my social work expertise allowed me greater access to voices and stories from trans narrators of all ages and gender variance. This methodology chapter discusses and reflects upon the unique decisions made at important steps of this study, which, while sometimes a rocky path, was ultimately a richly successful and rewarding one.

When I began formulating my study, I was determined to amplify the lived experiences of trans individuals. I wanted to not only understand but complicate the historical portrayals of trans individuals, and provide trans individuals with the opportunity, through their narratives, to reflect upon and share their personal histories. Gathering histories of trans people's everyday experiences of growing up, family life, and adulthood while negotiating their place in American society as people who were essentially transgressing historical gender myths of binary male and female roles and – in

certain cases - heteronormativity, was essential. Given the historic mis representation of trans individuals in US popular culture, the study would engage with how these individuals were perceived by society - whether in the closet or as fully out as trans individuals - and during various stages of their transition or identity development. Elizabeth Lapousky Kennedy, in 'What Makes Queer Oral History Different', states that 'oral histories if sensitively used, can provide a window into how individuals understand and interpret their own lives' which I also believe relates directly to trans oral histories.<sup>1</sup> This window into gender variant lives allowed me to collect and document the lives and histories of those who were excluded from the gender normative historiography of America. The work impacted me personally, professionally and politically as I gathered narratives about how the trans individuals I had the privilege of interviewing interpreted their lives, their futures, and even their contributions to this study.

### **3.2 Epistemology**

Epistemology or the theory of 'knowledge', is integral to the groundwork of any research and is profoundly influenced by ontology, or the theory of 'being'. As Crotty states '...to talk of the construction of meaning is to talk of the construction of meaningful reality'<sup>2</sup>. Researchers have varying beliefs about how knowledge is created and comprehended, which can be a result of past research experiences, disciplines and influential scholars/academics in their field. These beliefs also influence individual researchers in 'embracing a qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods approach to their

---

<sup>1</sup> E.E.L. Kennedy., p. 71, quoted in K.P. Murphy., J.L. Pierce., and J. Ruiz., 'What Makes Queer Oral History different', *The Oral History Review*, 43:1 (2016), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> M.J. Crotty., *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process* (London: Sage, 1998) p. 10.

research'.<sup>3</sup> A social constructionist epistemology underpins this research study, hand-in-hand with interpretivism. Social constructionists believe that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences which are directed towards objects or things; these meanings can be varied and multiple, pushing researchers to consider the complexity of individuals' perspectives rather than restricting meanings into a few groupings or ideas. Subjective meanings are regularly negotiated historically and socially and are formed through historical and cultural norms within which individuals operate their lives - not simply through interactions with others.<sup>4</sup>

As part of the social constructionist and interpretative framework for this study, my personal, historical, and cultural experiences and biases shape my position within the research and my interpretation of the data gathered. Unlike positivism, which is primarily aimed at discovering universal truths and social laws, interpretivism looks at ways to reveal people's experiences and interpretations of their social world by their interactions and observations.<sup>5</sup> A positivist approach strives to be objective and 'value-free', perceiving personal bias as a negative factor thus purposefully removing the researcher from evidence gathering. Interpretivism believes this is neither helpful nor advantageous to the outcome, because research can never be 'value-free.'<sup>6</sup> Maxwell states that in taking an interpretivist approach, a researcher will bring their personal biases to the study, informed by their upbringing, life experiences, gender, beliefs, ethnicity, and identity, for

---

<sup>3</sup> J.W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Inc., 2014) p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> Creswell, *Research Design*, p. 37.

<sup>5</sup> M. Carey., *The Social Work Dissertation* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2010) p. 53.

<sup>6</sup> M. Alston., and W. Bowles., *Research for Social Workers*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 2003) p. 10.

example, which are viewed as valuable and integral ingredients in any research.<sup>7</sup> These biases should be addressed continually through reflexivity, defined by Banks as having the ability as a researcher, to locate my position in the research picture and identify how I am both influential and influenced by people and the events I am observing.<sup>8</sup>

### **3.3 Methodology and methods of data collection: oral history**

Oral history is a relatively new methodology, having come into its own in just the last 50 years, and is still not without its critics. However, it stands out from other methods of historical research through its unique way of creating and collecting sources. Oral history interviews strive to obtain in-depth accounts of an individual's personal experiences and reflections, allowing sufficient time for narrators to provide and share their stories to their desired depth and richness. Additionally, and particularly important to me as an oral history researcher, its methodological grounding can be utilised as a powerful social research tool for discovering, exploring, and evaluating the process of both historical memory and current lived experiences: 'how people make sense of their past, how they connect individual experience and its social context, how the past becomes part of the present, and how people use it to interpret their lives and the world around them'.<sup>9</sup> Oral history interviews are collaborative and therefore rely on the narrators' willingness to share their stories. Therefore, interviews can last as little as 30 minutes or as long as 4 hours. Narrators were given the option to anonymise their data.

---

<sup>7</sup> J.A. Maxwell., *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1996), quoted in A. Whittaker, *Research Skills for Social Work* (Exeter: Learning Matters Ltd, 2010) p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> S. Banks., *Ethics and Values in Social work* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 3rd edn., 2006) p. 150.

<sup>9</sup> Thomson, A., 'Memory and Remembering in Oral History', in D.A. Ritchie (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 80.

Portelli argues that oral history has ‘no unified subject; it is told from a multitude of points of view, and the impartiality traditionally claimed by historians is replaced by the partiality of the narrator’.<sup>10</sup> The memories shared by narrators in the studies or projects are never complete because they are never exhausted, and the narratives are never fully replicable. Therefore, oral history is a continual work in progress methodology ‘that indexes and facilitates the interpretation and contestation of historical memory, never an authoritative and finished narrative about the past’.<sup>11</sup> It is this infiniteness that Portelli views as celebratory - rather than problematic - and I agree. Each narrator’s life history within this study is a work in progress, and unfinished; not only were our encounters brief and limited to time when recording their stories, but each narrator's embodiment and (re)construction was unfinished, with some narrators only at the beginning of their journey of physically transitioning. Therefore, oral history is well-suited to engaging with trans identities, as oral history ‘...might be understood as the method of “not yet”, one that reflects disparate desires and memories and engages a shared imagining of future possibilities...’ which most trans individuals express, not only on a personal, transformative level, but on a social and cultural level as well.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, oral history prescribes an understanding that an individual’s sense of self and identity have been formed and shaped by a number of elements; perceptions, language, culture and experiences. These elements of the self are referred to as ‘subjectivity’ or an individual’s emotional baggage.<sup>13</sup> Subjectivity is an incredibly

---

<sup>10</sup> Portelli, ‘What Makes’, p. 41.

<sup>11</sup> Murphy et al, ‘What Makes Queer’, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Abrams, *Oral*, p. 54.

important component of the oral history interview and relationship on both sides. The interviewer brings their baggage into the interview, with questions at the ready, and is influenced by their own subjectivity in the questions and research focus. Therefore, one interviewer's subjectivity might petition a certain narrative from the narrator they are interviewing, where a different interviewer, who brings their own subjectivity, could in turn petition a completely different narrative from the same narrator.<sup>14</sup> Subjectivity, according to Abrams is the 'bread and butter of oral history, especially the celebration and accessing of it'.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, an awareness of bias and positioning is highly acknowledged within oral history, as the likes of Portelli argues, oral sources are not objective and nor am I as an oral history researcher.<sup>16</sup>

The measurements for these methods rely on my analysis of the words spoken by narrators and the meanings behind them, as well as their body language, tone of voice, and other non-verbal communications. Oral history's flexibility regarding choice of recording environments also made this an attractive methodology for this study, especially for interviews conducted in public spaces. Oral history practitioners primarily aim for a quiet recording environment with as few distractions as possible to reflect best practice. Although this cannot always be adhered to, with each interview ultimately participant-led, there is evidence to suggest that boisterous settings with noise and intrusions from

---

<sup>14</sup> K. Borland., Co-Narration, 'Intersubjectivity, and the Listener in Family Storytelling', *The Journal of American Folklore*, 130:518 (2017), pp. 438-456; J. Pattinson., 'The thing that made me hesitate ...': re-examining gendered intersubjectivities in interviews with British secret war veterans, *Women's History Review*, 20:2 (2011), pp. 245-263; P. Summerfield., Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews. *Cultural and Social History*, 1:1 (2004), pp. 65-93; A. Portelli., 'What Makes Oral History Different', in R. Perks and A. Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 32-42.

<sup>15</sup> Abrams, *Oral*, p. 22.

<sup>16</sup> Portelli, *The Death*, p. 49.



others can still result in a productive interview. Oral historian Sherna Berger Gluck notes that:

...ultimately it is the narrator's terms and conditions that govern the process. That might mean conducting an interview in a somewhat chaotic setting and ending up with less than desirable audio quality. In other words, an authentic interview experience might well mean that we cannot follow "best practice".<sup>17</sup>

Gluck also argues that researchers utilising oral history methods should pay more attention to the socio-political context of the lived experience of their narrators and the narrative that comes with it, rather than just the interview itself, referring to solely focusing on interviews as a negative by-product called 'gross individualism'.<sup>18</sup> Instead she encourages the incorporation of more ethnographic fieldwork practices to deepen the understanding of cultural meanings when conducting interviews. Gluck's reflections have particular relevance to this study regarding the current political climate around trans individuals and how they view themselves and their place within US society when concealing their trans identities, revealing, and living their truth.

William Schneider, cultural anthropologist and folklorist, argues that there is a need for oral historians to look beyond the recording when contextualising interviews: to document the mutual exchange and chronicle their circumstances. He states, 'Stories need to find their place and once that happens, they await retelling'.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, while introducing the narrators within the analysis chapters, I will include the background to the

---

<sup>17</sup> S.B. Gluck., 'From California to Kufr Nameh and Back: Reflections on 40 Years of Feminist Oral History' in A. Sheffel & S. Zembrzycki (eds.), *Oral History Off the Record* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 39.

<sup>18</sup> Gluck, 'From California', p. 40; Ibid, p. 35.

<sup>19</sup> W. Schneider., 'Oral History in the Age of Digital Possibilities', in D.A. Boyd and M.A. Larson (eds.), *Oral History and Digital Humanities: Voice, Access and Engagement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) pp. 22-23.

interview(s) and reflections on first time meetings. Moreover, there is added value in incorporating anthropological fieldwork practices along with the oral history interviews comes with the recordings that encode cultural meaning, especially those of trans individuals' public or performative demeanour, their interactions with peers, and observing them as a collective or community. The use of field notes taken during my immersion in the community through my volunteer role provided me with data which added richness to the study, overall. I additionally gathered ethnographic data using participant observation - a research technique where the researcher is incorporated into the group they wish to study - resulting in an assortment of field notes and diary entries containing observed data, reflections on this data, follow-up questions regarding what was observed, and a critical awareness of my bias and subjectivity in relation to the data.<sup>20</sup>

### **3.4 Ethics, trust and collaboration**

Portelli expresses that 'Only equality makes the interview credible, but only difference makes it relevant'.<sup>21</sup> My identity of being a social worker and researcher going to America for fieldwork included an awareness of my differences, including my outsider status in the lives of those who used the GIC and the considerations or impact it had on them. I understood that I would be read as a white, Scottish, and cisgender, despite my gender history and biological uniqueness. In addition, I would be viewed as an incomer to America for a limited period of three months in trying to gain access into what I perceived as a tightly knit and self-protecting group based in Denver, Colorado. However,

---

<sup>20</sup> Balsiger, P., and A. Lambelet., 'Participant Observation', in D. Porta (eds.), *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 164.

<sup>21</sup> A. Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), p. 43.

I was also aware that having the position of a white outsider was beneficial to me; I did not belong to America, its history, its culture, or to a structural system which discriminates daily against trans individuals, especially those of colour. Therefore, I believe I was viewed as someone with whom narrators shared information more freely and with more personal depth, which intersected with the power I held. This could have been more apparent with trans individuals in the US than perhaps it would have been had I interviewed individuals in the UK, despite an acknowledgement that they would know that the UK has its own history of discrimination and transphobia.

Moreover, on reflection I believe that my Scottish connection – especially my accent – produced opportunities to engage with a number of individuals who attended the GIC. I found that on hearing my voice they wished to share and discuss their potential generational heritage and felt connections to Scotland and their ongoing interest in finding out more about their genealogy. This intersubjectivity produced a place of power, along with my whiteness and social work status. On reflecting further on Portelli's differences, I was also aware of my place of privilege and power within the GIC's trans population and my outsider status giving me credibility because of my widely accepted presence and place as a willing volunteer within the Center. I took time to establish myself as a familiar face, working 6 days per week on the reception desk for 8 to 10 hours, building trusting relationships from the encounters I had with individuals who were either waiting to see therapists or coming in for scheduled support groups. Eventually, I was viewed as trustworthy and respectful, which resulted in being invited into some of the support groups lead by members of the trans population within the Center on a regular basis. I was additionally asked to run two of the support groups – trans young people and young adults

- and was given permission to recruit from those who used the Center. Observing and participating in groups gave me the opportunity to gather ethnographic data in the form of field notes and a daily reflective diary.<sup>22</sup> I chose to write these notes after encounters and observations (versus during the group encounters) as I did not want the trans groups to feel I was observing them from a place of medicalised power, or a strictly as a social worker, which allowed me to listen more freely to their criticisms of their doctors; they felt more comfortable being outspoken about their treatments or lack of. I felt, as Portelli did about his outsider status in his text *Harlan County*, that I was there to learn from the trans community and not to present myself as an expert: ‘the most important things I had to offer were my ignorance and my desire to learn’.<sup>23</sup>

The knowledge I wished to glean from the narrators stretched and surpassed the depth of personal, cultural and societal differences, as well as gender identity differences. It required me to position myself in such a way as to learn from the trans narrators, despite approaching them with prior research knowledge on trans lives within the United States. However, the importance of placing myself as a learner during fieldwork also derived from my social work grounding, which sensitised me to the importance of striving to develop an equal power balance when interacting with those who are viewed by society as having little or no power. Moreover, it is an underlying social work view with those workers who wish to balance out power with service users to see the ‘client as the expert in their own lives’ meaning that - as professionals - we have everything to learn from them. Hence, taking my ethical and moral approach from social work and adapting it to

---

<sup>22</sup> See Appendix I for an example extract of reflective diary.

<sup>23</sup> A. Portelli., *They Say in Harlan County: An Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 7.

an oral history setting felt like a natural transition. In collecting these narratives, I was aware of the necessity of building trusting relationships with an established trans collective and being critical in my approach, to engaging and learning from the narrators as an interviewer and researcher. Cementing the endeavour for a reduction of power on my side was Portelli's *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*. Portelli's argument is that as a researcher, I am not studying the narrators, but talking to them. Narrators should not be viewed as 'sources' of knowledge, but their oral testimonies should, and it is these testimonies that I am largely learning from. The narrators are ultimately providing me with information I lack and need to successfully present the lived experience.<sup>24</sup> This ties into oral historian Michael Frisch's concept of 'shared authority' between interviewer and narrator as an extremely important in addition to my approach and will be discussed later in the chapter.<sup>25</sup>

While reflecting on my ethical standing in this study, I read the paper 'Decolonizing Transgender' A Roundtable Discussion' which highlights the importance of academics in inter-disciplinary fields producing work which benefits the trans community, rather than exploiting them for individual research purposes which brought no differences to their individual and community lives, essentially emulating American society's current and historical position.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, I became more aware of the need for my work to be more reflexive, and to be ultimately accountable to the GIC trans population and individuals in the study.

---

<sup>24</sup> Portelli, *The Death*, p. 49.

<sup>25</sup> M. Frisch., *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

<sup>26</sup> Boellstroff et al., *Decolonizing Transgender*, pp. 419–439.

Trystan Cotten discussed the importance of his moving away from research around trans identity and instead focusing on mobilisation and migration for trans individuals in African nations, in order to sleep, eat and survive. Cotten states, 'When I write about my informants, I want to produce work that's true for them and that's really about them rather than about what I think it interesting to explore about them'.<sup>27</sup> This need to produce research of a contributory nature directly relates to the (non) 'othering' of trans people, and importance - and value - for me, as a researcher, to de-centre myself as the expert, be Portelli's learner, and engage with the narrators through an oral history methodology to truly represent them.<sup>28</sup>

Lynn Abrams states that the interviewer is primarily active in creating the oral source; they are the one to identify and recruit narrators, set the interview agenda, shape the interviews, ask the questions of the narrator, and they are the one who ultimately controls the end product.<sup>29</sup> Abrams further argues that the researcher in the collaborative process with narrators is 'honour bound' to recognise their position and presence in the source in addition to their power over its conception and most importantly for me, how it is used.<sup>30</sup> I wholeheartedly agree with Abrams and feel that without this level of collaboration and awareness of my privileged state in creating sources of oral testimony, I would not have had the opportunity to meet or gather such powerful oral histories from each trans narrator, nor would I have succeeded in giving them the respect they deserve. From my decentred place as the learner in the situation, I created the space and opportunity

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 431.

<sup>28</sup> S, Hochreiter., 'Race, class, gender? Intersectionality troubles', *Journal of Research in Gender Studies*, 4:2 (2014), pp. 401–408.

<sup>29</sup> Abrams, *Oral*, p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 25.

during the interviews to not only learn but to pose questions which asked narrators to reflect on behalf of the trans community as a whole. However, this strive for balance and the sharing of authority with narrators did not make me forget my privileged place of whiteness, especially in America. Authors Jessica Elbert Decker and Dylan Winchoc argue that ‘Racial marginalization in America is symptomatic of a hierarchical and supremacist power system that privileges a dominant culture of whiteness.’<sup>31</sup> Therefore, I had to reflect on my whiteness as a researcher with authority which intersected with power and my presumed class position.<sup>32</sup> I additionally had to consider my whiteness as a female and perceived woman, and not as Ruth Frankenberg found, ‘think of race as something only people of color have to deal with’.<sup>33</sup> As Crenshaw states ‘Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects’ and maintaining personal and professional reflexiveness on these throughout the research was crucial.<sup>34</sup> Crenshaw continues:

If Blackness is a social construction that embraces Black culture, language, experiences, identities, and epistemologies, then whiteness is a social construction that embraces white culture, ideology, racialization, expressions, and experiences, epistemology, emotions, and behaviors. Unlike Blackness, whiteness is normalized because white supremacy elevates whites and whiteness to the apex of the racial hierarchy.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Decker, J.E., and Winchoc, D., ‘Introduction: Borderlands and Liminality Across Philosophy and Literature’ in J.E Decker and D. Winchoc (eds.), *Borderlands and Liminal Subjects: Transgressing the Limits in Philosophy and Literature* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p.14.

<sup>32</sup> ‘Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, More than Two Decades Later’, *Columbia Law School* (2017), <https://www.law.columbia.edu/pt-br/news/2017/06/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality>, date accessed: 19 August 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Weston, K., ‘Me, Myself and I’, in Y. Taylor, S Hines, M.E. Casey (eds.), *Theorizing Intersectionality and Sexuality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 31.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, More than Two Decades Later’, *Columbia Law School* (2017), <https://www.law.columbia.edu/pt-br/news/2017/06/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality>, date accessed: 19 August 2019.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

As part of this, it was important to not only be aware of my whiteness particularly as a structure of power, thought and feeling, rather than as of individual identity, and its potential to impact the research itself, but to disrupt hegemonic whiteness.<sup>36</sup> Denver was and continues to be known as being a predominantly white city. However, this did not mean that I was to disregard my whiteness or its construction, but instead have a more acute knowledge of it and its effect on trans people of colour whom I would possibly recruit.

### **3.5 Research Design**

In initially designing a study which focused on young trans people under the age of 18 and who were experiencing homelessness, I knew that when I travelled to the US for fieldwork, I would be attempting to recruit a minority of young people from within a minority group. Therefore, in the months running up to my fieldwork, I contacted a Denver-based organisation in order to become affiliated with them, and possibly arrange volunteer hours in exchange for contact with possible narrators. I was also aware that some youth organisations within Denver were very understaffed and poor at communicating via email, so I contacted several to ensure multiple possible entries for me and my research.

I negotiated voluntary placements with three organisations, namely the Gender Identity Center of Colorado, Parents for Lesbian and Gays (FLAG) and Transgender Young People's Services (TYES). I made one organisation, GIC, my base with regards

---

<sup>36</sup> C.E. Matias., K.M. Viesca., D.F. Garrison-Wade., M. Tandon., and R. Galindo., "What is Critical Whiteness Doing in OUR Nice Field like Critical Race Theory?" Applying CRT and CWS to Understand the White Imaginations of White Teacher Candidates', *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 47:3 (2014), p. 302.



to volunteering and serving the trans community. Establishing myself within an organisation from the outset allowed me to be viewed as an established member of a team, by other hard-to-reach organisations as mentioned above. Despite a large portion of time devoted to calls, emails, and footwork, I was unsuccessful in recruiting trans young people from the population this study had originally outlined. As a result, I widened my search parameters and after two months of volunteering for 6 days a week at the GIC, I successfully recruited 22 trans individuals between the ages of 22 and 70. Recruitment was a diverse mix of gender identities: trans women, trans men, two genderqueer identified individuals and one non-binary person. The majority of narrators were white, plus two Latino and one Native American individual. As a consequence of the available study group, my original topic was refocussed and restructured. Additionally, difficulties in linking in with many trans people of colour, limited the narratives I could collect and compare to the literature I had already gathered. Due to the available narrators, trans individuals of colour are underrepresented in this study.

More broadly, my participant numbers and their ethnic backgrounds were not large enough or varied enough to be representative of the trans community across the U.S., but it was representative for the those in Denver who utilised the support services at the GIC at the time. They hailed from all over the US and had varied social and economic standings. The longer I volunteered the more aware I became that the GIC was viewed by staff and gender variant people as a predominantly white space. Even though there was a small minority of trans people of colour who attended different groups.

### **3.6 Setting the scene for results and analysis framework: Sharing authority and the lived experience**

On entering into the field of oral history from a social work research/ practice background, I wanted to foster a transparent and collaborative interview process with trans individuals I recruited and asked to share their rich lived experiences. From the early stages of recruitment, I established through informed consent that the interview was entirely in the narrators' hands. As the deliverers of knowledge, the direction, subjects, depth and breadth of information shared, the time given to the interview, and the right to stop or withdraw at any point was entirely at their discretion. I pursued what Michael Frisch terms, a 'shared authority', driven by mutual record production by both the narrator and the interviewer and incorporated what Linda Shopes describes as, 'the manner in which an historical interpretation emerges from this structure, and the various ways what happens within the interview are connected to relationships and structures external to it'.<sup>37</sup> Intertwined was an equal passion to collect narrators' lived experiences, as Luisa Passerini expresses, 'the conscious and unconscious meanings of experience as lived and remembered...show[s] how the influences of public culture and ideology upon individual memory might be revealed in the silences, discrepancies and idiosyncrasies of personal testimony'.<sup>38</sup> I undertook this pursuit to highlight the importance of the lived experience of trans individuals over the majority of existing research which originates from a public health, psychiatry, criminology or mental health background. These present outside opinions and outcomes by the academic/practitioner, while often obscuring the voices of the trans people upon whose lives the research is based. In addition, by focusing on lived

---

<sup>37</sup> Frisch, *A Shared*, p. 1; L. Shopes., 'Commentary: Sharing Authority', *The Oral History Review*, 30:1 (2003), p. 103.

<sup>38</sup> L. Passerini., *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); L. Passerini, "Work Ideology and the Consensus under Italian Fascism," *History Workshop Journal*, 8 (1979), pp. 82-108.

experiences, I was able to understand where trans individuals were in conflict with the ideological dominant gender narrative and pop culture representations in how they live out their lives and negotiated their place within American society. These narratives present that at times, not only do they mute themselves, but live lives that conform to the normative narrative, creating secret histories built on what Portelli refers to as 'psychological truth'.<sup>39</sup>

In collecting life histories, I wanted each of the narrators to not have to follow a rigorous, inflexible questioning structure, or a seemingly directly historical need for facts. I was eager for them to take opportunities to reflect, deviate and discover buried memories and invited different levels of narration, which included those of an 'informal conversational narrative', as Daniel James would describe, rich in 'personal experience stories, anecdotes and gossip'.<sup>40</sup> However, as was suggested in most cases by the narrator for the easing of nerves and for finding a good starting point, we would open the interviews by asking typical questions of oral history, life history, and preliminary questions, (including their name, age, and childhood structure), to establish a rapport and nurture the narrative flow.

### **3.7 The narrators and trans in modern American history**

The narrators I listened to were unique in their personal identities and in the stage of their journeys - socially, emotionally, physically, mentally and on occasion, spiritually

---

<sup>39</sup> R. J. Grele, 'Movement without aim: Methodological and theoretical problems in oral history', in R. Perks and A. Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 48; A. Portelli., 'The Peculiarities of Oral History', *History Workshop Journal*, 12 (1981), p. 100.

<sup>40</sup> D. James., *Dona Maria's Story; Life History, Memory and Political Identity* (London: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 134.

- they navigated what it was to be trans in America, in a blue/democratic and widely-agreed safe state, and in a city known for its tolerance, acceptance, and welcome to trans people. Very few of the narrators were Colorado-born; many had travelled both personal and physical distances to accumulate space from their families, their past pains, their old identities, dead names (if applicable), their assigned genders, and at times, even their transness.<sup>41</sup> In most cases, the breadth of their life experiences and having no family in the area, reduced my ability to confirm stories for their accuracy and relation to modern American trans history. Triangulation would be, in part, impossible and I was comfortable with this. Moreover, I found it both exciting and nerve-wracking to be documenting knowledge with the narrators and giving them a means to make their own contribution to trans histories. Ramirez and Boyd state that:

Creating a new version (and versions) of history requires a leap of faith. It means taking narrators' voices and oral history methods seriously. While self-understood and often unspoken validation of narrators' subjective perspectives does not entail taking every recorded declaration as factual truth, it does require that researchers commit to listening carefully for what narrators' recollections reveal about their time and place in history.<sup>42</sup>

The quote above – in direct relation to queer oral history - talks about how factual narratives are not as valuable as the narratives of lived experiences, which as a trans oral history study is especially true: I considered the interviews as a creation of oral history narratives which presented the lack of trans histories that individuals had to draw on as influences in their lives. In addition, realistic consideration should be given regarding the available histories and narratives of trans individuals and communities within modern

---

<sup>41</sup> Their birth name associated with their assigned gender and self.

<sup>42</sup> N.A. Boyd., and H.N.R. Ramirez., 'Introduction: Close Encounters: The Body and Knowledge in Queer Oral History' in N.A. Boyd and H.N.R Ramirez (eds.), *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 5.

America, even though public representation is on the rise with the likes of Laverne Cox, Chelsea Manning, Caitlyn Jenner, Chaz Bono, and Jazz Jennings - reaching a wider audience through reality T.V. shows, documentaries, and social media. The question is whether or not they have a positive influence on trans people and the second wave trans movement within the US and whether they aid in maintaining its momentum. Overall, popular representation and trans histories can still be viewed as relatively scarce.

### **3.8 Analysis**

To analyse the resulting narratives, I used David Mandelbaum's anthropology-based model for life history analysis. Mandelbaum deduced during his career that past life histories, published mainly within the anthropological field, produced rich descriptions but minimal analysis.<sup>43</sup> As a result, he built a framework comprised of three elements which reach beyond what he describes as 'sheer chronological succession'.<sup>44</sup> Chronological or life stage analysis process is not suited to trans life history narratives due to the complexity of trans individual's identities, with life stages which deviate from the gender/hetero normative narrative (early childhood, puberty/adolescence, adulthood, older adulthood) owing to the cultural context within which they nurture or deny their identities - in this case American culture and society. With specificity to the narrators involved in this study, developing an awareness of their transness and/or fostering some form of gender dysphoria resulted in their realisation and acceptance and their detachment from the normative chronology. Essentially, they acted out their birth sex role or play the part which society dictated to them as normal, preventing any real development of their

---

<sup>43</sup> D. G. Mandelbaum., 'The Study of Life History: Gandhi', *Current Anthropology*, 14:3 (1973), p. 180.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

realised inner selves, until a point where they drew a line under living as this person and allowed their true self to emerge, pushing against societal norms. Therefore, the process leading up to coming out and embracing their true inner natures involved learning and developing both psychologically and - in some cases - biologically, which cannot be followed using a linear model. Ultimately, I found, Mandelbaum's non-chronological framework very fitting for the trans lives in this study.

The three elements of Mandelbaum's life history framework are, dimensions, turnings points and adaptations and will be discussed in order:

Dimensions: the aspects or dimensions of a person's life, including biological factors placed within the specific cultural and social dimension which mould the shape of a person's behaviour, interaction, and movements within society, as well as psychological and psychosocial dispositions, and variables within the societal context in which they grow up.<sup>45</sup>

Biology is the major factor in trans lives with regards to who people are - as society labels them - when they are born and who they wish to be once they develop and grow as individuals with identities. Both are influenced by America's ideological gender roles of male and female. These psychological and psychosocial dispositions add to trans individuals' pressures of policing/conforming and rejecting the gender normative narrative which has permeated into their psyche.

Turning points or major transitions, which can be viewed as immediate changes, or gradual processes over the lifetime, in both social and psychosocial dimensions.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 181.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

In 'Bodies of Evidence' Boyd and Ramirez refer to what is called 'pivotal queer moments' which in some ways is a potentially more accurate way of describing some of the turning points in trans lives which do not reflect the heteronormative lifecycle.<sup>47</sup> However, because this study primarily concerns gender rather than sexuality, trans lives are not wholly reflective the gendernormative lifecycle. Therefore, to reflect this, I have altered the term to 'pivotal trans moments', adopting and using it where appropriate. While Mandelbaum discards the influence of biological factors within the elements of turning points and adaptations, I am including it because of the integral part it can play as a turning point in the lives of some trans and gender-variant individuals who desire to change their bodies biologically through hormones and surgery in order to have them align with their gender identity.

Adaptations are the most important in the context, I believe, of this study involving trans people, as Mandelbaum states:

These periods are commonly drawn as segments along a curve, yet the depiction of a life as a trajectory, rising out of nothing, ascending to a zenith of something, and falling back to nothing is not a very useful analogy. A life cycle does not proceed in a projectable, unilinear curve, like a cannon shot. Rather, it involves ongoing development in various spheres of behaviour; it includes continuous adjustment and periodic adaptation. Personal adaptations are both the source of social adaptations and also the responses to it.<sup>48</sup>

Essentially, every individual, during the life course, must alter previously established models of behaviour to cope with new conditions and developments. Mandelbaum argues that it is, in fact, a 'built-in process'.<sup>49</sup> This last element of the

---

<sup>47</sup> Boyd and Ramirez, *Bodies of Evidence*, p. 7.

<sup>48</sup> Mandelbaum, 'The Study', p. 181.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

framework is suitable for trans history narratives because of the constant adaptation of trans individuals' behaviour as methods of survival, of conforming and fitting in to the sex roles they were born into or resisting. In addition, survival behaviour relate directly to the work of sociologist and psychologist, Erving Goffman, who argues that, 'Sometimes the individual will act in a thoroughly calculating manner, expressing himself in a given way solely in order to give the kind of impression to others that is likely to evoke from them a specific response he is concerned to obtain'.<sup>50</sup> There is major adaptation in adjusting to hormones, surgery, and the person they see in the mirror both before and after surgery. Additionally, and possibly most poignantly, finally adaptation includes living authentically.

With all of this in mind, I structured the following results chapters around pivotal trans moments, turning points, and adaptations within the life history narratives that I documented.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, I weaved moments of other life histories from the interviewed cohort throughout the selected narratives in order to compare and contrast specific turning points, pivotal trans/ queer moments, and adaptations.<sup>52</sup>

In conjunction with Mandelbaum's life history analysis framework, I used the open source software, 'Stories Matter', designed for oral historians by The Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling Concordia University.<sup>53</sup> It offers an alternative to transcription, and allowed me to maintain what Portelli calls the 'orality of oral sources'

---

<sup>50</sup> E. Goffman., *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 1956), p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> Boyd and Ramirez, *Bodies of Evidence*, p. 7.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> 'Stories Matter', *The Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling*, 2010, <http://storytelling.concordia.ca/storiesmatter/>, date accessed: 15 September 2016.



while undertaking analysis.<sup>54</sup> Key to my ethics, I did not feel it was effective or purposeful to, ‘turn aural objects into visual ones, which inevitably implies changes and interpretation’.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, I related directly to Gluck’s argument of wanting to ‘preserve the complex performance’ of my oral history narrators, ‘with their inflections, pitch, pace and rhythm instead of flattening these to a monotone in a transcript.’<sup>56</sup> I used Stories Matter to select clips used throughout the results chapters to best represent the narrator of each life history.

### **3.9 Societal and self-policing of trans**

One particular profound theme runs through each narrator’s story featured in the following results chapters, which I felt was important to highlight is a societal and self-policing of trans individuals. I refer not to policing and monitoring in the traditional sense of physical or existential branch of the justice system, but that of self-policing and self-monitoring on a societal level, permeating into the psyche via dominant ideologies of gender roles of male and female, throughout periods of time, and even during major life events and pivotal trans moments. This can be self-policing from an early age in the form of secrets, of individuals hiding trans identities from themselves, their families, communities, and the world as a method of survival or a level of self-deception in choosing traditional gender activities and jobs that attempts to correct the dissonance between the person on the outside and the person on the inside.

---

<sup>54</sup> Portelli, ‘What Makes’, p. 33.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> S.B. Gluck., ‘Why Do We Call It Oral History? Refocusing on Orality/Aurality in the Digital Age’, in D.A. Boyd and M.A. Larson (eds.), *Oral History and Digital Humanities: Voice, Access and Engagement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) p. 23.

Self-policing can turn into self-deception, preventing society from seeing the person underneath as well as keeping the narrator from seeing or knowing their true selves. This policing can also be seen in the form of pursuing heteronormative relationships and marriages, and the monitoring of oneself in every aspect of private and public life.

How much is this influenced by society? How much does a trans person need to emulate the heteronormative, mythical gender binary expectations America continues to uphold as ‘normal’ and supreme? Moreover, there are culturally formed normative narratives within the trans community, that include ideas about being truly trans requiring an awareness of being trans from a very early age, ideas about whether hormones and physical transition are crucial to a trans person’s inner and outer identity, both of which create the need to address/access healthcare. Deviation from these narratives is viewed as ill-advised, which leads to questions of whether a collective story can deeply influence an individual’s identity, memory, and narrative? I believe so. Boyd and Ramirez refer to:

pivotal queer moments in the lifespan: the first childhood memories of feeling “different”; the first encounter with a mirror of the self, that is, another “different” body in public that communicates back an unspoken yet felt affiliation; or the first instance when a queer body makes explicit its desires to a listening or viewing public. Indeed, queer oral history as a genre works in many ways to generate a series of intelligible (or predictable) sexual signposts that mark the queer body’s passage through time.<sup>57</sup>

Admittedly, this observation originates within sexual identity and therefore only relates to the LGB portion of the LGBT community, and this study is primarily gender

---

<sup>57</sup> Boyd and Ramirez, *Bodies of Evidence*, p. 7.

focused. However, if a trans standpoint is taken, it resonates with gender-variant bodies and narratives, especially with regards to the word 'predictable'. It has the potential to reaffirm that the normative gender narrative is the feeling of being different since childhood. This socially-constructed narrative can infiltrate into trans lives, convincing the individual that it is a part of their story, their narrative, their identity, convincing them of its one-track truth and total relevance in the trans community as a whole and moreover, as criteria for their own acceptance. In turn, this narrative aids in internally policing and judging the trans community, which is dangerous and misleading for all involved, especially those who inwardly identify as non-binary, gender queer, or gender fluid. Due to this, I felt that it was important to place 'the self' - the trans life history - at the centre of my research, because it encourages the narrator to dig deep into their experience and allows me - as listener - a way to access subjectivity, but also - as researcher - a method to analyse culture and its influence on narrators, their identities, and the relationship between the two.<sup>58</sup>

It is clear from the literature review that the self-policing, social policing, and cultural policing of trans individuals is a historical issue which the United States has adopted by adhering to the strict rules of male and female gender binary within the historical context of this study, from the 1950s until present and through pop culture. These strict binaries have been adhered to with untold consequences for trans people, not only affecting their psyches but essentially every aspect of their lives, past, present, and future. If, for example, we place policing into law and policy context within the US, trans

---

<sup>58</sup> Abrams, *Oral*, 2016, p. 34.

people are viewed simplistically as needing liberation. Dean Spade, trans man, academic, and activist writes:

We need a critical trans politics that is about practice and process rather than arrival at singular point of “liberation.” To practice this politics, we have to tackle some big questions about what law is, what power is, how the legal systems are part of the distribution of life chances, and what role changing laws can and cannot have in changing the arrangements that cause such harm to trans people<sup>59</sup>

The power that the legal systems have is key in Spade’s statement. It is the cultural and social power of the binary which forces trans individuals to police themselves and others with major consequences and will be examined throughout the results chapters through the lens of both liminality and trans theory.

---

<sup>59</sup> D. Spade., *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015) p. 20.

## Chapter 4 Trans women's lived experiences

Katy is the oldest and most widely experienced of all the narrators interviewed, born in 1946. She had a soft-spoken manner and was the most empathetic and kindest of people. Katy met with me in one of the GIC therapy rooms in which she, as a *pro bono* therapist, practiced counselling. I perceived Katy as a hippy at heart with a twist; she wore a calf length, billowing light blue denim skirt, and sandals with a self-styled, ripped Vietnam veteran t-shirt. Her shoulder-length silver hair complimented her attire and she seemed comfortable in who she was, then in her 70<sup>th</sup> year. She was also greatly respected around the GIC from what I observed of her interactions with others and heard through conversations with the other *pro bono* counsellors and Center clients.

I chose to highlight Katy because her life history was very distinctive. There were elements of her experiences which related to other narrators within the cohort, two of whom, Suzy and Maddie will be introduced later and featured throughout this chapter in conversation with Katy's life history. I felt bringing Suzy and Maddie's life histories into conversation with Katy's enhances both variety and similarity of the trans experience, expressing that one size or one narrative does not fit all.

Katy was born and raised in southwestern Illinois, along the Mississippi River. Illinois was and still is a largely Democratic state. However, Katy's area, known as Downstate Illinois, was in her words, 'redneck', with a history of supporting the confederacy and Republican politics, and a staunch religious outlook regarding abortion

and LGBT rights.<sup>1</sup> She described a ‘pleasant’ childhood for the most part, but had an emotionally absent father, a World War II veteran. Living with her grandmother and aunt during her formative years, Katy believed at one point that she was their child, only to realise after moving to a small house in a different town, that her mother and father were her parents. Looking back, Katy believed they were reasonably affluent because the family had indoor plumbing, including a toilet, which surrounding neighbours did not have. She had three sisters and was oldest and the first-born son.

Alessandro Portelli writes frequently on the significance of a narrator’s change in ‘velocity of narration’, as well as the rhythm and tone of speech. He argues that, ‘these oscillations are significant’, as ‘slowing down may mean greater emphasis as well as greater difficulty’, but admits to no hard and fast rules for analysis of these changes.<sup>2</sup> As Katy moved on to details of her early trans memories and realisations, I noticed a significant change in her pace, which contrasted with her description of her childhood surroundings and home life. Her pace changed from fast, straightforward and descriptive to slow, measured and thoughtful as she described first realising that she wasn't quite 'normal':

...I was with my cousin Patty in the bathroom one time, I was just a little boy, probably three or four. The women were probably...It’s not that they [women] weren’t modest, it’s just that they accepted me as a little kid and wouldn’t, wouldn’t mind piddling in front of me or something you know, and Patty did that one day, and I realised, on seeing her genitals and on

---

<sup>1</sup> M. Parker., ‘CIVIL WAR ‘STILL WITH US’ Confederate flag still prevalent in Southern Illinois’, *The Southern Illinoisan*, July 11, 2015, [http://thesouthern.com/news/local/confederate-flag-still-prevalent-in-southern-illinois/article\\_311544a9-e25c-5cd5-8d33-7c668dec6891.html](http://thesouthern.com/news/local/confederate-flag-still-prevalent-in-southern-illinois/article_311544a9-e25c-5cd5-8d33-7c668dec6891.html); E. McClelland., ‘Downstate hate: A history of the bitter, nearly 200-year rivalry between Chicago and the rest of Illinois’, *Chicago Reader.com*, November 15, 2017, <https://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/downstate-illinois-secession-history/Content?oid=34519694>; Interview with Katherine Patricia Malone [Katy], 27<sup>th</sup> May 2016.

<sup>2</sup> A. Portelli., ‘The Peculiarities of Oral History’, *History Workshop Journal*, 12 (1981), p. 98; A. Portelli., ‘What Makes Oral History Different’, in R. Perks and A. Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 34.

seeing my own, I'm sure I must have seen female genitals sometimes before that, but that was the instance where something clicked in my brain that I was different from what I was meant to be...<sup>3</sup>

Katy directly linked this pivotal trans moment to her early memories of cross-dressing:

A year or two later, about that time...still living at my grandmothers, I started cross-dressing, I would wear some of Patty's clothes and some of my sister's...clothes that I could fit into at that time. And um [pauses], however, this was still in the privacy and protected environment at my grandmother's house. After moving...that activity was seriously discouraged and from then on any of my cross-dressing activity would be strictly in secret.<sup>4</sup>

On asking Katy who discouraged her and why they discouraged her, she took time to reflect and answer. Lynn Abrams talks about the complexities of remembering difficult memories, and it was clearly difficult for Katy to find the right words.<sup>5</sup> There was a distinct possibility that she was tapping into emotions and feelings which she had not dealt with in many years. It clearly related however, to the very distinct overarching theme of this study, namely the self-policing and monitoring of the trans community within normative American culture and the lack of positive historical representation for trans individuals to draw on:

**Lorna:** Who discouraged you?

**Katy:** My, my social network, my peer group and uh, my Dad.

**Lorna:** And what were their reasons?

**Katy:** I have no idea why, that uh [pauses], that they didn't like to see a boy child or what seemed to be to them a boy child, I want to be politically correct because I don't know, [exclaims] Ahhh! [pauses] I definitely had a male body and uh, there was a very, very strong taboo in that red neck culture against boys being sissy's or gay and queer or, and we didn't know

---

<sup>3</sup> Katy, interview (2016).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> L. Abrams., *Oral History Theory* (Oxon: Routledge, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 2016), p. 92.

the word for trans back then, but it wasn't accepted. And I got bullied quite a bit and uh picked on quite a bit...and I think that one reason why, some of us transitioned so late in life, was just because we learned very, very deeply that uh, being trans is not an acceptable thing. And in order to survive, if you do feel that way, you must be very secretive about it. It's just part of survival.

This passage of Katy's narrative was full of reflection and confirmation similar to those found within John Howard's *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History*, which focuses on homosexuality and on occasion transsexuality/ transgenderism in the State of Mississippi from the 1950s where '...appropriate rituals and demeanours, phrasing and silences, for maintaining life at odds with prevailing sexual norms [were learned]'.<sup>6</sup> Howard describes how going about one's daily business as a queer or gender non-conforming person caused these norms to be tested, resisted and adhered to, only bringing the light or reminder to Mississippians of the limits and laws of the land by public episodes which came into local and national media coverage and context, because of their notoriety and scandal.<sup>7</sup> Katy's description of surviving via her secretiveness parallels Howard's findings within his book despite growing up in Illinois, although dwelling just south enough to feel its influence and cultural ideologies. Her covertness echoed other more national historical outlooks at this point in history, especially concerning medical literature during the 1950s and 1960s, cementing its view of transsexuals as pathological and deviant. It was interesting to hear however, that Katy specifically described coming out and transitioning in her 1960s, despite significant ground gained during the second wave trans rights movement from the 1990s onwards. It suggests that Katy's life

---

<sup>6</sup> J. Howard., *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 128.

<sup>7</sup> Howard, *Men Like That*, p. 128.



experiences of growing up in a gender normative household and culture, oppressed and policed her gender variance until she felt comfortable enough with trans representation and standing within society to come out and transition.

Katy's narrative demonstrated she was greatly affected by both the biological factors that played a part in her decision making and outlook. Her biological dimensions included being shocked in the realisation that she was different from other family members, that she was not a girl as previously felt, but at the same time, there was no acknowledgement of her male born body until she described cross-dressing. Katy did not further describe her shock regarding her male genitalia and forced male identity. Instead she described crossed-dressing without a second thought to America's strict idealistic gender binary and regulated identity for maleness. However, it is interesting to note that Katy was discouraged from cross-dressing once she left the 'protection' of her grandmother's home and moved in with her mother and father. Therefore, it could be concluded that living with her grandmother shielded her from societal gender norms. Shame in relation to cross-dressing only came into play when living with her mother and father, and within her new wider community. Thus, her biological dimensions and cultural dimensions were fulfilled by abiding by American gender norms in the shaping of her upbringing via her education and gender monitoring by family members: forcing her into silence and survival mode, essentially policing her transness. Furthermore, Katy's initial realisation of her sex versus her gender identity, and her parents' feelings towards her cross-dressing would have catapulted Katy into a liminal phase; having been removed from her fixed state female identity while living with her grandmother, she

entered a 'phase of separation' from the life she knew when moving in with her parents.<sup>8</sup> Turner would argue that this liminality would have left Katy both ambiguous in her gender identity but also in relation to a future fixed state identity, especially maintaining 'none of the attributes' of her past fixed state. In this case the influence of her grandmothers' love and protection. In liminal theory it could be described as a moment of indeterminacy.<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, Katy's pivotal trans moment, was quashed.<sup>10</sup>

Katy's experience of cross-dressing is mirrored and contrasted with other narrators such as Suzy – a slight and petite transwoman, who was feminine in both her attire and mannerisms. From her appearance, I did not imagine that she had been policed and self-policed so heavily throughout her life when we began her interview. At 47 (born in 1969 and 20 years younger than Katy), she sat with me in one of the GIC's therapy rooms to tell her story. Having been present during a lot of the trans women's group meetings, I had noticed Suzy for her quiet, reserved and unassuming demeanour, which contrasted significantly to the other trans women who were not shy in expressing themselves, voicing their opinions, or sharing their experiences. When Suzy volunteered to be a narrator for this study, I genuinely did not expect to build a rapport quickly enough with her to generate the space and trust to enable her to open up and talk about her history, gender variance and life experiences. However, I was very wrong. Suzy had a lot to convey and share with me.

Suzy, the oldest of three children, was born to an alcoholic, atheist father who ran the household, in her words 'tightly', and a Catholic mother who instilled a church-going

---

<sup>8</sup> Turner, 'Betwixt and Between', p. 46-47.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid; R.E. Terrill., 'Going Deep', *Southern Communication Journal*, 71:2 (2006), p. 166.

<sup>10</sup> Boyd and Ramirez, *Bodies of Evidence*, p. 7.

sense of religion into her children. Suzy admitted to having no responsibilities as the oldest child, but described herself as ‘the guinea pig’ for parenting, for the siblings who came after her, two years and 15 years apart.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, Suzy mentioned that her white, middle class suburban upbringing could have been viewed as ‘exactly what you saw in a 1970s TV show’, only to be an entirely different experience behind the TV show façade of her front door.<sup>12</sup>

From an early age, Suzy exuded a femininity which her parents, especially her Father, did not like, resulting in extreme gender policing and abuse.

**Suzy:** My Father was...and my Mom, were uh...very much trying to tough-toughen me up, I think. They didn’t like the way I lay down to watch TV, or the way, you know, I was too feminine for them. So, their idea was to toughen me up. So, you know, my toys would always be army men you know [laughs], I wanted to play with Lego’s or something [laughs]. They actually had kids come over to the house and, and pick a fight with me, [laughs] they did that once. Um, yeah, I know, it’s kinda weird. But uh...

**Lorna:** What was their motivation for that?

**Suzy:** To toughen me up, make friends, you had to be tough...<sup>13</sup>

This gender policing instigated by Suzy’s parents, very much reflected the gender stereotypes and thinking in America during the 1970s, currently termed as ‘toxic masculinity’; characterised by the enforcing of rigid gender roles, the requirement to compete aggressively with and dominate others, as well as ‘a drive to dominate by [the] endorsement of misogynistic and homophobic views’.<sup>14</sup> The 1970s were turbulent - featuring the continuing civil and equality rights movements from the 1960s and the

---

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Suzy Peterson, 28<sup>th</sup> May 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Suzy, interview (2016).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> M.C Parent., T.D. Gobble., & A. Rochlen., ‘Social Media Behavior, Toxic Masculinity, and Depression’, *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*, Advance online publication (2018), p. 2.

simultaneous conservative political backlash viewed as the ‘new right’ which strongly promoted traditional family values and roles. The 1970s additionally heralded the Men’s Liberation and Men’s Right’s movements where the ideal masculinity was represented and encouraged within the following frameworks: No Sissy Stuff: A stigma is attached to feminine characteristics; The Big Wheel: Men need success and status; The Sturdy Oak: Men should have toughness, confidence, and self-reliance; and Give ’Em Hell: Men should have an aura of aggression, daring, and violence.<sup>15</sup>

Suzy was a guinea pig, not just for parenting but in the adherence to these toxic stereotypes of masculinity within a controlled, patriarchal, gender normative and closed household where she held little power. It could be argued – similarly to Katy – that Suzy’s identity was pushed into a liminal phase through her negative experiences, existing in a period of marginalisation, in-between the rigid boundaries of gender dictated to her.<sup>16</sup> However, Suzy enjoyed sports - mainly American football and baseball - but states ‘It was like a thing my father always wanted me to do [laughs], keep me into sports...[the] only chance to meet other friends was that way’.<sup>17</sup> Her statements reflects a desire for engagement in sports without pressure. However, this desire was marred by her father’s need to reinforce the masculine role by forcing to continue on playing to meet what is suggested as masculine friends. Furthermore, while Suzy did not talk about friendships with depth it could have given her the opportunity to pick the friends she wanted - but also those who could deflect her father’s focus on her natural femininity.

---

<sup>15</sup> R. Brannon., ‘The male sex role: Our culture's blueprint of manhood, and what it's done for us lately’, in D. S. David., and R. Brannon (eds.), *The forty-nine percent majority: The male sex role* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1976) pp. 1-45.

<sup>16</sup> Turner, ‘Betwixt and Between’, p. 46; Terrill, *Going Deep*, p. 168.

<sup>17</sup> Suzy, interview (2016).

Moreover, Suzy used laughter in her narrative to express what I believe to be both disbelief and embarrassment, deriving from her parent's behaviour towards her femininity. To this end emotions feature frequently throughout this chapter and in subsequent chapters because of their importance in not just the words conveyed by the narrators but their silences. According to historian of emotions Rebecca Clifford, 'Oral sources...offer a window onto intimate feelings such as guilt, grief and love, as well as onto the more conventionally 'public' emotions such as anger.<sup>18</sup> In addition, the importance of highlighting emotions felt at the time of interview was '...about what had been felt in the past that the basic irrecoverable nature of 'lived experience'' becomes evident.<sup>19</sup>

When returning to Katy's narrative and examining her following recollections of school days I noticed the pace of her narrative change as she reflected and touched on the more difficult memories she tapped into as she got older and moved into high school for upper grades. Her narrative reflected not just the level of vulnerability she experienced but her inner conflict in feeling different to her classmates, being bullied and not fitting with America's ideological male gender role. Katy labelled herself as a misfit and outcast under those established rules and boundaries:

**Katy:** Anna Burass, she was my favourite teacher of all time. She would sometimes keep me or Billy Tucker or Ronnie John after school because [pauses], they weren't like me, but they were misfits just the same, in their own way. It was such as treat getting, this sounds funny, it was a treat being kept after school in Mrs. Burass class. She was just such a sweet lady, she would read us stories...And she had taught generations of kids there in El Quaca and never seemed any younger or any older. She was one of those timeless people. Then, our upper grade school grades were

---

<sup>18</sup> R. Clifford., 'Emotions and gender in oral history: narrating Italy's 1968', *Modern Italy*, 17:2 (2012), p. 210.

<sup>19</sup> J. Plamper., *History of Emotions: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 288.

over at the old high school uh, and that was somewhat traumatic experience in itself because it was farther away from my home and it was also the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades [age 9 to 13 years old] when kids start to get serious about anybody who's any different from them. And that is when, ummm, I somehow, [pauses] uh, found myself, instead of being fairly well-liked young person uh, somewhat of an outcast. But uh, so it goes.

**Lorna:** Why did they see you as an outcast?

**Katy:** I don't know, if they just uh [pauses]. Lorna, I don't know if they could just tell that there was something deep down different about me, or if it was, I didn't try hard enough to fit in...I wasn't good at sports, and I didn't like sport back then, they were strictly boy sports. The girls at that time didn't get to do sports and uh [pauses], I still don't know for sure if that it was, I didn't try hard enough to fit in or if I just didn't care enough about fitting in. And looking back on it now, uh, I don't think that people should have to try to fit in. But yet in that culture at that time, if you didn't fit in, oh you were an outcast, you were ostracised somewhat, you were someone the bigger kids would pick on and bully uh [pauses], I don't think it'd probably be that way now. You hear about the schools being a lot more strict about bullying. But uh, it was back in that day you were expected to look out for yourself and if some kid happened to catch you alone somewhere and did beat you up, if you didn't stick up for yourself, well, my dad, would have, he wouldn't have beat me when I got home but he wouldn't have been pleased with me because I hadn't been acting like a real boy.<sup>20</sup>

Katy's narrative revealed a sense of reservation and acceptance but also hope in reflecting on the level of vulnerability she had as a child who did not fit in. She moved from enjoying telling the story of her most memorable teacher, Mrs. Burass - talking about her with affection and how she was protected as a 'misfit' child along with the others in her self-professed category. However, she singled herself out as being different from them. Katy expressed appreciation in describing the children safe after school - listening to stories with her protector - to almost trepidation in her narrative as she slowed, paused and reconnected with her past pains of feeling like an outcast. Katy wrestled with her

---

<sup>20</sup> Katy, interview (2016).

feelings of being read as ‘different’ by the other children and young people and her inability to work out why she was bullied. Her repetition of labelling herself as a ‘misfit’ or ‘outcast’- who did not fit in/was not normal or was ‘not acting like a real boy’ when bullied or taking part in boy sports - was so apparent in her entrenched language and societal outlook of the time. She experienced pain when recalling these experiences and her remembered emotion of the past reflecting Plamper’s statement that ‘Even with current emotional experiences the interpretation of the psychophysical tangibility of feelings can hardly be separated off from their subjective value, ‘inner’ experience from ‘external’, sociocultural frameworks’.<sup>21</sup> It could be argued that Katy experienced ‘traumatic remembering’ or at the very least difficult remembering. This was not in the sense that Katy could not find the words but in having to relive and retell her painful story and lived-experience of bullying and feeling outcast.<sup>22</sup>

In response to her outcast status Katy avoided the community and school which did not understand her, nurturing personal isolation and survival in the form of – surprisingly - being extroverted rather than introverted. Katy changed in her outward social behaviour reflecting the adaptation stage of Mandelbaum’s life history analysis , arguing that ‘personal adaptations are both the source of social adaptation and also responses to it’<sup>23</sup>:

So uh, I explored the fields and meadows around the town, and I got out on the river when I could, and [sighs] I hung out up in our attic or in our basement when I could be by myself a lot. And, when they’d [family] drive to a nearby town like Burlington or somewhere then I’d have a chance to do a little cross-dressing and that’s how I survived my grade school and

---

<sup>21</sup> J. Plamper., *History of Emotions: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 289.

<sup>22</sup> R. Perks., and A. Thomson., ‘Part II Interviewing Introduction’, in R. Perks and A. Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 103.

<sup>23</sup> Mandelbaum, ‘The Study’, p. 181.

high school years. In high school, I had to go to a consolidated school that was several miles away and there I decided that I would enjoy being a little bit more popular and so I came become somewhat of a class clown. And I was even able to pull a little bit of gender bending into my class clownishness like for instance in ahhh, pep rallies<sup>24</sup> and things. I made myself a pair of high heeled sneakers and I'd [clackage] a cheerleader in high heeled sneakers.<sup>25</sup> I don't think that anybody read me at that time. I think they just thought that I was an unusual person.

Katy negotiated multiple adaptations at this point in her life: self-isolation in her home life; circumstantial cross-dressing; risky 'gender bending' and self-imposed role of class clown. All of these different facets play into liminality theory- her role as the 'transitional-being' of existing in a place where she was 'at once no longer classified, and not yet classified'.<sup>26</sup> Within these adaptations and transgender theory - in specific regards to adolescence - Katy inadvertently 'call[s] attention to the operations of normativity within and between gender...identity categories, rais[ing] questions about the structuration of power'. Moreover, Katy's actions and motivations within trans theory 'unravels adolescence along with fixed notions of gender identity, sexuality, and selfhood...while suggest[ing] the possibility of reconstruction, revision, and remaking outside the developmental imperative.'<sup>27</sup> It could be argued that a negotiation and ownership of power in Katy's gender variance took place allowing her to find strength, freedom and a sense of identity in openly cross-dressing and remaking the 'developmental imperative' for herself all the while cleverly and stealthily hiding her true self to the world

---

<sup>24</sup> A 'pep rally' is a high school wide activity usually held before a sporting event and endeavours to inspire enthusiasm and school spirit.

<sup>25</sup> 'Clackage' refers to the sound from a high heel shoe. Can also be referred to as 'click clack' as per RuPaul's song of the same title.

<sup>26</sup> Turner, 'Betwixt and Between', p. 47-48.

<sup>27</sup> S. Stryker., 'Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity', *Radical History Review*, 2008:100 (2008), p. 146; G. Owen., 'Adolescence', in Transgender Studies Quarterly (eds.), *Abjection, Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1:1-2 (2014), p.23.



in her comedic role. Playing the clown - in gender variance - reflected the pop culture of the time in its view and representation of trans people as jokes and something to be mocked. However, there was also power in what Katy did for herself, her sense of gender expression and survival as a gender-variant person in such a threatening time and personal situation.

It could be argued that this was a pivotal trans moment in Katy's adolescence and her need to be liked. This despite her level of vulnerability and risk taken in experimenting with her gender variance - without her peers knowing or realising- as she was not 'read'. Instead Katy subverted societal boundaries and America's idealised gender binary roles in southwestern Illinois. In part however, Katy maintained an undercurrent of self-shaming - having been shamed by her father and peers previously - in her awareness that dressing openly as herself was viewed as deviant and transgressive.

Maddie - narrator and transwoman - 27 years Katy's junior at 47 years old had a similar experience in relation to cross-dressing. I initially met Maddie when I was working on reception in the GIC: She burst through the door one afternoon prior to the trans women group, looking like a supermodel with long, flowing, straight blonde hair, blue eyes, large framed glasses, and perfectly painted pick nails. She wore a black Paisley patterned floaty top, a large black beaded necklace and soft pink pedal pushers. Most noticeable was Maddie's high-high heeled sandals on which she floated, and it utterly amazed me that anyone could walk in such a shoe, which for me would have been akin to torture. We bonded quickly and Maddie was bubbly, outgoing, funny, witty and pleasant to be around. She shared that she was an aspiring fashion designer which had not surprise me given her quirky and fashionable presentation.

Maddie shared that she ran the infamous GIC Clothes Swap: featured on the first Saturday of every month. She invited me to attend one, and I jumped at the chance.<sup>28</sup> After getting to know Maddie over the coming weeks I asked if she would share her life history in an interview and she agreed without hesitation. We met one afternoon after she had finished work -she was an engineer with a large aerospace company - in one of the therapy rooms in the GIC. One of Maddie's stories was about cross-dressing in school on Halloween one year in a similarly secretive way to Katy:

**Maddie:** Ok, this is a little bit off, but. I will say that in 8<sup>th</sup> grade [13 or 14 years old]...for Halloween I went to school dressed as a woman, that was my costume [laughs]. And, because it was a perfect excuse, and, [pauses] but nobody, not even my Mom, who helped me get the costume together, never had any indication that it was anything other than just a Halloween costume [giggles].

**Lorna:** What was the costume?

**Maddie:** Ummmm, It was just a skirt and I mean it was very uh, I would say it was very modest, mostly because I was too afraid to assert myself as far as what I would have liked to wear, and ummm, I would have gone more edgy but at that time, just to be able to wear women's clothes was good and somebody like my sister came up with a wig from somewhere [pauses], and ummm, in fact my sister also had like a stuffed bra, that she gave me to use and did my makeup and everything and, and ummm, it felt amazing but I did such a good job of hiding my true, I like made a big production out of deciding what, making it look like, like this wasn't the only option. This was just like, in fact I put it up to chance and I wrote down a couple of other costume options and I put them in a hat and I made a big production of doing that and I actually pulled out this as my costume idea, I was like, "well I'm going to have to go with it." When like really, I really, really just wanted to do that because it just felt right.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> The clothes swap was a renowned date in the GIC calendar when trans women brought clothes they no longer wanted or had picked up elsewhere to the Center to essentially swap, try on, get opinions on from other group members and give an impromptu fashion show. Some of the group would bring makeup and on occasion makeovers were given. Maddie gave out fashion tips and picked outfits out if the members did not know where to begin in dressing for their figure.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Madeline Haanel, [Maddie]; 4<sup>th</sup> June 2016.

Unlike Katy, Maddie did not feel shame in what she was doing saying ‘...it just felt right’. Her happy, quickly paced description throughout this section of her narrative communicated that Maddie thoroughly enjoyed simultaneously the ruse of hiding her gender variance with her willingness to try out women’s clothes publicly. Her protests enhanced her enthusiasm as did her sisters contribution and input in clothing choices all the while secretly delighting in the opportunity to dress in what could be perceived as safe circumstances and without being caught.<sup>30</sup> According to Steven Seidman the ‘subversion of identity is a celebration of liminality, of the spaces between or outside structure...[an] opposition to disciplining, normalizing social forces’.<sup>31</sup> Maddie’s ability to revel in her transness, albeit privately, very much reflects this statement and her liminal place and space at this point in her narrative. In addition, there is the sense of power that cross-dressing covertly held for Maddie - as it did for Katy - in pushing gender boundaries. From a gender normative position however, Maddie’s ‘costume’ was most likely read as mocking individuals who transgressed the gender binary, especially as an adolescent and dressing in front of school friends or around her neighbourhood. Much like Katy at the pep-rally. However, in both cases it fulfilled a secret desire to stealthily experiment in trying out an identity without anyone suspecting. In addition, both were transgressing and trying out their fluidity of embodiment - in line with transgender theory – while playing with the ability to self-construct their identities and living in the context of social expectations and essentialist, naturalisation.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Maddie, interview (2016).

<sup>31</sup> Seidman, S., ‘Identity and politics in a “postmodern” gay culture: Some historical and conceptual notes’ in M. Warner (eds.), *Fear of a queer planet: Queer politics and social theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1998), p. 133.

<sup>32</sup> Nagoshi, Nagoshi and Brzuzy, *Gender and Sexual Identity*, p. 77.

On reflection, I regretted not asking Katy why she felt she was not read by her peers as gender-variant or trans but seen as an ‘unusual person’ and what this meant to her at this period in her life. The banality of the label could suggest that getting away with dressing without punishment spurred her gender bending. Instead, I asked Katy about her circumstantial cross-dressing which took place at home while her family members were out in the car:

My folks...they had a big old Ford which you could hear coming into the driveway...when they were away...I would get to put on my sisters or my mother’s clothes and check myself out in the mirror and if I heard big old Ford V8 coming back up the driveway then I’d try to get everything hung up properly and not be red faced when they came in [laughs]. It’s so silly, being ashamed of something like that. But as I said, it was survival back then.<sup>33</sup>

Katy’s laughter sounded and felt like embarrassment when reflecting on it, much like Suzy’s in her story of her parents bringing children to her house to ‘toughen her up’. However, Katy’s sat within the realm of cross-dressing as survival which was revealed in her urgency to hang up all the clothing up in time. This promoted an air of danger and risk which was reflected in the pace of her narration and her expression suggested a fear of being caught and shamed. However, it also spoke volumes about the risk she took in her experimentation: a chance to see herself in the mirror. Katy did not linger on these survival years at home, instead she quickly moved on to when she left her small town for the navy.

Joining the navy was a major pivotal moment for Katy: she had a sense of her oppressed gender expression within her liminality, and she was influenced by the political

---

<sup>33</sup> Katy, interview (2016).

climate of the time in America. It seemed also that she had few, and perhaps only one choice for survival: escape from her town with its widespread oppression and bullying by engaging in one of the most hyper masculine roles upheld within American society: the military services.

I have split the following two paragraphs of Katy's narrative up, for the reason of management more than anything else. But both have a very different tone and narrative pace despite Katy narrating them one after the other. The first contains Katy's escape and following trauma in Vietnam, giving an air of powerlessness and the second shows a very different side of her experience in Vietnam: of love, agency and authenticity. Paul Thomson, in talking about the sharing of traumatic memories and the self, states that 'For most people the pain of the past is much more manageable, lying alongside good memories of fun, affection, and achievement, and recollecting both can be positive'.<sup>34</sup> To a certain extent, I believe this to be true for Katy in these following paragraphs, only because of their contrast and reflexivity:

So, ummm, not really enjoying that atmosphere and only having one friend who was the only out gay boy in town...I didn't know if I was gay or not, but I didn't really feel gay and didn't know about being bisexual at that time. I just knew that I was odd, and I wanted to get out of that town and so I joined the navy. And [pauses] in a way it was definitely a way to get out of town, 'get out of Dodge' we might say, an old American expression. But little did I know that the Vietnam War was being escalated and I ended up in Vietnam. Where if I thought I had been bullied in El Quaca, I didn't even know what bullying was [sniggers]. Uh, [pauses], but strangely enough, I have always been [exhales], able to, [exhales] seemingly defined, when things seemed darkest, somebody to stand by me and even protect me and that has caused me a lot of self-exploration into the fact that, "Well, are you, are you just one of those people that just need protecting all of the time?" Well, I don't know, I, certainly did in Vietnam. I was in [pauses], I was way out of my league. Those guys were over there uh, with murder

---

<sup>34</sup> Thomson, *The Voice*, p. 183.

in their hearts, a lot of them. [pauses] I'm not saying all Vietnam veterans were mean, murderous ummm, there was a male culture of violence which I did not fit in to. And I got, I ended up getting gang raped a few times, uh [pauses], but fortunately, I did find a protector. A dear friend and lover, who took me under his wing and looked out after me. He was Vic, [pauses], we had, sounds like we had a horrible experience in some ways, yet it was a beautiful experience in some ways.<sup>35</sup>

I found Katy's narrative in this first paragraph very difficult to listen to on each and every play back - her brief story about her gay friend, her confusion about her sexuality at the time, while telling her truth of her now bisexuality. It gave a sense of longing to escape and in her limited choices the only way was by joining the military. Katy's pace slowed at this point returning to the former pace of when she described her school days - of being an outcast, approaching it with poignancy and loss but with a measured expression of emotion, reflecting on her words prior to speaking them. There was a sense of her tapping into those memories and emotions and the difficulty in her pauses of sharing these arduous words which needed to be said. This portion of narrative was accompanied by Katy shutting her eyes, suggesting that the reliving and the retelling required visual prompting or implied difficulty in connecting with me as she shared this traumatic memory. Clifford argues that 'the most painful moments of lived experience, the ones associated with the most troubling memories, can be difficult, if not impossible, to describe in their emotional complexity. This is all the more true where these stories do not fit into established narrative patterns'.<sup>36</sup> Katy's mixture of loss, shame and self-questioning in her wanting to know if she really needed protecting at all times was both a roller coaster of emotion but also tentative and exploring as she retold her experience.

---

<sup>35</sup> Katy, interview (2016).

<sup>36</sup> Clifford, 'Emotions and Gender', p. 217.

Her subjective place in history is undeniable - both as a transwoman in hiding and as an individual in the military who had previously been vulnerable, bullied, violently abused and an outcast within her community.

The words, ‘with murder in their hearts’ as Katy described the men with whom she went to Vietnam struck a real nerve with me which made me look into this period of history. The Vietnam War (1 November 1955 to 30 April 1975) was known for being a strategic killing war where according to Nick Turse, journalist and author of *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam*:

Recruits were...indoctrinated into a culture of violence and brutality, which emphasized above all a readiness to kill without compunction...a deft combination of “depersonalization, uniforms, lack of privacy, forced social relationships, tight schedules, lack of sleep, disorientation followed by rites of reorganization according to military codes, arbitrary rules and strict punishment” was brought to bear to accomplish the task.<sup>37</sup>

On reading these lines it made me realise that Katy - sniggering when reflecting on her already harmful and painful childhood and adolescent bullying experiences in southwestern Illinois - indicated that those experiences did not compare to her experience in the military. I genuinely felt that she was making light of a dehumanising situation and using it as a coping mechanism of which I heard only small fragments of her experiences. However, it did reflect Katy’s emotional filter for how her experience of Vietnam shaped her memory and her narrative.<sup>38</sup>

Vietnam is a beautiful country. A lot of the people are very kind and accepting and uh, there were gay clubs down in Saigon, where, when we could get away for a long weekend or just when we weren’t on duty, during, just during spells of RnR<sup>39</sup>, we could sometimes go down to Saigon

---

<sup>37</sup> N. Turse., *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam* (New York: Picador, 2014), pp. 26-27.

<sup>38</sup> Clifford, ‘Emotions and Gender’, p. 211.

<sup>39</sup> A military abbreviation for ‘Rest and Relaxation’.

and go dancing in the gay bars and at one time, [pauses], I actually had like an athletic bag with some girls' things in it, that I could actually even dress in Saigon. One time however, that did get us beat up. But, and Vic was, Vic was pretty tough too. In any case, ummmm, it was quite an experience. It opened my eyes up about how narrow-minded some of the things were in my area of the United States where I was raised, and how much looser things are out in the real world. We actually did some RnR in Hong Kong and some RnR in Singapore one time and those, at that time, at that part of my life they were some of the sweetest memories that I'd had yet. About just be able to be myself with someone who accepted me, the way that Vic did. Ahhh. [pauses] I don't know if he, this was before almost, before anybody, except maybe Dr Benjamin, knew much about trans issues and so when I could share with Vic, when I could dress with him [pauses], I don't know if he really took me as a woman, but it didn't matter, because at least he, allowed me to feel that way. Ummm, which was hugely reaffirming, validating...<sup>40</sup>

This second paragraph contrasted significantly from the first. Katy's narrative was lighter, more excited and optimistic in talking about her experiences with Vic: the opportunity to dress and be alone with him on RnR. This was clearly a pivotal trans moment for Katy not just in having the opportunity to purchase 'girl clothes' and keep them in a bag, but actually allowing herself to let her guard down with someone she trusted enough to openly dress as a woman in what it would seem, was a mostly - a loose word, as she describes being caught dressing and not passing - safe, LBGT-accepting environment in Saigon.<sup>41</sup> In *Sexuality and Human Rights: A Global Overview* Helmut Graupner and Phillip Tahmindjis state that 'during the Vietnam War (in the late 1960s) there were three lesbian bars and eighteen gay bars in Saigon...there were also homosexual clubs, steam baths and coffee houses'.<sup>42</sup> This was reflected in Randy Shilt's historical text *Conduct Unbecoming Lesbians and Gays in the U.S. Military, Vietnam to*

---

<sup>40</sup> Katy, interview (2016).

<sup>41</sup> Boyd and Ramirez, *Bodies of Evidence*, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> H. Graupner., and P. Tahmindjis., *Sexuality and Human Rights: A Global Overview* (New York: The Haworth Press, 2005) p. 192.



*the Persian Gulf*: ‘Gay hangouts were so famous that *The Advocate* published an extensive list of gay hotspots in Saigon...In the gay bars on...Tu Do Street, it was now not unusual to see muscular Marines dancing together in full camouflage to “Tears of a Clown,” their Colt .45s bouncing on their hips’.<sup>43</sup> Yet, according to Paul Horton, a researcher on LGBT individuals in Vietnam:

The hegemony of heterosexuality in the Vietnamese context has meant that non-normative forms of sexuality have either been silenced or portrayed as pathological, and rather than being recognised as full members of society, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people have either been rendered socially invisible or misrecognised and subjected to a form of social subordination.<sup>44</sup>

These juxtaposed images of Vietnam made me reflect on where the disconnect happened in Vietnam’s history or whether, due to Wartime occupation, the country’s heteronormativity and gender normativity suspended itself for the duration. I additionally reflected after the interview if Katy openly dressed in Hong Kong or Singapore as mentioned in her narrative as other RnR destinations. Especially when Singapore, a post-colonial city State had no tolerance for gays or trans in its culture or its laws. According to Graupner and Tahmindjis gayness in Singapore- as late as the 1990s - was still viewed as a Western pollutant and phenomenon.<sup>45</sup> Katy’s narrative however expressed that time with Vic was special, it validated and affirmed her in her gender expression in addition to Vic’s acceptance of her in and out of women’s clothing. This was especially poignant because during the 1960s ‘trans’ was termed transsexualism - an identity in itself - and those who cross-dressed were not viewed to be under the same umbrella. According to

---

<sup>43</sup> Shilts, R., *Conduct Unbecoming Lesbians and Gays in the U.S. Military, Vietnam to the Persian Gulf* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), p. 149.

<sup>44</sup> Horton, P., “‘I thought I was the only one’”: the misrecognition of LGBT youth in contemporary Vietnam’, *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, 16:8 (2014), p. 961.

<sup>45</sup> Graupner and Tahmindjis, *Sexuality and Human*, p. 196-97.

the medical literature of the time cross-dressers did not need support but therapy/treatment for their deviant behaviour, reaffirming gender variance as a mental health issue.<sup>46</sup>

Vic's acceptance of Katy's authentic self was in her eyes something positive. Her memories of Vic seemingly balanced out her traumatic experiences in Vietnam at the hands of her platoon and the military in general. Vic's treatment of her was unconditional, protective and ultimately caring. There was part of me that questioned whether Katy painted Vic in a much more positive light in her memory as a survival mechanism or romanticised the experience over the years to allow her to have had agency and power over memories of sexual violence. It surprised me that Katy did not have open conversations with Vic about her gender expression as they seemed to have an intimate relationship and he was open and supportive in her dressing publicly. It could be argued that Katy was content with the depth to which they knew each other or their relationship was viewed as temporary or situational/beneficial for the both of them: one which not only allowed Katy to have freedom within herself in receiving validation and affirmation, but one which educated her in knowing herself better as a trans person and as someone who needed strength and determination as part of her continued survival.

Katy's experiences in the military were reinforced but also complicated by Suzy's:

**Suzy:** Why did I join army? I think in many ways it was because all of my dad's side were in the army: Rangers, Airborne, that was what was installed, since I was young, that, that's how you behave if you're a man. And so, you know, I didn't know where else to go. Umm, I kinda knew about myself then and I also had an attraction to men, I couldn't act upon it, because [pauses] when I was growing up uh, people who were trans were drug addicts and, and [pauses] that was it. They were simply crazy drug addict people. And that's the only world I knew. There wasn't the computer then, there wasn't the internet. So, you know, it's like, in some

---

<sup>46</sup> See Chapter 2 section 2.1: *Medical Influences*.

ways...in some ways that helped me later on...But uhhhh, uhhhh, in other ways it slowed me down so much. It hindered me. But I joined the army in a lot of ways to get away from home...And maybe, in a little bit subconsciously, it was just a way to die [laughs], an acceptable way to die, for my family. You know, so yeah, I joined the army, just to get away from home basically [laughs].<sup>47</sup>

Both Katy and Suzy secretly identified as trans and used the military to get away from home and from their locale. In retrospect, I should have asked what they had both hoped to gain from their military experiences, although Katy later explains in her narrative that her joining was down to patriotism and defence of the US. In knowing that both trans women were largely unable to share their gender expression openly within service, how did joining the military aid the shaping of their identities? Or was it the case, as Suzy claimed ‘that’s how you behave if you’re a man’: the need to tap into a masculinity derived from America’s gender ideology of men to prove themselves to be men, to prove to the world, or at least to family that they could function as men in masculine roles?

What struck me most about this portion of Suzy’s narrative was that she viewed joining the army as an acceptable way to die for her family - at least. Her laughter could have been read as contrasting her emotions of the past to the present while creating multiple connotations: Did she wish to die with dignity because of the shame her parents had in their feminine son, dying in a masculine way which would only make them proud in her death?<sup>48</sup> Was it her own way of committing suicide thus bringing honour rather than shame or because of following in the footsteps of the men in her family and dying in the military viewed as heroic and for her country? At no time did Katy express this level of thinking, despite her very different and extremely traumatic experiences from Suzy.

---

<sup>47</sup> Suzy, interview (2016).

<sup>48</sup> Clifford, ‘Emotions and Gender’, p. 218

Katy continued her campaign of survival, pursuit of personal power and reflected on her experience as a form of growth:

**Lorna:** Describe your time in the army.

**Suzy:** Well even before that when I was with the recruiter, cause I, I failed to get into the army cause I was too small. I was like 109-110lbs, and I had to get, for my height, I had to get up to like 113lbs...And there was this one day, there was this openly gay, you could just tell was a totally gay guy, he's going, 'Don't do it! Don't do it!' [laughs] and I always remember that. You know, I always remember that, I should have listened to him. I was brainwashed.

So...My time in the army was like my time in school. I was uhhh, ummmm, a very reserved person. Think that, maybe that just keeps me safe, I don't know. But you know, I only had one or two friends and that worked from me. So, I went through the training...Like even how I stood, or how I talked, just constantly on my mind and always will be [chuckles]. So, I went to different training, went to become radio operator...I'd have my weekends free, which was nice. Yeah, then we went to Desert Shield, Desert Storm so I spent a lot of time out in the desert...Ummm, yeah. So, I started to think about things...I decided I wasn't going to re-enlist. It wasn't for me. And you know, I started thinking about my sexuality then too. Because they had a whore house outside of Fort Bragg and my friends took me to it, and I couldn't do anything with her, I'm sorry [laughs]. I think she saw that right away, so she didn't charge me. Which was nice of her...So uh, yeah, I started thinking about things like that too. My sexuality...I couldn't do anything about it at that time. Cause if you were caught you'd be an embarrassment, you'd lose any benefits, you'd get kicked out and I think they even threatened to put you in jail or something like that, right? [smiles]. So, you know, yeah. I was pretty much [pauses], actually no, there was one time I did go to the whore house again, after that I wasn't a virgin anymore right? ...So, what was the question?

**Lorna:** Tell me about your time in the army.

**Suzy:** Yeah, yeah, so yeah, then we had Desert Shield, Desert Storm and when it finally came to the invasion part, I got lucky again, they didn't put up much of a fight. Ummm, yeah so, there's all kinds of people surrendering everywhere left and right, body parts everywhere, of course that too. I still remember that. But I think the thing that pissed me off the most was, a lot of my fellow soldiers, as we were leaving, there would be women and children on the side of the road begging for food, and they'd

spit on them and curse them and I just thought that was so disgusting, [long pause], I hated it. But then I got out of the army [laughs].<sup>49</sup>

Both Katy and Suzy gained world views outside of their upbringings and childhood social locale: Suzy gained perspective in recruitment, training and deployment in Iraq, while Katy cross-dressed openly and somewhat safely – except when Vic was beaten up - leaving both undeterred. Katy additionally and contrastingly learned for herself how small-minded and limited her home town was, while Suzy learned how small-minded the army was - from witnessing soldiers spitting on women and children. Suzy's experiences also placed her into a new liminal phase marked by her 'physical separation...from the rest of society'.<sup>50</sup> Suzy was unable to explore her sexuality with men: she hid it from the military and society by losing her virginity with a woman in reaction to an outward fear of being dishonourably discharged as an embarrassment and potentially jailed.

The obvious contrast between these two experiences of the military was that Suzy had time to reflect, read and consider her sexuality and her future within the military. Her pivotal trans moment was not when the openly gay recruiter told her not to go into the services, but instead when she had time in the desert on deployment to reflect.<sup>51</sup> Suzy decided the military lifestyle was not for her. At the beginning she felt 'brainwashed' by family pride and involvement in the military but at the end she clearly wanted something more suited to her gender identity and sexuality. However, Suzy was aware of the level of self-policing and monitoring she had to undergo to maintain her masculinity within the

---

<sup>49</sup> Suzy, interview (2016).

<sup>50</sup> V. Turner, 'Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology', *Rice Institute Pamphlet - Rice University Studies*, 60:3 (1974), p. 58.

<sup>51</sup> Boyd and Ramirez, *Bodies of Evidence*, p. 7.

army, despite her slight frame and difficulty in gaining weight. She stated ‘I mean I was, I had to of course, hide everything of how I really felt. Like even how I stood or how I talked, just constantly on my mind and always will be [chuckles]’.<sup>52</sup> This suggested that Suzy had not yet conquered her parents’ installation in her psyche of ideal masculinity derived from her childhood experiences. Instead she continued to self-police and monitor as a consequence even though at the time of interview she was living full time as a trans woman.

Katy’s narrative of her time in the military further described being caught, discharged from the military and forced into aversion therapy, which she portrayed as being left ‘sexless’ and confused about what to do next; whether to go home or find an ‘alternative lifestyle’<sup>53</sup>:

...ummmm, after my discharge, and some aversion therapy, because I was caught [pauses] ummm, I was pretty much rendered sexless [pauses] and, I honestly didn’t know what to do, whether to go on back home, maybe try to figure out, some alternative lifestyle. By that time, knew that they were doing some surgeries in California, in the United States, in Californian, in Sanford, but ahh [pauses], I didn’t have very much money and I didn’t know what to do... Well, from the different traumas, complex trauma from childhood and PTSD<sup>54</sup> from Vietnam and all of the gender confusion at that time, at the time that I was released...

They caught some of the guys while I was having aversion therapy, Lorna. That’s when I was the most helpless. One of the orderlies would shoot me up with morphine or, heroine [pauses], different kinds of drugs [pauses]. It was strangely paradoxical [pauses]. On one hand, missing Vic so badly, he had been killed in a night operation, we took quite a few mortar attacks...ummmm, [pauses]. On one hand, I really enjoyed the attention and the drugs but on the other hand of course I was outraged that they were doing that to me and I [pauses and sighs], I’m not sure, I think maybe if I could have gotten my hands on, on a weapon I might have killed them, but

---

<sup>52</sup> Suzy, interview (2016).

<sup>53</sup> Katy, interview (2016).

<sup>54</sup> Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

I couldn't. Th-That situation was just not possible. I was in a mental ward and we didn't have weapons.

...On being released from treatment and the service, and uh having been able to make a deal with the head shrink at that hospital in Yokuska [Yokosuka] Japan, that I would not try to press any charges against the service if they would give me an honourable discharge. So, I got released with an honourable. But from the aversion therapy rendered fairly sexless and uh, I was just kind of drifting and rudderless at that time and uh, [pauses] [Hidesbury] sounded good but I just decided to go to college and the profs at that time, I wasn't the only strung out on alcohol and drugs Vietnam vet by any means and they were pretty easy on us if we just showed any effort at all they would usually get us through the classes, it was. And some of them had been Korean veterans themselves, and there was a sort of brotherhood or sisterhood.<sup>55</sup>

Katy's narrative felt laboured and embedded in fresh confusion and frustration while reflecting on this point in her life. Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki state that:

On one level, the stories are constructed because difficult and nonlinear memories are nearly impossible to communicate, and they have to be "made a story." On another level, stories are constructed in the interest of "making sense" of these experiences: giving them meaning, finding a place for them in one's identity... being able to live with these memories...<sup>56</sup>

Katy's memory of this time was filled with emotion and difficulty in retelling but brought composure and meaning to her narrative.<sup>57</sup> Her sense of self suggested her liminality was 'dark, invisible, like a planet in eclipse or the moon between phases; they are stripped of names and clothing, smeared with the common earth, rendered indistinguishable from animals'.<sup>58</sup> She was stripped by drugs, aversion therapy, the navy and her loss of Vic, leaving her both physically and psychologically indistinguishable.

---

<sup>55</sup> Katy, interview (2016).

<sup>56</sup> A. Sheftel., and S. Zembrzycki., 'Only Human: A Reflection on the Ethical and Methodological Challenges of Working with "Difficult" Stories', *The Oral History Review*, 37:2 (2010), p. 201.

<sup>57</sup> Sheftel and Zembrzycki, 'Only Human', p. 205.

<sup>58</sup> Turner, 'Liminal to Liminoid', p. 59.

Katy was only 20 years old at the time and she had experienced more than the average person would have.

The adaptations Katy made at this juncture in her life, according to Mandelbaum's life history framework analysis were 'to cope with new conditions' associated with her traumatic experiences and her powerlessness, both at the hands of the aversion therapy orderlies, and in her abuse by the navy.<sup>59</sup> Granted, she did regain some power and agency when discharged honourably - keeping her veteran benefits. Katy's narrative was punctuated by pauses and reflections thus seemingly fulfilling Sheftel and Zembrzycki's argument that narrators need to make sense of their own experience and story.<sup>60</sup> Despite not probing Katy to go deeper into her memories of these traumatic experiences, they still showed her strength and resilience: she was not willing to give up her psyche, her body, and her life despite being left addicted and confused about her identity, belonging, and future. Katy's narrative was a complex interconnected web of survival, agency and strength.

What puzzled me when reflecting on this portion of narrative was Katy's willingness to return to southwestern Illinois. It was a state which she herself described as narrow-minded and the social and cultural outlook made her the victim of violent abuse. It could suggest that returning to familiar and in a sense, comfortable ground was easier than starting new after her heightened level of trauma and drug exposure, dare I say returning home was 'better the devil you know'. I found the thought of Katy returning to such an oppressive space unfathomable especially having gained a wider world

---

<sup>59</sup> Mandelbaum, 'The Study', p. 181.

<sup>60</sup> Sheftel and Zembrzycki, 'Only Human', p. 205



experience in Vietnam. It was feasible that she felt there was no choice but to go back. In addition, Katy did not mention being in touch with family or returning to their care for help or support after the war. It made me reflect on whether this portion of her life was difficult to recall because of so many intertwining elements of her experience - the level of drug and alcohol abuse experienced, her sexlessness and lack of identity which included her the state of her mental health - on return from Japan.

Instead of returning home Katy decided to go to college [she did not disclose the location or name of the college]. She shared she was not the only ‘strung out Vet’ in her class.<sup>61</sup> The performance of ‘just turning up’ under the influence of drugs and alcohol was good enough for professors of the time whom themselves were war veterans [Katy did not share which war/s the professors were veterans of]<sup>62</sup>:

**Katy:** So, my grade point average wasn’t great or anything but I did get through college and I married a farm girl from that area. Which was not fair to her [sighs].

**Lorna:** Why did you marry her?

**Katy:** In the attempt to be normal. Ahhh, knowing deep down in my heart I was not normal in any way shape or form. It was a way that I could keep up the façade of being normal. And uh, we had a daughter and I was so strung out on drugs that they couldn’t stay with me. And that’s, that’s, it’s only right, it’s only sensible.

**Lorna:** How did you feel though?

**Katy:** I understood, I wouldn’t have stay with me either. And, that took me back to some of the gay lifestyle and I had some better experiences, even after the aversion therapy, several years later then with some men then...Thought I would try teaching for a few years but ummm, every evening after work I’d have to dress and I was still having a pretty serious problem with alcohol and [pauses] just decided to look for some other way to conduct the rest of my life and went out on the road and ended up

---

<sup>61</sup> Vet is short for Veteran [of the armed forces].

<sup>62</sup> Katy, interview (2016).

[pauses] in a commune in Oregon with a wonderful bunch of women, a lesbian commune, where they just accepted me completely. I was one of the only ones who wore dresses and skirts [laughs] but they accepted me just the same...the gender dysphoria was getting extreme. If any one of them would have offered to lay my penis on a tree stump and chop it off for me, I would have said, "let's do it." Uh, I was so tired of being a male by then, being taken for a male. Uh, [pauses], but they didn't. They just accepted me for who I was. I don't know if that thought ever crossed their mind like it crossed my mind. Then, family matters. My dad's health, with some cancer, and his ultimate death, took my back to Illinois, where I tried [pauses] to [pauses], maintain a very, very low-key life of cross-dressing secretly. Living with my aunt and uh, drinking too much and getting back into drugs.<sup>63</sup>

Complexity featured in this portion of Katy's narrative as she skimmed over her married life, highlighting the unfairness of the situation on her wife and daughter in her pursuit of gender normativity. Her pause and sigh spoke volumes about driving her family away because of her sustained drug and alcohol use. In turn, after graduating successfully from college, trying out a normal profession of teaching did not appeal, and Katy returned to her initial idea of finding an 'alternative lifestyle' which was fulfilled by joining a lesbian commune. Her acceptance as a woman by the women meant a great deal and Katy was able to be herself - wearing skirts and dresses and feeling accepted in her femininity, despite her overwhelming dysphoria. Upon returning home to be a part of her father's life, Katy resumed her childhood habits of self-policing, oppression and secrecy stating, 'family matters'.<sup>64</sup> The following narrative contained a quick succession of descriptive changes - of the 'consciousness to language, from the denotive to the performative' and a phase of liminality that Katy felt she would never escape<sup>65</sup>:

---

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> J. Sangster., 'Politics and Praxis in Canadian Working-Class Oral History', in A. Sheftel and S. Zembrzycki (eds.), *Oral History Off the Record: Toward an Ethnography of Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) p. 65.

One New Year's Eve party, back in my college town, where I'd gone to college, I still had quite a few friends down there. I decided I was going to dress in public! And, I put on one of my nicest long wool skirts and went to this party dressed. And that night I drank too much but I didn't do any drugs. Which is another story, uh. That night, instead of feeling like a boy or a male person in female clothes, that night something wonderful and magical happened and I became a woman that night [pauses]. Uh, it's very difficult to explain. That shift inside where, you're just no longer acting, but you have become who you are, what you wanted to be for so long, all those nights, in my childhood praying that I might wake up a girl, and then, having it actually happen in a way. Woah, but of course, what to do? I was literally scared shitless.

I got back out here to Colorado and I didn't, I had no idea of where to proceed [sighs]. And I had a full-time job as a school bus driver and mechanic [pauses]. Well, as fate would have it, I found a therapist, who would help me. And after we worked through some of my gender issues and I fulfilled the time requirement to get on oestrogen, then she started realising how bad my PTSD was and we started working on PTSD. And, uh, it was like, [pauses], it was like I was able, my whole life just turned around magically, Lorna. I didn't have to. I had started to go to AA<sup>66</sup> and NA<sup>67</sup> to try to quit doing drugs and stop drinking, just because I wanted to clean my act up, but after getting on the hormones, it just all fell away. I was able to, with no effort. I was able to stop drinking and stop doing drugs and I'm sure there have been other trans people who have had similar experiences too when they get the right hormone in their body. It makes such a difference in [pauses] how we feel about ourselves and how we can start...better late than never, started treating my body kindly again, and decided I wanted to do the, go for the whole nine yards and ah [pauses] Marci Bowers was doing surgeries down in Trinidad Colorado at that time.<sup>68</sup>

So, I went to a couple of the Gold Rushes at that time were put on by the Gender Center here in Denver, and met Marci and decided to finally, depen-by this time, I know I sound like I probably skipped around a bit but it's hard to summaries things in this short of an interview. By this time, I was in my 50's. I just decided [pauses], I'm going to live the rest of my life as authentically and transparently as I can. And that means for me, living as a transsexual woman, ahhh, some people would just say, 'as a woman', but I have spent enough time as a male person that now I kind of

---

<sup>66</sup> Alcoholics Anonymous.

<sup>67</sup> Narcotics Anonymous.

<sup>68</sup> Dr. Marci Bowers, M.D., is, 'widely recognized as a pioneer in the field of Genital Reassignment Surgery and is the first transgender woman to perform transgender surgery'. Dr. Bowers worked in Trinidad Colorado from 2003-2006, where she then moved to practice in California, <https://marcibowers.com/mtf/dr-bowers/>, consulted: 11/10/16.

prefer to acknowledge that so, I identify as a transwoman. Ahh, my family would have none of this, so I put a topper on the back of my pickup truck and mattress in the back and drove myself down to Trinidad. I'm proud of my determination and my intentionality that I did that. Ahh, and, I never had a very, very high income, but it was sufficient from working at the bus barn where I worked, to be able to get enough credit to afford the operation.<sup>69</sup>

Katy quickly covered her life here from her 20s until her 50s; her pivotal trans moment in her 'magical' change which she could not put into words; successfully getting on hormones - another major adaptation, biologically, physically and socially - as well as living full time as a woman and pursuing gender reassignment surgery (GRS) from Dr. Bowers.<sup>70</sup> I additionally examined Katy's silences in between these times: Alexander Freund often talks about silences as expressing individual or collective forgetting, reluctance and discomfort amongst others.<sup>71</sup> It felt that Katy selectively silenced her wife and child during her journey of discovery, reflecting Clifford's view that 'the most painful moments of lived experience, the ones associated with the most troubling memories, can be difficult, if not impossible, to describe in their emotional complexity'.<sup>72</sup> There was no indication from Katy of a healed or even distant relationship with her family.

I reflected on whether Katy's father - having died from cancer - played a part in her acceptance of her trans identity as he had instilled her masculinity when she was a child and made her most ashamed of her identity, pushing her into a place of secretive cross-dressing - which she freely admitted to recommencing on returning home. Additionally, it could be argued that Katy's symptoms of PTSD as well as her drug and

---

<sup>69</sup> Katy, interview (2016).

<sup>70</sup> Mandelbaum, 'The Study', p. 181; Boyd and Ramirez, *Bodies of Evidence*, p. 7.

<sup>71</sup> A. Freund., 'Toward an Ethics of Silence? Negotiating Off-the-Record Events and Identity in Oral History', in A. Sheftel and S. Zembrzycki (eds.), *Oral History Off the Record: Toward an Ethnography of Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 223.

<sup>72</sup> Clifford, 'Emotions and Gender', p. 217.

alcohol abuse were tied up in her gender dysphoria. Military research shows that ‘early experience of neglect, physical or sexual abuse are likely to increase the risk of mental health problems, and joining the military is also associated with higher rates of reported ‘adverse childhood experiences’ for both men and women in the US’.<sup>73</sup> In her having the time to pick these apart - identifying the individual strands of trauma, where they separated out and how they affected her everyday life – Katy found them to be life-affirming and life-changing. According to Katy, her healing came from accessing the GIC and engaging with a therapist, who was skilled enough to separate out Katy’s trauma from her gender identity. This brought Katy to a point of healing and progression where she could access hormones and in turn feel the change within herself, reflecting her endeavour to become who she wanted to be and live authentically.

Moreover, Katy’s description of her magical pivotal trans moment in feeling like a woman rather than pretending to be one was such an individual narrative. The pace with which she shared it as well as the tone of her voice and her engagement confirmed that she believed this was as in Mandelbaum’s life history narrative analysis, a major transition and turning point.<sup>74</sup> Mandelbaum describes it as ‘relatively more ascribed or self-chosen, prescribed or improvised, quick or protracted, but each provides an index to the person’s conduct after the turning’.<sup>75</sup> It had a tangible sense of making up for all of those past experiences when she was caught, beaten up or had to dress in secret. In addition, I did not hear this kind of wording or statement from any other of the narrators I interviewed;

---

<sup>73</sup> H. Cornish., ‘Gender, Mental Health and the Military’, in R. Woodward and C. Duncanson (eds.), *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 278.

<sup>74</sup> Boyd and Ramirez, *Bodies of Evidence*, p. 7; Mandelbaum, ‘The Study’, p. 181.

<sup>75</sup> Mandelbaum, ‘The Study’, p. 181.

there was acceptance and comfort in making a gradual change to a place of authenticity, but it was never described as ‘magical’. It could be likened to a religious or spiritual awakening. To put it another way, it sounded like a gender epiphany, if there is such a thing. It brought major turnings to Katy, according to her narrative, in what was a noticeably short space of time and described as life-changing and affirming.

Having a pro-bono counselling role in the GIC, Katy had to see a client and therefore it was decided mutually to have one interview split into two on the same day. On return to the second half of the interview Katy had clearly reflected on what she had told me in the first half, and she expressed what she had shared could have potentially been communicated as ‘tragic’. However, Katy expressed that escaping one’s town for the military was ‘not uncommon’ and that young men such as she felt that it was patriotic to serve their country:

I’m not going to fault the patriotism or the patriotism of any of my friends in going to serve, the fact that we were probably lied to and misled seems evident now...So, after having explained that just a little bit more, I would have to say that some of the reason why, I relate that part of my story now, [pauses] especially, probably the rapes, is because rather than it harming my spirit, I think that it has made me a stronger woman now. Ummm, a survivor and, uh, it’s well documented now, that almost 50 percent of reported rapes, rapes in the military to the Department of Defence and the VA<sup>76</sup> are from male people. So, while I thought it was unusual at the time, for somebody who identified as male, to be an assault victim, it’s not that really uncommon at all. And especially in the situation I was in, it was [pauses], it was, [pauses], I wouldn’t say it was inevitable but not all that unusual.<sup>77</sup>

It was interesting that Katy felt the need to justify or attempt to change her seemingly ‘tragic’ narrative and its impact on me or potentially herself. There was a

---

<sup>76</sup> Veterans Association

<sup>77</sup> Katy, interview (2016).

definite element of tragedy - that so many negative experiences happened to one person in such a short life - but I also heard Katy's story of survival and her position of not taking a victim role, despite what she perceived. After the interviews had finished, Katy and I continued to converse in the main lounge area of the GIC while there were no other individuals in to use the Center's services and therefore maintaining an air of confidentiality. She told me that she had approached the Veteran's Association [VA] after her discharge on return to the US from Japan. She had also approached the military in order to seek support and counselling for her sexual assault experiences while in Vietnam. She described her apprehension as she approached the VA and spoke to the woman on the desk in reception. Katy told the receptionist discreetly what had happened to her at the hands of her platoon, asking if she could receive help. Katy told me then that the receptionist had in no uncertain terms asked her what she had done to make her platoon rape her because 'she must have done something'. Katy described on hearing this she turned on her heel and walked out of the building, shocked and horrified. None of the other narrators within the cohort who had enlisted in the military - because it enabled them to conceal their gender variance from themselves, and their families - shared experiences of being sexually assaulted while serving. This does not mean it did not happen, they just did not share it with me.

Katy told me of returning back to Colorado and the ease of transition 'clicking and falling into place'.<sup>78</sup> However, her colleagues at her work did not accept her as a trans woman:

---

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

I went from being pretty popular person to experiencing quite a bit of transphobic, transmisogynistic bigotry. But they were who they were, and even that was totally worth it. I mean, in the way that I did work enough to get my retirement benefit, and once again, just being challenged, it, it uh [pauses], strengthens your resolve. Having that kind of resistance. It was pleasant, but, I wouldn't do it again, but...it was tolerable.<sup>79</sup>

Katy experienced transphobic discrimination reflecting the findings of *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey*, which stated that 90% of surveyed trans individuals who were out at work 'reported experiencing harassment or mistreatment on the job or took actions to avoid it' and 47% said they had experienced an adverse job outcome, such as being fired...because of being transgender/gender non-conforming; 26% of respondents said that they had lost a job due to being transgender or gender non-conforming.<sup>80</sup> Despite this, Katy went onto describe removing her mother out of a care home - in which her estranged sister had put her into - to live with Katy until her death. Interestingly, and surprising to Katy her actions brought her and her sister back together during the process. Again however, there was no mention of Katy's wife or daughter within her narrative maintaining silence on the subject.

On being made redundant, Katy's therapist recommended she return to school to become a therapist for trans individuals:

I had never been much of a student and I have to admit that I was doubting my ahh, ability, but she was very encouraging...So, umm, I checked out several different schools here in Colorado and uh got accepted to a couple...that is just about where this brings us.

I was interning at, a local community action agency in Alamosa and I was I interning at the mental health center there. And just [sighs], this just shows how, even just a couple of years ago, down in the San Luis Valley

---

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> J M., Grant, L A. Mottet, J Tanis, J Harrison, J L. Herman, and M Keisling., *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey* (Washington: National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2011), p. 51.



there was this much [sighs] transphobia. Uh, I was let go from both those positions when I outed myself. In one instance, I was talking to a nurse who worked with Dr. Stanley Biber, out in the waiting room and the supervisor overheard me. And evidently, they were ok with me working there, but if I actually verbalised my trans status, I don't know, I guess it was kinda like, "don't ask, don't tell" cause I lost both of those intern positions. And I called Karen<sup>81</sup>, and she says sure I'll take you on as an intern...and uh that was summer of two years ago...got my degree and have been working as a pro-bono therapist part time ever since. So, it's been a very, very joyful journey. I have sometimes inspired myself with my tenacity, uh [laughs] because, uh, I think that I was probably one of the older women to go through my graduate programme...and I was absolutely sure I was the first transgender woman to go through the programme. I hope that I will not be the last. But yet, that is one sad commentary on the gender community. There really went many of use that seem to want to become qualified to do this work...I certainly hope to see that change for the better.

**Lorna:** Why do you think that is Katy?

**Katy:** Well [pauses], I can only speculate but I've always had some, uh, self-respect issues [pauses]. Having been, to some degree as I've already related Lorna, picked on and bullied, and ahh, I think that we've just now begun to feel good enough about ourselves [pauses], to believe that we can do a lot of those things...but things are changing enough now that we're becoming, actually accepted enough that we will have the amount of wherewithal and self-respect necessary and go ahead and pursue those kind of things more and more and I hope that we do. For me, as I said, it was my therapist that encouraged me, that I would have the ability ahh, to get through that sort of a programme and [pauses] ahh, I didn't say this, but uh, she was also trans and so, just as I would encourage any trans person that I was working with here at the Center, and I do, if I see the potential in them. I try to encourage them too. Not that I don't totally appreciate our cis-gender allies. I certainly do because we're such a small little percentage [laughs], we need all the help and support we can get. But still, I think there is I believe that there is [pauses] a new day dawning for the trans community, just like there has been for the LGB community...<sup>82</sup>

This final section of narrative contained so much hope, reconciliation and optimism for Katy. Her air of tenacity - which impressed her at times - was certainly on show: on how far she had come, how much she had survived and how she exceeded her

---

<sup>81</sup> Dr Karen Scarpella, Director of the GIC in 2016.

<sup>82</sup> Katy, interview (2016).

own expectations for herself both academically and physically. Despite Katy not expressing an outward involvement in activism within the community, she was clearly an activist on an individual level: encouraging those around her, especially her trans clients and friends to go for what they wanted despite the odds and possible consequences – losing family, friends and employment in the process. In liminality theory Katy reached a new ‘fixed state’, meaning she had passed through the earlier liminal phases and reached a place where she was stable in her own identity both physically and psychologically.<sup>83</sup>

With few regrets Katy said:

I am just so grateful and so thankful that I am one of the people that was born at this time where we could actually have hormones and have surgery and get to experience things from both sides. Uh, it’s not something that everybody gets to experience and it’s a really wonderful and joyful experience and while I wouldn’t wish it on anybody, I am thankful that I am one of those people.<sup>84</sup>

Katy may be viewed as typical transgender life history narrative - knowing and feeling like a girl rather than a boy since birth and cross-dressing from an early age whenever and wherever she could. However, Katy was also a story of her time and reflected Stryker’s statement in relation to transgender theory that ‘we understand genders as potentially porous and permeable spatial territories (arguable numbering more than two), each capable of supporting rich and rapidly proliferating ecologies of embodied difference’.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, all the narratives featured in this chapter reflect these fluid and spatial territories, relating directly to each narrators’ pivotal trans moments. Each one had the potential to be permeable but were supported or quashed differently depending on

---

<sup>83</sup> Turner, ‘Betwixt and Between’, pp. 46-47.

<sup>84</sup> Katy, interview (2016).

<sup>85</sup> Stryker et al, ‘Introduction: Trans-, Trans, or Transgender?’, *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly*, 36:3/4 (2008), p. 18.

narrators social and familial influences and situation: gender normative parents and siblings, relationships to peers, societal position with regards to their learned outlook on gender and the gender binary and its adherence. They reflected the unique stages each narrator was at in their gender journey, whether in a liminal or solid state of change or authenticity. Each tied to their actions and pursuit of stepping out of the gender binary. Interconnected with these moments are transgender theory's fundamental underpinnings: the fluidity of embodiment, the entirely self and socially constructed aspects of identity intertwining with the dynamic interaction and the integration of these aspects of identity which exist and are created within narratives of Katy, Maddie and Suzy and the spectrum of their lived experiences within this chapter.<sup>86</sup> Katy however, was the oldest narrator in the cohort and it was important to share Katy's narrative first in the selected full-life history narratives, not only because of its uniqueness, but to also show that despite adversity associated with America's gender norms trans people do survive and lead fulfilling, authentic lives and are not just the marginalised, voiceless, victims as portrayed in popular culture. Katy -at the time of interview- was firm in her statement that America society is changing positively for trans and gender-variant people and for their rights to equality and visibility despite its historiography's omission of their voices. Katy's voice was a strong voice to begin with but bringing Suzy's and Maddie's voices in to enhance and converse with Katy's narrative - in their similarities and differences - brought narrative richness and contrast with Katy's history

---

<sup>86</sup> Nagoshi and Brzuzy, 'Transgender Theory', p. 432.

## **Chapter 5 Trans women's lived experiences: A Native American narrative**

I have chosen to feature Corina next because her Native American heritage makes her the only voice of colour within the cohort of narrators in this study. I had never met Corina prior to our interview but she had kindly volunteered via an email sent out by the GIC's director and we arranged to meet in a room I rented in Loveland Public Library in Colorado around 50 miles north of Denver. I was excited to meet Corina and hear her story as she had never been interviewed before. We met in the foyer of the library and as Corina approached, I was struck by her beauty and stature. Her hair was straight and mid brown with blonde highlights, and she wore a tight turquoise top which contrasted with skin tone and Native American silver feather necklace and earrings. She wore skin-tight jeans and brown boots. She smiled and shook my hand. Corina was very softly spoken in her greeting and we quickly built a rapport as we moved to the room where the interview would take place. It was a large conference room with glass walls and a projector, table and chairs to seat 10 or more. It was not as intimate as the GIC's therapy rooms, but I felt confident that it would still serve its purpose. The priority was for Corina's story to be heard and recorded. I was very excited to hear what Corina would kindly share with me during the interview.

Corina's pace, rhythm and narration throughout her interview differed greatly from Katy's, which I noticed from the outset. Her pace was slow and steady, and she was careful in what she shared, reflexively navigating her way through her narrative. Moreover, she had the added pressure of being interviewed by a researcher, which I could empathise with in making her wary or more reflexive in her answers. Lynn Abrams states that reflexivity in a life history interview is to be expected because of the intersubjective

role the interviewer plays in the recalling and retelling of the story, but adds that ‘reflexivity - or reflection on the self - is being actively created in the interview’.<sup>1</sup> Gergen and Gergen argue ‘stories are not simply told about a pre-existing self but that stories...bring phenomenologically real “true selves” into being’.<sup>2</sup> This may have been especially true for Corina as a transwoman and first time interviewee who was attempting to construct a public narrative that reflected her inner one.<sup>3</sup> Corina’s narration also reflected Mandelbaum’s statement concerning narration not being a linear venture.<sup>4</sup> She darted about her life story - telling it in pieces, which I avoided interrupting at the time of recording. There were times however when I asked Corina questions which focused her narrative specifically on her trans identity throughout her life history, prompting her to recall those important developments.

Corina was one of the older narrators in the cohort at 50 years old. She was born and partially raised in St. Louis, Missouri. She referred to growing up on a small farm of five acres, but at no point did she refer to it as a reservation. Corina stated she got to ‘roam free...we were always walking or hiking, or something’.<sup>5</sup> Corina described herself as an only child - adopted at 3 months old by her step father after her mother divorced her biological father and mother remarried. Corina said her ‘name was changed at that time to Duncan’<sup>6</sup> replacing her Native American name of Feather. In having said she was an only child she expressed that she had a half brother and sister, although she did not clarify

---

<sup>1</sup> Abrams, *Oral*, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> K.J. Gergen., and M. M. Gergen., “Narratives of the Self”, in T.R. Sarbin and K.E. Scheibe (eds.), *Studies in Social Identity* (New York: Praeger, 1983), p. 266.

<sup>3</sup> D. Mason-Schrock., ‘Transsexuals’ Narrative Construction of the “True Self”’, *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 59:3 (1997), p. 177.

<sup>4</sup> See Mandelbaum, ‘The Study’, p. 181.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Corina Feather Duncan, (1<sup>st</sup> June 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Corina, interview (2016).

where she stood in the pecking order within the family. In reclaiming her Native American tribe name of Feather as an adult it made me reflect on whether describing herself as an only child related directly to her Native heritage. Her step-father had a full-time job at ‘Continental Can Company’ as a ‘millwright mechanic, worked on the machines’ so the farm was not used for farming.<sup>7</sup> Corina’s mother was an office manager until retirement.

Corina shared that she was Native American and this meant ‘I have got to have the outdoors, and I’ve got to run free and I enjoyed it thoroughly’.<sup>8</sup> She described having a diverse group of childhood friends in Missouri, mostly minority ‘Black and Hispanic’ and felt she ‘fitted in’ with minorities.<sup>9</sup> Corina expressed having a childhood friend with whom she did everything. However, she did not engage that well in school early on feeling that it took her away from the time spent outside that she treasured. Already Corina’s childhood contrasted significantly with both Katy’s and Suzy’s, both of whom experienced bullying from peers or family because of their outward femininity, or ‘oddness’, resulting in periods of isolation despite both having one or two close friends throughout childhood and adolescence.

In talking about her childhood education, Corina expressed that in moving from St. Louis to Kremmling, Colorado in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade [typically age 11 or 12] there was a lack of diversity in her school peers, but it did not really matter to her ‘it didn’t strike me,

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

it didn't shock me'.<sup>10</sup> She did not 'get much into school' until relocating. The geography of the move itself was clearly a significant turning point in Corina's life as she stated:

...something happened when we hit the Rocky Mountains. We climbed up, and I don't know if you've been there but it's off i70 [Interstate 70], ummmm, just passed about Genesee [Colorado], there's a bridge. And you go through that bridge on i70 and what you see is a picturesque front range, white capped mountains and coming from St. Louis, that was AMAZING. And that took my breath away, and also all my memories [laughs] of my, of my Missouri life because I was ready for that. That was just amazing.

Corina's pace of speech as she described seeing the Rockies is the same pace as when she described being Native American and her inherent need for the outdoors; which I feel suggested simultaneous reflexivity and measured storytelling, indicating she took pleasure in reflecting on her journey and articulating exactly what she felt.<sup>11</sup> This paired with the awe of experiencing the Rockies for the first time and venturing into a new period in her life clearly had an effect, not just on her future but on wiping her memories of the past as she most articulately said. Moreover, nature was a major influence in Corina's narrative: openly engaging with it contributed to her wellbeing and happiness. This reflected the writings of Linda Moon Stumpff - an indigenous activist - who states that 'Native American perspective grows out of the multiple and watershed specific practical experience with real natural processes. As a well-spring of life, wildlands are sacred bench marks' and the 'deep connection to wildlands is embedded in philosophy and spirit. These are the places of the origin of life and its sustenance'.<sup>12</sup> Corina too straddled multiple liminal phases at this point in her life: her Native American heritage; moving

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Alessandro Portelli discusses changes in narrative rhythm and pace in 'What Makes Oral History Different' (1998), stating there are no hard and fast rules for interpreting changes, but that they are normal and singularly introduced by the narrator, p. 34.

<sup>12</sup> L.M. Stumpff., 'The Essence of the Wild: Native American Perspectives and Practices', *Environmental Practice*, 1:2 (1999), p. 75.

from a rural farm in Missouri to city living and losing friends of colour from her life. However, her love of nature never diminished. Within this phase Corina can be described as the ‘passenger’ moving through an ambiguous ‘realm’ containing none of the attributes of her past or coming state.<sup>13</sup> Her narrative in this instance reminded me of Katy who also used her connection with nature and the outdoors as a way of escape, of solitude and relief from the bullying she experienced throughout her childhood and adolescence. However, there is a simultaneous connection between sadness and joy in Katy’s involvement with nature ‘When I was ten, my dad actually got me a canoe...I spent quite a bit of time out on the river, because that gave me the opportunity to be by myself, to be alone...’<sup>14</sup>.

In conveying her engagement in school during 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades [age 11-14] of Junior High - unlike Katy but much like Suzy - Corina enjoyed sports and was picked out by a coach in her school because of her height, for basketball. She said she spent every summer:

by myself...but I was always at the court...by myself, but I just loved it. It kind of removed from Missouri, to Colorado, and went from being in the outdoors to being in town. And I think my outdoors, got taken from me and being in sports was the next best thing for me. I was able to run, and basketball was heaven for me because I could release all my energy.<sup>15</sup>

Like Katy, Corina spent time by herself when playing sports despite having peers and a team to play with. In some ways her narrative parallels Katy’s here though Corina did not discuss loneliness or isolation. She said she would enlist friends to play basketball with her if she could but mostly, she was alone. Corina additionally mentions her

---

<sup>13</sup> Turner, ‘Betwixt and Between’, p. 46.

<sup>14</sup> Katy, interview (2016).

<sup>15</sup> Corina, interview (2016).



connection to nature when playing basketball outside showing her resilience in having the insight to compare her love of performing sports in the city to a similar sensation of running free on the farm in Missouri.

Corina's sporting career extended to track [running] and American football in Junior high, but she dropped the latter soon after choosing basketball and track as her main sports and energy outlets. Corina did not comment further on her involvement in sports, nor on her connection to school after this. However, she did express her want to become a teacher, but her parents did not help her pay for college, nor did her teachers help her apply for scholarships lamenting that she did not ask for help. Corina sadly expressed 'I think about this all the time'.<sup>16</sup>

Instead of further education Corina left school and turned to odd jobs; disk jockey, construction worker and a cleaner at a ski resort solely for the lift pass, eventually finding a job making 'lots of money' and in quick succession got married and had a family. Prior to this - and integral to Corina's overall narrative - she described becoming bored in the three or four years after leaving school, stating she started drinking as consequence. Corina abruptly stopped to reflect admitting '...I was always drinking, since I was 15. I got 3 speeding tickets in a row and lost my licence, so I had to stay back with Mom and Dad. So, I was 21 or 22...I wasn't amounting to much'.<sup>17</sup> I found this statement interesting, because it initially seemed as though Corina had begun drinking out of her disappointment in the authority figures in her life; parents and teachers not taking an interest in her wanting to become a teacher. However, she corrected herself, admitting

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

she had been drinking for a much longer period. Her pauses and reflections made me initially reflect on whether Corina felt like she only wanted me to hear the good parts of her life. I felt her instinct was that I would feel burdened by this information or alternatively it could have indicated some shame surrounding her alcohol use. It made me reflect on Corina's sporting abilities and how she revelled in the physicality and freedom of basketball and how it conflicted with her use of alcohol. On questioning Corina further about why she started drinking at 15 she said that everybody else in her school was doing it and she was working in the town's grocery store, which gave her the ability to steal a six pack of beer:

I remember, it was the first time I ever drank, and it was incredible, the way my head felt after I drank it. I was like, light and I had never felt anything like that before and I just wanted more. I found out later that you know, Indians have a hard time with alcohol, and I think that was in my system, because I turned into an alcoholic...<sup>18</sup>

Corina became an alcoholic but did not realise this until 2011, when she began attending Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). She shared she had been drinking for 28 years before realising and in asking her how it felt to reflect on it being 28 years she exclaimed, 'Ah-ha! I never have before! [pauses] It's kind of a shock to think about that, it's gone by that much, that I've drank that'.<sup>19</sup> I wanted to be sensitive to her reaction and not probe any further into her alcoholism as I was aware that it would most likely return throughout her narrative. I also felt that this moment was what Abrams refers to as a form of 'self-revelation' - in Corina's first efforts at telling her story - it was not a revised section of

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

her self-narrative, as it can be with other seasoned narrators.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, I moved onto asking her about how she met her spouse.

The following full paragraph of Corina's narrative has been featured because of the transition she makes from talking about her upbringing: what would be considered as a typical childhood and adolescence, to meeting her wife and introducing cross-dressing into her narrative. It is lengthy but gives excellent insight into Corina's memory: looking back on her situation at the time and making sense of the past<sup>21</sup>:

So umm, at the time, I think I was 22 or 23 and ummm, gosh [pauses], I was drinking quite a bit. An, and looking back, I think I was drinking quite a bit because I was dressing more as a woman. I would go out and buy clothing, women's clothing and dress up and I think I drank because I didn't understand it. I didn't understand trans until 2011. Anything else was ummm, pornographic, was not a healthy thought. So, I was really confused and drinking and dressing and met her. Met her at a club. I dressed in the closet, so I was in the closet this whole time...and ummmm, I dunno, we really hit it off. To this day, we still see each other...we're divorced...But I think I was looking to get away from dressing, and when I was with her, I didn't feel like dressing and I thought, 'this must be right, this must be good'. But at a certain point after that I started dressing again, in private, in the closet. But, for, for a brief amount of time and I think it was the newness of the relationship, I didn't want to do that anymore.<sup>22</sup>

Corina's reflexivity in examining how she met her future wife was in line with Mandelbaum's life history analysis structure: a forced adaptation with limited success, suppressing a pivotal trans moment because she denied her transness.<sup>23</sup> Corina explicitly stated that she wanted to cross-dress, thus her goal was to use her new relationship as a deterrent to police and deflect her gender variance. Her adaptation therefore was forced

---

<sup>20</sup> Abrams, *Oral*, p. 51.

<sup>21</sup> Portelli, 'What Makes', p. 38.

<sup>22</sup> Corina, interview (2016).

<sup>23</sup> Mandelbaum, 'The Study', p. 182; Boyd and Ramirez, *Bodies of Evidence*, p. 7.

and contained in ‘adapting to new conditions’.<sup>24</sup> This was confirmed in how short-lived the deterrent was; Corina seemingly felt the relationship was potentially a remarkable cure or mythical charm which would constrict the urge to explore her transness in relation to its longevity within her life and her future. I regret not asking Corina if she also stopped drinking when she stopped dressing; in reading this passage, it was clearly wrapped up in her ‘confusion’. Did she also pursue sobriety along with her policing behaviour and adaptation? Addiction organisations talk about a similar action called ‘addiction replacement’ which is usually for those in a place of recovery.<sup>25</sup> It would have been extremely interesting to have found this out. It would also have indicated her level of faith or willingness to believe that this relationship could, for want of a better word, miraculously make her ‘normal’ - not just in a gender sense but in terms of her addiction.

In addition, Corina clearly equated her biological influences and dimensions with America’s gender ideologies within the societal and cultural influences on her life.<sup>26</sup> Despite her addiction to alcohol as an outcome of suppressing her transness she inherently strived to uphold America’s gender ideals and myths of policing the binary: adhering to stereotypical male roles and normativity, deeming anything other than ‘not a healthy thought’. This adherence also spoke into the adherence of herself and her body to colonialism in direct relation to her Native American identity. Despite this, she was already in engaging in what trans theory deems that ‘...which escapes regulatory processes through crossing or falling outside normative bounds’ in playing with the idea

---

<sup>24</sup> Mandelbaum, ‘The Study’, p. 181.

<sup>25</sup> ‘How to identify an Addiction Replacement has occurred’, *AddictionCenter.com*, March 18, 2016, <https://www.addictioncenter.com/community/addiction-replacement/>, date accessed: 1 June 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Mandelbaum, ‘The Study’, p. 180.

of a fluid gender embodiment and identity, even if it was just in her thinking and intentions<sup>27</sup> Her experience further reflects the essence of liminality theory, in that the liminal body is a 'temporal interface whose properties partially invert those of the already consolidated order', or in the case of Corina, cross-dressing challenged America's gender ideals, despite her resistance.<sup>28</sup> Granted, she described that she did not understand what trans was until 2011 when she was 46. This adherence to the strict binary gender roles puzzled me. Trans or transgender is just a word, it is terminology and was not used until the early 1990s as an umbrella term for gender variance.<sup>29</sup> Corina did not explore who she was for much of her adult life - even though she transgressed the binary ideals regularly through cross-dressing. This was in stark contrast to Sheri - transwoman age 59 and narrator in the cohort.

I met Sheri the first day I began volunteering at the GIC. She was renowned in the Center for her cooking skills, her outspoken nature and as a trustee on the board of the GIC. I found Sheri to be very forthright in her thoughts and feelings around being trans as well as the changes in American society regarding gender in comparison to when she was a child. Sheri met with me in one of the therapy rooms in the Center to tell her story. She happened to be late for our interview and came in on her road bike wearing a long flowing multi-coloured summer skirt, white scoop necked top, sandals and bicycle helmet. Underneath the helmet was long, straight grey hair and she wore wire framed glasses.

---

<sup>27</sup> B. L. Hausman., 'Recent Transgender Theory', *Feminist Studies*, 27:2 (2001), p. 474.

<sup>28</sup> Turner, 'Liminal to Liminoid', p. 74.

<sup>29</sup> D. Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: an ethnography of a category* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 24.

During her interview Sheri spoke of being between the ages of 11 and 14, in junior high from 1968 to 1971 when she went to the University of Colorado libraries regularly to access books on transsexualism of which they had 3 or 4. Sheri expressed ‘I would never check them out, but I’d grab one, and go sit-hide in a corner with a big magazine over it...and I’d read it for hours’.<sup>30</sup> This act reflected Sheri’s first trans connection via Christine Jorgensen. Having grown up in the 1960s in a strict patriarchal, gender normative military household – one which did not embrace trans representation in the form of Christine Jorgensen as positive - she stated:

I’d always kinda had this in, deep in the back of my brain but buried, it was always buried, that this was who I was, but I didn’t know. I mean, back at that time, the only example that anybody had ever heard of was Christine Jorgensen, and in our house Christine Jorgensen was a joke, that was, that was, something you made fun of. I think it was kind of their [her parents] way of saying, this is not ok, so, and besides that, society as a whole was that way, so. So, I grew up thinking I was just really weird and different and there’s only one other person like me in the whole entire world and she’s a joke.<sup>31</sup>

Despite her familial and general societal negative view, she was spurred on to her to find out about and embrace her trans identity and eventually transition. There was the possibility that Corina had not heard of transsexualism, Christine Jorgensen or those preceding her from the 1950s to the 1980s. I felt then that Corina experienced isolation and felt abnormal in her identity - much like other trans individuals - which as a consequence pushed her gender exploration and cross-dressing into a place of secrecy and shame.

---

<sup>30</sup> Sheri, interview (2016).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

Interestingly, this related directly to Sable's own reflections on representation of trans people. I recruited Sable - who was forty-four years old at the time of interview- via email and she agreed to meet with me at her downtown Denver office of a community LGBT charity. I found myself revering her almost immediately as she presented herself as a confident, strong and fierce transwoman. Sable was known positively around the GIC as a vocal transactivist and was highly respected. When I arrived at her office for our interview, we at once built a rapport which centred around my Star Wars t-shirt. Sable had long dark hair and sallow skin. She wore a dark purple zip fleece, a black and white pattern top, black fitted trousers and black flats. Her office was small with no windows, but was glass fronted. Sable's desk and floor was stacked and busy with leaflets, banners and other accoutrements on the run up to Denver Pride 2016.

During our interview, Sable, not only reflected on her thoughts on her queer identity, her transness, but her life under America's mythical gender binary ideals - juggling the world's rejection of trans lives - while internalising messages of womanhood and the danger of expressing them in the wrong body:

So [pauses] I think the social experiences, the social differences I've experienced are more from my awareness of, of my transness and how it interplays in the world and how the world really doesn't want trans people around, like overall, like there's a social dialogue, it doesn't like trans people, it doesn't like trans women, like, ummm, we're not well represented anywhere...it's the intersection and womanhood plus transness and how that, that, the messages I get from society and how that winds up getting internalised in my own stuff...So, yeah. There's eh, one of things that we talk about is that, that trans women get all the same messages that women get growing up, ummm, we're just not to, we're just not allowed to internalise them and if we do internalise them and express

that internalisation then we are met with ummm, violence, either physical or verbal or emotional violence...<sup>32</sup>

Sable hinted at a form of societal/ top-down policing via the internalisation of cultural and societal gender role messages, that mixed with her ‘own stuff’ and expressing without perceived societal permission. This relates directly to Corina and Sheri’s own experiences.

Furthermore, and in contrast to both Sheri and Corina, Sable revealed to me how she embraced her gender variance and queerness from an early age and expressed it visibly, playing the part of the self-professed outcast in high school and remaining popular with her peers. She fiercely owned her trans narrative and was clear that her activism and strength grew from an active awareness of the initial trans rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, and from growing up in the 1970s and 1980s during the trans rights movements ‘Difficult Decades’. She credited her resilience and independence to losing her mother to cancer early in her life.<sup>33</sup> Sable remarked on the lack of role models for trans people during her formative years:<sup>34</sup>

One of the things that I talk about a lot now is the need for role models because there were, there was no sense of role models for trans folks in the 70s and 80s, right? The, you know, I sometimes tote out the character Corporal Klinger from M\*A\*S\*H\* is the closest thing that we had to anybody presenting in any sort of like gender variance on television and Cor and Klinger was a joke, he was, he was doing this for, to get seen as insane, to ummm, and it, and it was just really very awkward for this, this character in these dresses and things like that, and ummm so, really there wasn’t, so there wasn’t any connection with that sort of piece for who I was...<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Sable Shultz; 14<sup>th</sup> June 2016.

<sup>33</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*, pp. 91-121.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.



Klinger's cross-dressing and potential gender variance does not coincide with Sables' view of trans women nor does the character of Klinger provide a representative example for the gender normative audience. As discussed in Chapter 2, this historical representation was built on monstrous tropes, especially those that promoted trans individuals as insane or defying gender norms for a joke. However, this representation did not prevent Sable from becoming who she wanted to be or from involving herself full-time in trans activism. As a teen and as an adult, Sable experimented with her transness in safe spaces such as fetish clubs where goth, androgyny, and Bondage, Discipline, Dominance and Submission (BDSM) were popular fare. Through her experimentation, she worked out that she was queer with a preference for women, and gradually – through meeting and interacting with trans individuals for the first time and seeing their gender expression and trans embodiment - she felt something relatable in herself.<sup>36</sup>

In returning directly to Corina's lack of awareness of trans representation – good or bad - and contrasting significantly with Sable's narrative, was that the internet was a large part of how some of the trans individuals I interviewed learned about their identities and themselves, utilising early chatrooms at the end of the 1980s, building online communities, purchasing hormones online, or investigating surgical options, if wanted.<sup>37</sup> However, Corina's lack of knowledge about her gender variance until 2011 suggests to me, an ongoing discomfort or denial in admitting to herself who she was and what this meant for her life and her future. It could also have indicated an element of resistance in

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Listen to Wilma, Suzy, Jen and Jaqueline's, Luke's and Sable's interviews for examples.

breaking the gender ideological role she had placed herself in and the possible social and familial consequences it could bring.

On asking Corina how long she had been cross-dressing prior to meeting her wife she shared it had started at '6 or 7 years old'. However, her mother had told her a story - of which Corina had no recollection - that when Corina was two years old her mother saw her taking a nap in her [Mothers] panty-hose [tights].<sup>38</sup> She said 'when I learned about being transgender in 2011, I look back on that and thought, how the hell can this be learned? I mean, that has to be inherent. Really. It really shocked me that she noticed that. But didn't say nothing and didn't do anything'.<sup>39</sup> These two significant reflections revealed that Corina - despite her out transwoman identity - was still negotiating and working out her transness despite having lived with it for so long. Corina, learning that her mother witnessed her possible first cross-dressing experience but had presumably not mentioned it to her until Corina revealed she was trans, was a shock. I feel that in Corina, stating, 'that has to be inherent', her revelation could have facilitated working out who she was earlier and helped with her gender confusion. Her clear argument pertained to trans not being a choice but a biological factor. Corina was clearly hurt in not being told this story earlier by her mother 'didn't say nothing and didn't do anything' proposing her gender variance could have been more accepted by her mother or felt more loved or normal in it.

There was an additional frustration for Corina in both of these moments, which I feel suggests that had Corina's mother approached her prior to 2011 and discussed her

---

<sup>38</sup> Corina, interview (2016).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

cross-dressing, Corina would have found better understanding of who she was inside, and where it had stemmed from. It made me feel strongly that Corina could have challenged America's gender ideology and myths about gender and specifically her own gender identity earlier than her 46 years. In response to Corina's memory of her Mother telling her about sleeping in her panty-hose, I asked Corina to describe her first memory of cross-dressing and what it felt like:

I just felt like...it felt good. I remember it feeling good. I didn't think about being a boy or a man. I thought about being a girl. And [pauses and sighs], I enjoyed it. [pauses] I felt guilty, going into my mothers and sisters' rooms doing that. But, it [smiles] just made me feel [pauses], I don't know, I couldn-, I didn't even know th-, about self and all that at the time. It just felt right. Yeah.<sup>40</sup>

Corina's narrative pace and rhythm slowed significantly in this passage, giving me the opportunity to 'understand the feelings and deeper meanings that may lie behind the words'.<sup>41</sup> It sounded and felt as though Corina was tapping into her memories for the first time in a long time. Rather than talking about what she wore; colours, detail or patterns, or even a deeper, descriptive story about how she went about accessing clothes, she focused on her feelings and emotions around this first influential experience. It was an incredibly positive memory for Corina despite her feelings of guilt around breaching the privacy of her mother and sister's rooms/closets.

On asking Corina how often she dressed throughout childhood she said that it was 'regularly'. She revealed she was 'spanked' for doing it, and as she grew older she received the 'belt' and 'switches' [a thin tree branch with no leaves] for doing it because

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Murphy et al, 'What makes Queer', p. 9.

‘it was sick, not right and boys don’t do that’.<sup>42</sup> Corina expressed that her father gave out the punishment but it was her mother who initiated it by asking her father to ‘take care of that’ or ‘would you make sure he stops doing that’. Corina nervously laughed as she disclosed that the only way her father would handle it was via ‘corporal punishment’.<sup>43</sup> Corina’s possible pivotal trans moment was turned into shame and secrecy, forcing her to adapt:

Ummm, I would try to hide it more and more. Eventually, I stopped doing it at the house and started doing it at the fairgrounds, next to our house...late at night. Which was, probably very dangerous [laughs]. Ummm, but I didn’t have anywhere else to go...I don’t know, it was just an urge, that I had to do that.<sup>44</sup>

Her adaptation suggests that not only was she made to feel shame for what was - in her parent’s words - ‘sick and not right’, but from her father’s regular corporal punishment. This drove her from cross-dressing in what should have been the safety and security of her home to a personally-admitted dangerous situation of not only dressing at night but in a public place. Corina was forced to adapt into what would be known in social work circles as high-risk or risk-taking behaviour - normatively associated with young people involved in societally deemed criminal activity. However, in Corina’s narrative, it was in response to her desperation of having somewhere to go and dress as herself. I believe this relates directly back to her mother sharing her memory about her early cross-dressing - as described above - and Corina’s vehement belief that being trans is biological. To Corina, dressing was an inherent drive and feeling like a woman was an inherent drive and within this, Corina did not fit into either binary gender category,

---

<sup>42</sup> Corina, interview (2016).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

destabilising them with her embodiment and intentions for her identity Her mindset and actions here reflect Kate Bornstein's arguments about the fluidity of gender being a battlefield and transgender theory's arguments on the limitations of fluidity imposed by the body and biology on the sense of self, but which can be extended to the limitations brought by the established gender binary.<sup>45</sup>

There was also disappointment in these two passages for Corina in not only having her mother share an acutely important memory of her identity with her, but how her mother was associated with her overall punishment and condemnation. Her mother's late sharing of her cross-dressing memory seemed to feel like the ultimate punishment. As Corina had earlier stated she did not do anything about it, and she did not say anything about it earlier than adulthood. Tied to this was Corina's use of the word 'that'. She said, 'I had to do that' while her mother said to her father 'stop him from doing that'. Referring to cross-dressing as 'that' brought highly negative and shameful connotations. Parents, in accordance with Mandelbaum's life history narrative framework's biological dimensions are extremely influential in their children's lives especially those LGBTQI+ young people who live with gender normative parents in a gender binary idealist society such as America. I believe that Corina's relationship with them at this point was linked to shame and anxiety over her inner identity and her outer gender presentation relating to the direct statement of 'boys don't do that'.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> K. Bornstein., *Gender outlaw: On men, women, and the rest of us* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 222; Nagoshi, Nagoshi and Brzuzy, *Gender and Sexual Identity*, p. 76.

<sup>46</sup> Corina, interview (2016).

Corina's childhood experience of cross-dressing did not directly relate to any other of the narrators in the cohort with regards to corporal punishment but did in terms of shaming for those who displayed gender variance during childhood. Katy cross-dressed happily when she lived with her grandmother and her aunt at a very young age but on going back to live with her mother and father, she was shamed both by them and her peers - which caused her to stop dressing in her teens. Suzy was shamed by her parents for her femininity calling her 'sissy' and bringing local boys over to fight her and force her to become more masculine. Contrastingly, Maddie cross-dressed in her mother's and sisters' clothes when she babysat her siblings and relatives during childhood but never eludes to being caught. However, Maddie did say that she was aware of the cultural 'taboos' around being gender-variant - which instilled within her a sense of shame directly influenced by her social and cultural dimensions rather than her biological ones<sup>47</sup>:

I would put the kids down for a nap...and you know, I tried on one of her dresses and you know, when I would do those things there was always this immense feeling of guilt. Because I felt that what I was doing was weird, it was wrong, it was not, if anybody else knew about it, it would, you know, it would just be, I felt like something was wrong with me...this is something people joke about. It's, it's not, like [pauses], I felt I was [sighs], there was something wrong with me for actually wanting to do that.<sup>48</sup>

Much like Corina, Maddie expressed how right it felt to cross-dress as did the other narrators who cross-dressed in childhood. It felt right and true but societal, biological or cultural elements which influenced them nurtured their internal shame - telling them it was wrong to have feelings of gender variance. Maddie also used the word 'that' in describing wanting to cross-dress. However, transwoman and narrator Sarah

---

<sup>47</sup> Mandelbaum, 'The Study', p. 180.

<sup>48</sup> Maddie, interview (2016).

Marie's childhood experiences of cross-dressing contrasts significantly to both Corina and Maddie's.

At 66 years old Sarah Marie was from Western Colorado. She was tall and slim with straight shoulder length grey hair, earrings, a pink t-shirt, pedal-pusher pants and sandals when I met her. I interviewed her in one of the GIC's therapy rooms and found her to be one of the kindest, most soft spoken, but tenacious trans women I had ever met. She said this about her cross-dressing and her internalised shame '[I felt] guilty, ummm, you had this guilt that [coughs] even though you're doing this, it feels so good, it isn't right... "Oh my god! What am I doing?" But you can't stop doing it...' <sup>49</sup> Sarah Marie however had a very positive experience in childhood of cross-dressing. She revealed her parents had a general store which sold 'hard goods, soft goods, that sort of stuff' and when she was four she remembered picking dresses and underwear from the rack and wearing them outside to play. <sup>50</sup> Sarah Marie was very surprised at the reaction from her mother - who Sarah Marie was proud to admit was of Danish descent - she 'caught me and said, "Well ain't you cute!" and left it at that'. <sup>51</sup> She was positive her parents had many 'late night conversations' because in dressing from the 'rag bag' where she found 'female' clothing that would fit, she would wear it. <sup>52</sup> Sarah Marie expressed that she cross-dressed in front of her father well into her teens and for a child born in the 1950s she was amazed. She felt her father was disappointed by it but instead he'd laugh and say, 'well there's my hun' which Sarah Marie stated with real emphasis that his comment 'astounds me'. <sup>53</sup> She

---

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Sarah Marie Walker (2<sup>nd</sup> June 2016).

<sup>50</sup> Sarah Marie, interview, 2016.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

felt it was because they were a couple established within the community, in their middle age and had a person in their family who was 'different'. Sarah Marie shared that she 'wasn't slapped down for it and told "no"'.<sup>54</sup>

Sarah Marie's childhood cross-dressing experience contrasted significantly with Corina's and the rest of the narrators mentioned thus far. Yet, she did feel shame via cultural and social elements instilled into her from the wider American mythical gender ideology. Despite the positive reinforcement at home, cross-dressing in Sarah Marie's mind became shameful and wrong despite feeling good and right and wanting to continue with it. All of these narrators' pivotal trans moments in the influential years of their lives were quashed by the varying biological, social and cultural elements, which prompted them to feel shame, and at times, to engage in high-risk behaviour to express themselves outwardly.<sup>55</sup>

Corina continued, describing her high-risk behaviour of having to dress at the fairgrounds 'late at night' stating 'It was probably very dangerous, but I didn't have anywhere else to go, I didn't know where to go'.<sup>56</sup> Corina's pace and volume changed dramatically when she said she 'didn't know where to go'. It was faint, almost said under her breath, which gave an almost desperate, hopeless sound to it - like the fairgrounds were her last resort to be able to express herself because of the hostilities of home. On asking Corina to describe her experiences of the fairground she said it was an 'urge' that she 'had to do that'.<sup>57</sup> Again, she repeated her use of 'that' to refer to cross-dressing as a

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Boyd and Ramirez, *Bodies of Evidence*, p. 7.

<sup>56</sup> Corina, interview, 2016.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.



shameful and wrong urge. Corina contemplated momentarily what her experience was like. She firstly described the darkness of the fairgrounds: how they used only ‘three or four times a year’ and secondly the storing of her female clothing in one of the unlocked storage barns. She explained hiding in a ‘little storage area under the bleachers’ and ‘not having that many things of my own’, but she would put them on and ‘peek out the door to see if anyone was coming’.<sup>58</sup> On asking how long she did this for, after a pause and contemplation again, she says, ‘a while’ and feels it was perhaps for around three years.<sup>59</sup>

I did not follow up with Corina on why she chose the fairgrounds over anywhere else in town. No other narrator cross-dressed in another location bar their family home until they were in their teens or adulthood. In relation to this, social scientist Kimberly A. Stieglitz states:

By middle childhood, many children have experienced verbal and physical abuse in places in which they should feel safe (e.g., at home and in school). Research has shown that psychological distress, beyond personal confusion about identity, is present at this stage of development. By adolescence, the time of increasing independence and autonomy, youth are more confident in exploring cross-gender behavioral expressions, including cross-dressing and sexual attractions.<sup>60</sup>

I am unsure, with regards to the cohort of the narrators I interviewed that their confidence increased in adolescence. It was clear from the likes of Corina, Katy, Maddie, Sarah Marie and Suzy that they were continuing to experience their own internal transphobia, societal shame and secrecy well into their teens. However, I believe it is probable that the times they were growing up in prevented them from experimenting

---

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> K. Stieglitz., ‘Development, Risk, and Resilience of Transgender Youth’, *The Journal of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care*, 21:3 (2010), p. 203.

openly bar the odd social occasions - such as Katy and Maddie, at the pep rally or Halloween party.<sup>61</sup> These experimentations were risky and public for both of these trans women, especially in the home environments, communities and states they grew up in. However, their experimentation was hidden behind humour and mockery, maintaining their safety and hidden gender variance.

In addition, the theme of secrecy arises in every single transwoman narrative within this cohort and not only presented itself throughout the life history, but I feel as a means of simultaneous self-protection and forced biological and societal adaptation related to shame and again back to America's instilled ideologies regarding gender roles. Even at these stages of differing cross-dressing exploration the narrators experienced liminality in the social transition and uncertainty they faced - with trans-theorists adding to this conception of liminality, especially in Corina's case that "'home" might be as dangerous as the "liminal"'.<sup>62</sup>

Like many of the trans women within the interview cohort - including Suzy, Katy, Maddie, Sheri and many others - Corina abided by America's gender ideals for men: getting married and having a child. This is not a comment on Corina's sexuality or the common misconception that trans people are gay but to reflect the commonality in the cohort of marrying a partner while keeping their trans identity a secret: either throughout the marriage or revealing their truth at some point to varying degrees of reaction from their spouse/family. Corina was silent on her role as a father, her perceived masculinity,

---

<sup>61</sup> See Chapter 4: subsections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3 for these stories

<sup>62</sup> L. Sjoberg., 'Toward Trans-gendering International Relations?\*', *International Political Sociology*, 6 (2012), pp. 346 -347.

or how it should have been lived out in accordance with American gender ideologies. She was additionally silent on her alcoholism in relation to her ability to be a father. I believe this silence suggests shame, disappointment and regret.

As introduced earlier, Corina met her wife at a club she frequented and, in the beginning, felt that their relationship would be a magical or mythical cure to her gender variance and desire to cross-dress which was admittedly short-lived. The following portion of Corina's narrative oozes reflexivity; initially describing the status of her marriage: gradually revealing how unhappy it actually was: and how heavily she began to drink:

...[cross-dressing] got even more advanced, and I started drinking even more because of some of the things I was learning. And what I was learning, was [pauses] not good. It was pornography. Cause I didn't understand how to research or find out about this, what I was doing. Ummm, so [pauses], ummm, a lot of mine, when I was younger, was mixed I think with wanting to dress and be a woman and having the male sex hormone and sex drive. So, I ended up masturbating a lot. And when I'd finish, I'd always hate myself. Ummm, and that's when I started drinking more and more, and just wanted it to stop and I would purge my clothes and everything and throw them away and say, "no more, no more. This is it!", and end up a month or two later, with some new shoes or something. And start the cycle all over again...Ummm, it was going on the whole time we were married, there was probably three or four months that I didn't, like I said because of the newness of the relationship and after that I started dressing more and more. And then the 90's I think was when the computers, the web started and all that stuff and I started getting on and finding out about transsexuals and that pornography stuff and I would just start drinking because I couldn't believe that that was me. I didn't want to believe that...Ummm, it got pretty bad, my drinking got really bad...I'd print off pictures from the internet, transsexual porn pictures and take them into my closet and look like that. Ummm, and I remember, I remember hating my body, just hating the thought of seeing this and a penis and I'd drink more. Every time I'd go into my closet, I'd have three or four beers with me. It was awful. [pauses] Ummm, [pauses], yeah.

Corina's narrative contained so much at this juncture in her life: multiple turning points and adaptations. According to Mandelbaum's life history structure, turning points can be snap decisions or ones made over time, all led by her need to cross-dress, her confusion over transsexualism, her negative view of pornography and her consequential alcohol consumption.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, the major dimensions in Corina's life at this point were her relationships with pornography, drinking and cross-dressing - seemingly caught in a destructive cycle. She stated earlier that she did not know she was trans until 2011 but had begun to explore her gender identity all be it in a sex-negative and self-shaming light. Eliza Steinbock in her short essay *Pornography*, reflects Corina's actions stating that 'any potential eroticism of a trans body by and for the trans individual is sup-planted by the necessity to state a desire to change one's genitals. The construction of the monolithic transsexual reduces the heteroglossia of sexual experience to a whisper of secrets'.<sup>64</sup> Corina's gender exploration therefore was reduced to a shameful 'whisper of secrets' in taking the fantasy images she printed off into her - literal - closet. I'd like to argue that that Corina's only available outlet was to explore and access transsexual porn images which 'can also be considered highly localized, personalized even...It signifies the apotheosis of Western confession culture in which the declaration of sexuality anchors the self in the social order'.<sup>65</sup> America has had a long and tumultuous relationship with the porn industry and the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century brought a new genre of porn directed towards heterosexual males, namely 'tranny porn', 'she-males' and 'chicks with dicks', perpetuating what was thought of by activists as poor representation for the trans

---

<sup>63</sup> Mandelbaum, 'The Study', p. 181-182.

<sup>64</sup> E. Steinbock., 'Pornography', *TSQ \* Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1:1-2 (2014), p. 156.

<sup>65</sup> Steinbock, 'Pornography', p. 156.

community.<sup>66</sup> More recently however, a wave of feminist, trans and queer pornography was created encouraging ‘the political strategy of countering stereotyped images with more diverse images of trans sexuality’, which had its own issues but is not discussed here.<sup>67</sup> These diverse images did not come early enough for Corina however and her use of porn to explore her gender was not an isolated narrative in the cohort as will be discussed in the narratives of Wilma, Jenn and Jacqui.

Wilma’s life history is particularly important in relation to porn and identity. Wilma was a transwoman of 51 years of age and one of the biggest personalities I have ever known. We met when I volunteered at the GIC on reception and we immediately built a rapport which turned into a friendship. Wilma was known in the GIC as not only being a trans advocate, but an outspoken activist, who regularly educated large groups of cisgender people about all aspects of being transgender - including answering intimate and difficult questions which many trans individuals found ‘vulgar and rude’.<sup>68</sup> My lasting memory of Wilma was her love for the colour pink: always dressing in different hues every I saw her. She had long jet-black hair with a striking blonde fringe - both contrasting significantly with her pink painted nails, pink fitted top, grey three-quarter length trousers and sandals. For our interview Wilma and I met in one of the GIC’s therapy rooms.

---

<sup>66</sup> J.K. Gardiner., ‘Female Masculinity and Phallic Women— Unruly Concepts’, *Feminist Studies*, 38:3 (2012), p. 615; J. Escoffier., ‘Imagining the She/Male: Pornography and the Transsexualization of the Heterosexual Male’, *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 12:4 (2011), p. 269.

<sup>67</sup> Steinbock, ‘Pornography’, p. 157; <sup>67</sup> H. Hok-Sze Leungr., ‘Film’, in *Transgender Studies Quarterly* (eds.), ‘Abjection’, *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1:1–2 (2014), p.87.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Wilma Ann Peterson, (28th May 2016).

Wilma grew up in Missouri ‘on the poor side of the rich side of town’, the oldest of two children her mother would cover for her to prevent her authoritarian father ‘giving her hell’ for what she got up to in her teens.<sup>69</sup> She joined the air force when she left school as a result of having been brought up in an armed forces family. She shared that her father - who was absent most of the time because of his role in the civilian military guard - was present 9-to-5 when he was home and would physically punish her sibling. When Wilma’s father was away her mother brought up the family single-handedly. Wilma additionally admitted to joining the air force because it was ‘manly’ but she did not know where to go or who to contact in relation to the feelings she was having about her gender identity. Wilma’s outlook on masculinity in the army was typical of the military’s, ‘institutional heterosexual masculinity and...gender ideology upon which war and [the] patriarchy depend’. Furthermore, reflecting ‘recruiting materials combin[ing] images of ‘manly’ bodies in uniform with combat, adventure and excitement’.<sup>70</sup> Wilma described buying ‘women’s clothing and would purge’, telling herself she was ‘perverted’ and that ‘there was something wrong’ with her.<sup>71</sup> However, even in the air force she was buying and purging, a result of finding it difficult and potentially dangerous to hide women’s clothes in the barracks.

Historically, cross-dressing has been the subject of spectacle and research especially from the psychiatric and medical community, labelling its place and meaning;

---

<sup>69</sup> Wilma, interview (2016).

<sup>70</sup> H. Cornish., ‘Gender, Mental Health and the Military’, in R. Woodward and C. Duncanson (eds.), *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 279; C. Duncanson., ‘Anti-Militarist Feminist Approaches to Researching Gender and the Military’, in R. Woodward and C. Duncanson (eds.), *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 49.

<sup>71</sup> Throwing all clothing away which relates to female attire; Wilma, interview (2016).

some viewed it as a perversion, a ‘clinical symptom’ or a deviancy. It was thought that transvestitism was a pastime solely for men where sexual pleasure was fulfilled in the wearing of women’s clothing and especially women’s lingerie.<sup>72</sup> Individuals who cross-dressed were not viewed as trans through the eyes of medical literature in the 1950s and 1960s, instead it was seen as something curable, or at least treatable.<sup>73</sup> Only those who showed signs of hating their genitalia - now termed as gender dysphoria, or wishing to transition to the opposite sex - were appreciated and referred for gender identity ‘issues’ to the likes of Harry Benjamin. Benjamin pioneered the opinion that the two identities of transvestism and transsexualism could not be cleanly separated, that they merged and mixed together, undefinable from each other.<sup>74</sup> Trans women in this cohort certainly experimented with cross-dressing, feeling it was both a fulfilment of their needs at the time, and as narrated up until this point but most, a perversion. This juxtaposition is deeply entrenched in what is deemed ‘normal’ in the gender ideologies and perpetuated myths of the United States. Cross-dressing to a certain extent gave each narrator pleasure but in dressing and exploration, revealed their trans identity. Moreover, Califia supports this, stating that in his experience within the trans community there was a lot of mirroring of Benjamin’s clinical experiences; people within the community had a lot of overlap between their two identities and behaviour, which prevented an ease of separating cross-dressers from transsexuals. Much like Corina and Wilma, the belief was that there were many within the community themselves who were often confused - specifically about this

---

<sup>72</sup> H. Benjamin., ‘Transvestism and Transsexualism in the Male and Female’, *The Journal of Sex Research*, 3:2 (1967), p. 107–109.

<sup>73</sup> H. Benjamin., ‘Newer Aspects of the Transsexual Phenomenon’, *The Journal of Sex Research*, 5:2 (1969), p. 136.

<sup>74</sup> Benjamin, ‘Transvestism’, p. 109.

- thinking themselves as transsexuals or transvestites at different times in their lives.<sup>75</sup>

Other studies such as Beemyn and Rankin's *The Lives of Transgender People* state that gender variant individuals, over time, realised they were trans rather than cross-dressers because they no longer wish to take off their female clothing, stop being women or that cross-dressing is no longer enough.<sup>76</sup>

To return to her pornography use, Wilma stated that in using straight, heterosexual pornography between men and women:

it wasn't me as the guy, it was always me as the female. It's always been that way. Even in intercourse with women, my mind put it in a different perspective that I was the female. It was always me receiving and not giving and I didn't understand it and always thought it was a fantasy and couldn't grasp what it all meant.<sup>77</sup>

Much like Corina, Wilma's actions and identity remained hidden to her spouse but her experimentation and exploration continued. While Wilma was overseas for her job, her wife - much to her horror - found pornographic magazines and sex toys Wilma had gathered over time and hidden away. Around this time Wilma admitted she started pursuing men and used the classified advertisements in the back of magazines to write letters, which her wife also found and was upset by. This resulted in Wilma being essentially forced into seeing 'a psychiatrist to be healed', which she readily admitted did not work because she lied about her feelings 'to save my marriage'.<sup>78</sup>

In relation to Wilma's being found out Corina expressed:

---

<sup>75</sup> Califia, *Sex Changes*, p. 58.

<sup>76</sup> G. Beemyn and S. Rankin., *The Lives of Transgender People* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 131.

<sup>77</sup> Wilma, interview (2016).

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.



‘At the height of it, I was laying on the bed drunk, wearing a garter, stockings, heels, bra, passed out. My wife comes in and screams at the top of her lungs and tells me to get out. So, with all the soberness I could muster [chuckles], I change and get out and get into the truck and I drive...’<sup>79</sup>

In a way, I feel that both Wilma and Corina could be seen as wanting to be found out by their spouses - possibly in hopes of receiving acceptance or to be understood in what they were feeling and going through. As Wilma stated, her place as a woman when using porn was one of fantasy which - along with not knowing where to turn - I believe suggested she never thought she could transition. Additionally, Wilma said that had she shared her thoughts or feelings with superiors or health professionals within the setting of the military, she would have been dishonourably discharged and sent to a psychiatric institution for treatment - much like Katy’s experience. This related directly back to the feelings of shame and perversion which both Wilma and Corina expressed. The shame of using pornography - according to Sarah Leonard - relates directly to the discourse of the 1960s and 1970s when the exploration of sexuality was repressed and ‘symptomatic of a broader cultural hypocrisy – one that ignored and repressed presumably ‘natural’ and ‘healthy’ instincts’.<sup>80</sup> However, it was clear from these narratives that Wilma and Corina felt cultural pressure to suppress their gender identities but felt shame connected to their ‘failed’ masculinity according to America’s standards in putting themselves in the place of the female porn star. On this note, the relationship to trans individuals and pornography is a difficult one and it is continued in Jenn and Jacqui’s narratives.

---

<sup>79</sup> Corina, interview (2016).

<sup>80</sup> S. Leonard., ‘Pornography and Obscenity’, in H.G. Cocks and M. Houlbrook (eds.), *Palgrave Advances in the Modern History of Sexuality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 182.

Jacqui and Jenn - trans women and partners aged 28 and 36 respectively, spoke briefly during their interview about their differing relationships to pornography. They met with me at the GIC in one of the therapy rooms after expressing their willingness - via a friend and intern at the GIC - to tell me their stories. Jenn had a slim, feminine build, tanned skin and mid length, brown/blonde hair. She wore a flowing, short, green strapless summer dress with strappy high heels. Jacqui was also tanned with a very slight build. She had sandy blonde hair to her shoulders and wore a fitted red and white checked blouse, short black skirt, black lace leggings and flat black slip on shoes. Our interview was our first meeting and we built our rapport quickly in chatting off the record and while filling out paperwork. With reference to gender identity and pornography Jacqui said:

When I knew I was trans, it was actually a sexual thing...the first time I had ever watched pornography, the first pornographic image I ever saw, it was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade [13-14 years old] and it was a girl getting fucked a whole bunch...after then I just got confused cause it was sexualised, you know. And so, I was just like, I don't even know what I want, because my first realisation that I wanted to be a girl was this pornographic image and then after that, it was just like...who am I? I'm not really trans. Trans people always say they knew since they were zero years old...all of their memories, and I never felt that way. Like, I never was like, 'I wanna be a girl' like, until I was like in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and then after that, I wanted to be a girl, in bed, or something like that, sexually...it fucked me up...if something else would have happened I wouldn't have wrapped it all around in sex you know...until I finally broke free from that, when I quit drugs. And I realised I just wanted to be a girl.<sup>81</sup>

This was an incredibly intense and multi-faceted description from Jacqui. It felt like she was not reflecting on this memory while telling it - as Corina, or Katy did in their measured way. Instead she released it at an urgent tempo as if she just had to get it out. Moreover, her narrative did not read reflectively until she looped back at the end

---

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Jaqueline McCray [Jacqui]; 11<sup>th</sup> June 2016.

wondering if a more positive image of a woman would have made her identity formation as trans smoother and not directly related to sex. Jacqui maintained a fast and intense pace throughout this section of her story and the majority of the interview. However, her narrative always contained depth and meaning which reflected her intelligence and even early in her story her struggle with her gender identity. Mixed in with this was seemed like a lot of confusion about whether she was trans enough, in not having had memories or feelings from 'zero years', as Jacqui articulately stated. She hinted that even at the time of interview, she still may not have been trans enough. Jacqui's experience reflects similar thinking to other trans and gender variant individuals especially opinions of peers within the trans community.<sup>82</sup>

To return to pornography, Jacqui's early identity in wanting to be a girl was wrapped up in this pornographic and negatively influencing image only breaking free once she stopped using drugs. I feel her explanation seemed over-simplified and a little glib as in having worked with individuals struggling with drug addiction in the past, I am aware of the great deal of self-motivated change and willpower it would have taken to stop using drugs, let alone to be faced with exploring her gender identity with a clear mind, and setting the challenge of separating the porn image from it. Jacqui seemed to minimise her strength, resilience and ability in finding out who she was once she was clean and sober.

---

<sup>82</sup> K. L. Nadal., C.N. Whitman., L.S. Davis., T. Erazo., and K.C. Davidoff., 'Microaggressions Toward Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Genderqueer People: A Review of the Literature', *Journal of Sex Research*, 53:4-5 (2016), p. 499.

Jenn - almost ten years Jacqui's senior - responded to Jacqui's narrative by stating that 'pornography has done her [Jacqui's] generation of trans a bad thing, because that's how a lot of them identified it, was through sex'. She said that when she saw porn and trans porn, her identity was already 'solidified' and she felt that was a positive thing because of the amount of confusion it produced in children who were 'gender non-conforming'.<sup>83</sup> Academic Jeffrey Escoffier - whose work focuses on trans porn - argues that 'To imagine a sexual performance in a fantasy or to see one in a porn movie enables us to experience sexual excitement without the side effects of anxiety, guilt, or boredom—and for many the erotic excitement is heightened when the fantasy includes an element of risk, danger, mystery, or transgression'.<sup>84</sup> This statement may be true but it also rings of being solely directed towards the hetero/cisgender male population of porn users. Yes, there was erotic excitement in transgressing the gender binary for Corina, Wilma and Jacqui while using porn but in it lay guilt, shame and anxiety in the after-effects of its use in direct correlation to their gender confusion and lives dictated by America's ideals of male and female. Wilma's fantasy was to put herself in the role of the woman and for that, she felt abnormal and perverted. Corina put herself in the place of the transwoman and felt guilt, shame and self-hatred for relating to it, and Jacqui, who was the youngest when viewing porn wrapped it up in sex - living a life of confusion about who she was. Steinbock, within a transgender theory standpoint, reflects all of narrators issues stating that 'Pornographic materials for trans communities, like for feminist camps, figured large in the war of identity politics' claiming standings for and against porn but assuming the

---

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Jennifer Zen, [Jenn]; 11th June 2016.

<sup>84</sup> J. Escoffier., 'Imagining the She/Male: Pornography and the Transsexualization of the Heterosexual Male', *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 12:4 (2011), p. 269.

image ‘transparently represents the real identity of the performer’ which in turn ‘collapses the visual realism into a “visual essentialism” of identity’. Essentialising the performer perpetuates stereotypical images of the binary and the roles played within them. Thus, preventing trans and gender variant individuals from breaking out of their views and feelings towards their own gendered embodiment, and probable gender dysphoria to find themselves their own fluid identity.<sup>85</sup> .

Jenn’s reflexiveness on porn and how it related to her identity contrasted sharply with the experiences of Jacqui, Corina and Wilma, all of whom - despite their generational and ethnic differences - had very similar life narratives. The defining difference was Corina’s experience, as she was the only narrator who talked about how much shame and hatred she felt in viewing trans porn which amplified her gender dysphoria and left her ‘...hating my body, just hating the thought of seeing this and a penis...’.<sup>86</sup> However, both narrators had a longing for bodies that matched what they were feeling: in the case of Wilma - the role of woman and receiver she wished to play in her porn fantasy; and for Corina the overwhelming shame she experienced from trans porn. Jan Morris - transwoman, journalist and travel writer - in her autobiography *Conundrum* talks of her own male body and its inability to perform in a female way, expressing herself beautifully in her frustration:

When it came...to more elemental pursuits of pederasty, then I found myself not exactly repelled but embarrassed. Aesthetically it seemed wrong to me. Nothing fitted...though my body often yearned to give, to yield, to open itself, the machine was wrong. It was made for another function, and I felt myself to be wrongly equipped.<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> Steinbock, ‘Pornography’, p. 157.

<sup>86</sup> Corina, interview (2016).

<sup>87</sup> J. Morris., *Conundrum* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1974), p. 24.

Morris felt no shame, shirking the pursuit of America's mythical masculine role and only identifying herself with the woman within despite waiting nearly half her life to transition, all the while experiencing increasing gender dysphoria. This quote perfectly reflects Corina's and Wilma's conflicts over their own bodies and roles as the women they shamefully longed to be and where they saw themselves sexually and physically. In addition, Marjorie Garber in her text *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, highlights that those who identify as cross-dressers 'even at the height of the feminine behaviour – when he is fully dressed in women's clothes, he has the absolute insignis of maleness, a penis'.<sup>88</sup> Corina and the other narrators however put themselves in the place of a woman or a girl when they cross-dressed - not of a man - longing to remove their penis's altogether.

Corina's wish to remove her penis in her narrative conflicts with her Native American and specifically Two-Spirit legacy within the Cherokee Nation.<sup>89</sup> In Walter William's *The Spirit and the Flesh*, he wrote that a 'Cherokee told a white traveller in 1825, "There were among them formerly, men who assumed the dress and performed all

---

<sup>88</sup> M. Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 96.

<sup>89</sup> 'A term originated from the northern Algonquin word *niizh manitoag*, meaning "two spirits," which refers to the presence of both masculine and feminine components in one person': R. L. F. Anguksuar., 'A postcolonial perspective on western [mis]conceptions of the cosmos and the restoration of indigenous taxonomies', in S.E. Jacobs, W. Thomas, and S. Lang (eds.), *Two-spirit people: Native American gender identity, sexuality, and spirituality* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press: 1997), p. 217.

'Two-Spirit individuals understand the binary of gender and sexuality not as mutually exclusive opposing poles, but rather as potentially overlapping states': J. L. Davis., "'More Than Just 'Gay Indians'" Intersecting Articulations of Two-Spirit Gender, Sexuality, and Indigenesness', in L. Zimman., J. Davis., and J. Raclaw (eds.), *Queer Excursions: Rethorizing Binaries in Language, Gender, and Sexuality* (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2014), p. 3

"'Two-Spirit" carries with it a particular commitment to decolonization and Indigenous histories and identities': Q. Driskill., 'Shaking our Shells: Cherokee Two-Spirits Rebalancing the World', *Beyond Masculinity*, (2008), p. 122.

the duties of women and who lived their whole life in this manner.”<sup>90</sup> Two-Spirit individuals were known to be revered and upheld within the community and gender liminality was valued and respected. Colonialists however, used their religious beliefs to condemn the accepted gender and sexual diversity they witnessed of indigenous peoples, using them to contribute to their justifications in committing acts of genocide, the stealing of Native land, resources and to the destruction of cultures and religion.<sup>91</sup> Corina did not share whether her mother shared lessons on her Native heritage or history, nor did she share whether she was reconnecting with it. I believe that in not knowing first-hand about Two-Spirit people or identity, Corina could have felt that her only gender choice was to abide by America’s western colonial gender binary ideals, or regrettably live within the confines of the liminality they provided.<sup>92</sup>

Admitting that when her wife found out she was cross-dressing, she questioned Corina on her sexuality, about having other women and why Corina could not talk to her about it:

She couldn’t understand why, why I couldn’t come to her and It told her [pauses], as a man, I don’t want anybody to know this. I can’t come to you and talk to you about this. I don’t want you to know that because you’re my wife, and you’ll think less of me, think of me less, as a man. And I didn’t want that. Because my role was to be the husband, the father [sniffs] yeah.<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> W.A. Williams, *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), p. 6.

<sup>91</sup> L. Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), p. 22.

<sup>92</sup> K. Roen., ‘Transgender Theory and Embodiment: The risk of racial marginalisation’, *Journal of Gender Studies*, 10:3 (2001), p. 254.

<sup>93</sup> Corina, interview (2016).

On reflecting on how she felt about being seen as less of a man, Corina laughed and said that now 'she doesn't care' and hoped she'll 'never be called a man again', but at the time that was the role she was supposed to take and it was all she knew.<sup>94</sup> Her confusion of her male role - as Mandelbaum states - backed by her biological factors of familial, societal and cultural upbringing, juxtaposed with the pornographic images she downloaded and printed off, presenting an impossible image of a person, a transsexual, with both male and female 'parts', a person Corina was ashamed to identify with.<sup>95</sup> She reflected this thinking further by arguing that 'All I knew was, man or woman. I had grown up being taught, I'm going to be a man. So that's why I came back to her like that. This is what a man has to be'.<sup>96</sup> In her confusion, Corina was determined that being a man, a husband and a father was her goal and the denial of her true identity or even the exploration of it was suppressed. They became negative elements in her life; pornography, drinking and a cross-dressing cycle of self-abuse. Corina's experience very much reflects what transgender theorists explore regarding gender variant individuals in their experiences interacting with socially constructed aspects of gender and sexual identity. Her outlook reflects Stryker's rage that, 'bodies are rendered meaningful only through some culturally and historically specific mode of grasping their physicality than transforms the flesh into a useful artefact'. She goes on, 'gendering is the initial step in this transformation...'.<sup>97</sup> This is especially true for Corina in line with her Native

---

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Mandelbaum, 'The Study', p. 180.

<sup>96</sup> Corina, interview (2016).

<sup>97</sup> Nagoshi, Nagoshi and Brzuzy, *Gender and Sexual Identity*, p. 77; Stryker, 'My Words', pp. 249-250.



American heritage, historically colonialised and re-made, constructed and given meaning in a Western (medicalised) ideal of gender and function of gender identity.

There was an element of trauma in this line of narrative from Corina in her inability to find herself, her voice or her identity in amongst the gender ideals and pressures by which she felt she had to abide. Liminality theory describes the liminal phase as an ‘interstructural situation’ that even though Corina wished for the structure and stability state of being a man - while wanting to be a woman - she existed in neither because of a separate liminal state of alcoholism and shame.<sup>98</sup> Mandelbaum additionally talks about conditions for adaptation that ‘Each person changes his ways in order to maintain continuity, whether of group participation or social expectation or self-image or simply survival’.<sup>99</sup> I would argue in this case that Corina was the opposite: resisting adaptation despite her wife catching her while cross-dressing. She was not willing to explore nor confide. Instead, Corina idealised to ‘maintain continuity’ in her masculinity and role as husband.

Corina revealed that in being caught and confronted by her wife, she took time to explore and read about being ‘two-spirited’. She in turn took her research to her wife<sup>100</sup>:

...I’m Native American, and I thought...and I told her, this is what I think’s going on. Is that I’m two- spirited. In the white world, it looks sick, I told her. It looks like this. But if I was raised in the Native American world, on the reservation, what would that look like? So, I was slowly finding justification, I guess, in who I was. [pauses]. She wasn’t buying it.<sup>101</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> Turner, ‘Betwixt and Between’, p. 46-47.

<sup>99</sup> Mandelbaum, ‘The Study’, p. 181.

<sup>100</sup> Corina, interview (2016).

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

This was a difficult adaptation for Corina: her turning point of being caught by her wife having to alter her behaviour in line with questioning her place as a man within society, husband and father, led to a pivotal trans moment in the exploration of her gender identity and within it found as she put it a justification in who she was.<sup>102</sup> Defining herself as two-spirit was a positive step but yet in the same passage the juxtaposition of her identity remained in the context of the 'white world' as 'sick'. There are sparks of sadness and loss in this passage: Corina's reflection on what could have been another life - a Native life - as well as hearing her parent's chastising words of 'sick'. Her desperation and turmoil were tangible to me. Her liminal persona defined by a set of symbols; man, white world, sick and binary. None of them aided her in her transition, instead they drove her to invisibility in her carved-out and seemingly permanent male role.<sup>103</sup> Mandelbaum talks about how turning points can be quick and can be over a longer term, but he does not define whether or not changing behaviour for adaptive purposes is viewed as beneficial to the individual. It seemed in Corina's case - prior to telling her wife - that she was moving in the right direction to explore her gender and identity.

Corina subsequently continued to explore her gender in attending counselling with her wife. However, they divorced in 2012 after her wife proved unable to accept Corina's gender variance. Corina then moved into her own place in 2011 and began to bring her female clothes out, freely leaving her doors open and was 'out at home'. While researching her identity more she realised she was trans.<sup>104</sup> In June 2011 Corina hit a major pivotal trans moment in venturing out fully dressed with makeup and a wig, to a

---

<sup>102</sup> Boyd and Ramirez, *Bodies of Evidence*, p. 7.

<sup>103</sup> Turner, 'Betwixt and Between', p. 47.

<sup>104</sup> Corina, interview (2016).

bar in Denver: ‘...I left...and drove in women’s clothes for the first time and got out of my car, went into that bar and sat and had a 7up. And um, a couple of people said ‘Hi’, but I just remembered feeling wonderful, that I could just do that. It felt right’.<sup>105</sup> Corina expressed genuine joy here in her tone for the first time since reflecting on seeing the Rocky Mountains for the first time as a child. There was a freedom in her voice which was new to the interview and it captured the progress, courage and risk she took stepping out dressed in public for the first time. It was obviously a proud moment for her, a breakthrough in so many ways which I feel must have pushed her into her next steps.

Corina fulfilled another pivotal trans moment by inviting her wife to her apartment to meet her fully dressed and ‘it was so disappointing [pauses], she didn’t even like that’. She said, ‘I wasn’t dressed trashy...I always think of myself as a tom-girl’.<sup>106</sup> Again, Corina used ‘that’ to refer to her dressing in a negative, distancing, childhood way. However, it did not stop her from becoming the person she wanted to be. She told her neighbours that she was a ‘cross-dresser’ and began walking about in her neighbourhood dressed. Her progress was one step at a time, policing herself and her identity seemingly to not offend her neighbours. In 2011, there was a lot more positive exposure for trans individuals with mostly positive representation of trans individuals on TV with the likes of Caitlyn Jenner, Jazz Jennings and Laverne Cox. 2012 brought Corina to the GIC, which was a major turning point and adaptation. She felt then - much like Katy - that transition was not an option but in a clear development she began taking oestrogen in 2013 consequentially starting the transition process.

---

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Corina, interview (2016); Boyd and Ramirez, *Bodies of Evidence*, p. 7.

Unlike Katy, Corina did not describe her transition as a ‘magical’ experience but one of noticeable differences to her behaviour, outlook and demeanour. She described social changes and emotional changes: not wanting to ‘butt in’ on conversations anymore ‘like men do’, but conveyed feeling like her mother in remembering how her mother listened to people and ‘waited her turn’. ‘I...wait my turn to speak’.<sup>107</sup> Similarly to Katy, Corina trained to be a counsellor, feeling the oestrogen enabled her to be a better listener. However, she continued her day job as a construction manager and expressed she felt confident in who she had and has become. Corina confided that she was pleased she passes, saying, ‘I feel like I’ve transitioned to where I want to be, I fit into society, I think I don’t stand out and I like that’.<sup>108</sup> I could argue that Corina did stand out as herself and within herself for so many years as a person with whom she did not identify that there was an internal satisfaction and resolution in her ability to pass. However, she argued:

‘My confidence is in who I am, more than what I present to people. Whether I pass or not, is indifferent, because I’m living who I am and that’s being authentic, is like, man, [pauses], there’s nothing, I don’t think there’s anything in the world that can compare with living who you are. Living your life...’<sup>109</sup>

I feel this was a clear message of triumph for Corina. She adapted and developed into the person she wanted to be, leaving the liminal phase of transition and entering into her own fixed state.<sup>110</sup> Granted, she did not describe the intimate details of her transition, instead revealing the twists and turns life brought. Like Katy, Corina found her place on the gender spectrum where she knew who she was, enough to begin transition. Corina

---

<sup>107</sup> Corina, interview (2016).

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Turner, ‘Betwixt and Between’, p. 46.

shared that she had been sober since 2011 and highlighted that she was mending relationships with her ex-wife and children. Initially, they found accepting her coming out difficult, but they are ‘returning’ to her.<sup>111</sup> Corina discussed her wanting to find and gaining a place of authenticity in her identity and life, stating that she would die for it if she had to. Her identity contrasted significantly from when she could see no way for herself to become the trans woman she foresaw. She reflects transgender theory’s idea of fluidity, embodiment and the self-constructed identity and the ability to inform ‘intersectional oppressed identities’. Throughout her narrative, Corina narrated experiences of different embodiments in line with America’s binary ideals, and the many social oppressions she experienced, especially top down policing from society, which, like Katy, made her police herself and her own gender expression and identity, but she also received social oppressions from her wife in remaining male. Corina negotiated and understood her identity as she challenged binary norms, and explored her Native American heritage, leading her to transition.<sup>112</sup>

Corina was the only Native American in this cohort, and as stated at the beginning, there was an importance to featuring her voice; especially the silences of her lost heritage and traditions which she did not have the opportunity to be brought up in or know. Also, her story did not contain the typical trans narrative of knowing she was female since childhood, instead she struggled throughout most of her adolescence and adulthood in upholding America’s gender ideals and masculinity. As a Native American and person of colour, she wrestled with the urge to cross-dress for reasons unknown tempering her

---

<sup>111</sup> Corina, interview (2016).

<sup>112</sup> Nagoshi, Nagoshi and Brzuzy, *Gender and Sexual Identity*, p. 78.

gender confusion with negative levels of alcohol use. With American indigenous activist politics deeply embedded in post-colonial and decolonisation discourse and action, I wonder if Corina will in the future re-engage with her Cherokee heritage, ending her passing and stand out as trans in her community.<sup>113</sup> Much like Katy, Corina is a survivor. While they are different in their ethnicity and heritage - which is an important distinction - their similarities lie in both abiding by America's strict essentialist gender ideals of societally imposed male and female roles, behaviours and identities. These ideals impacted greatly on her pivotal trans moments, mostly quashing them through her own shame and fear of who she was or might become. However, in exploring her gender identity and persevering in her cross-dressing, she embraced the idea of fluidity of gender and finding her own identity. Perhaps, had Corina grown up where two-spirit was accepted and embraced, she would have had a different story to tell, but she grew up in a mostly white city, in a mostly white school seemingly denied her roots and heritage. However, throughout this loss she identified herself past a place of being two-spirit, firmly landing on the gender spectrum in identifying as a transwoman. She transitioned, finding herself happy and most importantly, living authentically, as herself, without fear.

---

<sup>113</sup> Boellstroff et al., *Decolonizing Transgender*, p. 419.

## Chapter 6 Trans men's lived experiences

Grayson was one of the few trans men I interviewed while volunteering at the GIC. At age 30 - born in 1986 - and one of the youngest of the interview cohort, Grayson had the role of facilitator and leader of the weekly trans man group held in the Center on a Sunday night. On meeting Grayson for the first time I found his smile to be warm, he seemed approachable, very attractive and a little shy. He had short mid brown styled hair and wore his work's uniform of a navy polo shirt embroidered with the construction company's name on the left breast, cream cargo pants and heavy work boots. These were the clothes I saw Grayson wear most frequently.

Prior to his interview - when I was volunteering on the reception desk of the GIC - Grayson and I would politely chat. Unlike my quickly built relationships with Katy, Maddie or Sheri, Grayson and I did not build the same rapport which on reflection I found strange because as a child and well into my twenties I had more male friendships than female and preferred the company of men. There was a chance it was Grayson's fleeting visits or work focus when he was at the GIC, or his general shyness which prevented us from getting to a place of real ease and potential friendship. I may have not struck that perfect working relationship on the run up to Grayson's interview, but it did not prevent Grayson and I from conducting an interesting and rich life history.<sup>1</sup>

Grayson and I met for his interview at the GIC, in what was known as the group room, the largest room in the Center. It had large wooden double doors with many mismatched chairs, a large glass dining table and a book corner of trans autobiographies,

---

<sup>1</sup> Abrams, *Oral*, p. 58.

resources and academic textbooks. The corner additionally housed a board game corner and lastly a large white board with local trans support services and crisis services detailing their remits and contact numbers for anyone using the Center to note down. This room was not as intimate as the therapy rooms because of its size but on closing the doors and hanging a 'do not disturb' sign, it was a suitable venue for recording.

The other trans men featured in this chapter: Artemus, volunteered at the GIC and was in his early thirties; the youngest of the interview cohort, 22-year-old trans man named Luke, experienced years of mental health issues and homelessness and at the time of interview lived in Boulder, Colorado, too far away and too expensive to attend the GIC. The three narrators ages and social standings contrasted significantly to the age range of trans women who attended the Center; mostly in their late forties to late sixties and in Katy's case, early seventies. The difference in age and the generational gap was an interesting dynamic and could have indicated a shift in American society's gender ideological outlook due to increasing positive exposure to trans knowledge and widening gender identities. However, it could also have been an indicator that mostly democratic, liberal states and cities were in support of trans individuals coming out at a younger age, or specifically in Denver and Boulder, Colorado.

Many of the trans women in the interview cohort noted in the weekly groups, that younger trans people had a much easier time of being accepted by family and society, as well as a wider access to investigate gender variance and trans identities. Their reasoning derived directly from their own memories and experiences, and from the development and widespread access to the internet, increasing medical resources and positive trans exposure via pop culture and social media over the last 8 years or so. They however, did



not voice frontline activism within their reasons. Research such as Beemyn's and Rankin's *The Lives of Transgender People* argue that being a young trans person in the internet age allows self-acceptance and coming out an easier transition is a common misconception. Their findings demonstrate that younger trans people, especially youth 'continue to struggle with accepting their gender identity and gaining the acceptance of families and peers'.<sup>2</sup>

As established, this chapter features Grayson as the main narrator but includes the voices of Artemus and Luke, which speak to Beemyn and Rankin's findings in complementary and contradictory ways. I felt it was important to highlight the heavy use of all three narratives in this chapter because of the lack of research focussing on trans men, which according to Griffin Hansbury is rooted in the assumption that even now 'when we hear the word transsexual, most of us immediately think of male-to-females [trans women]' and miss 'the little-examined identities within the almost invisible world of female-to-males [trans men]'.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, I did not wish to neglect an opportunity to represent those identities here.

Grayson's life history complicates the typical trans narrative - filling it with silences and difficulties of adhering and abiding to America's mythical gender ideals of being, feeling and performing as female. Additionally, Grayson was caught up in what Mandelbaum describes as 'cultural expectations for a life course' via the 'cultural dimension' namely dealing with those 'shared by the people of a group with the cognitive

---

<sup>2</sup> G. Beemyn and S. Rankin., *The Lives of Transgender People* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> Hansbury, 'The Middle Men', p. 241.

and normative thought they have in common'.<sup>4</sup> Grayson's narrative oozes power imbalance and struggle due to his feminine competition with his sister while filled with family expectation of his becoming the beautiful woman he did not feel himself to be on the inside. Caught up in a state of apathy and powerlessness because of his assigned sex at birth, Grayson's biological dimension according to Mandelbaum is 'based on the individual's organic makeup...[plus] the unique, individual aspect of each life that is a basic consideration in life history study'.<sup>5</sup>

Through the literal pausing of his life and expectation to become a woman, Grayson's liminal phase had no apparent end as he seemed blind to his inner self for the majority of his 30 years, desperately gripping onto an idea of female performativity – learned social behaviour - that he did not adhere to.<sup>6</sup> It was possible that Grayson was not blind but simply remained silent in omitting his thoughts and feelings around his gender identity or variance during his childhood and adolescence because he did not want to reflect deeply on those painful times. It was Grayson's right as narrator to give me 'a subjective record of how one...looks back on their life...how they speak about it, what they miss out, how they order it, what they emphasise, [and] the words they choose'.<sup>7</sup> Due to Grayson's perceived lack of insight on his life or his gender variance, his narrative did not contain childhood memories of cross-dressing and shame as Katy's and Corina's did. Instead, it opened up into a narrative of discovery, of difficult dimensions, pivotal

---

<sup>4</sup> Mandelbaum, 'The Study', p. 180.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Nagoshi, Nagoshi and Brzuzy, *Gender and Sexual Identity*, p. 78.

<sup>7</sup> P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3rd edn, 2000), p. 227.

trans moments and adaptations which were made through expectation of cultural and social influence.<sup>8</sup>

Grayson was born and raised in Castle Rock, Colorado, describing it as a suburban sprawled ‘bedroom community’ for those who worked in Denver. He said he had a ‘nice childhood’ where the house ‘backs up on an open space and kind of run around and be kids’. However, because of the rural and urban mix of Castle Rock he was caught up in a conservative/ liberal split ‘one foot in each’.<sup>9</sup> Grayson grew up with both parents present, highlighting their continued marriage during the interview. He was a middle child with an older sister of three years and a younger brother of four years. He admitted that when they were kids they did not get along very well ‘kids are kids, but ummm, you know it’s funny, when you hear that the middle child is supposed to be the peacemaker, that was not at all the case’.<sup>10</sup> Grayson laughed that both his brother and sister would have ‘made peace’ over their dislike for him. They would bully him ‘nothing too malicious’ but he shared that he did not get on well with his sister:

...she expected me to be her little sister, ummm, and expected me to have a lot of the same interests and I absolutely did not. And with my brother, we got along, ok, until, like really, when I hit puberty, things kinda fell apart a little bit. But ummm, we had been sharing a room, an’ when I got to puberty, I was like not-I couldn’t do that anymore. And I like [chuckles], I like moved myself down to the basement one day and lived in this unfinished basement through middle school and high school [age 11-18].<sup>11</sup>

It provoked thought in me that Grayson felt he did not take the expected role of peacemaker - between his brother and sister - and instead was the focus of bullying for

---

<sup>8</sup> Boyd and Ramirez, *Bodies of Evidence*, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Grayson, (27<sup>th</sup> May 2016). [Grayson chose not to give me his last name on the record].

<sup>10</sup> Grayson, interview (2016).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

them. They had an agreed neutrality in their feelings towards him, in Grayson's eyes. Already at this juncture he had accepted being disliked by his siblings: they had power, but he did not. To further this narrative, when Grayson reached puberty, he moved out of the shared room in what could be seen as a survival move or perhaps as a victim would, withdrawing from the situation powerless to alter it. Grayson lived in the unfinished basement of the family home for a large portion of his childhood and adolescence. I would argue that he sought not just social isolation but also physical isolation throughout the unwelcome changes of his body and the potential that he had in his unknown or unrealised gender dysphoria. Grayson did not give further detail about why either sibling disliked him, nor did he comment on how his parents felt about the move and I did not ask about this further. I did however ask further about his sister's role in expecting him to be her mirror image in interests. His response was that he hated his sister feeling he should be attracted to the same clothes, interests and going to the mall like her, all of which Grayson admitted again he hated:

I didn't really care what I wore. I think my way of dealing with, you know, gender expectations that didn't really fit with who I was, was just disengaged with my entire presentation [pauses]...You know, I had like literally had the same hair cut from when I was like 5 years old until like college, cause I was just like, I don't care, I'm not going to do anything about it, you know, and I was just, dressing in the most basic jeans and t-shirt...<sup>12</sup>

Grayson continued, sharing that his sister did not engage with his lack of interest and could not understand his reasoning for his way of being - as she liked shoes and purses. He said that when it came to dating, he again had no interest and his sister 'just

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

didn't understand me'.<sup>13</sup> In listening and reflecting on this passage of Grayson's narrative, I found it interesting that his sister had such influence over the way he portrayed himself through clothing or interests. He was criticised for not being the woman he was supposed to be - the woman like his sister. This reflected the additional influence of the mythical binary gender stereotype - of western essentialism and expected and learned performativity - to be dating like his sister did like a 'normal' teenager. Simone De Beauvoir states in *The Second Sex* that 'One is not born, but rather becomes a woman'.<sup>14</sup> Reflecting Judith Butler's performativity argument that 'Not only are we culturally constructed, but in some sense we construct ourselves'. Grayson therefore, seemed to very much embrace that he was both biologically and culturally constructed; he accepted his gender identity with apathy and defeat, despite rebelling against his sisters expectations.<sup>15</sup> His actions could have been viewed as a sign of power and strength - in not conforming to mythical gender ideals - but like a double-edged sword it could also have been viewed, in Grayson's words as 'disengagement' - hiding, dormant, or oppressed, unknowingly being forced to conform to a gender category that he did not directly identify with.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, I did not ask how his parents felt about his presentation throughout this time.

I followed up by asking Grayson about how he felt about this disengagement at such a young age. He expressed that he did not understand it as disengaging at the time but more interestingly, he did not understand why others had an interest in him. He

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> S. de Beauvoir., *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p.301.

<sup>15</sup> J. Butler., 'Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig, Foucault', in S. Salih (eds.), *The Judith Butler Reader* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) p. 21.

<sup>16</sup> J.L. Nagoshi., and S. Brzuzy., 'Transgender Theory: Embodying Research and Practice', *Journal of Women and Social Work*, 22:4 (2010), p. 431.

expressed that in middle school [age 11-14] he began feeling separated from his friends - they were developing new interests in boy bands, 'cool clothes' and giggling about boys and 'I just didn't'.<sup>17</sup> However, Grayson admitted that he pretended to be interested because he did not care:

To a point where, I don't know, I think that I didn't understand, like how disengaged I was from everything until I did start transitioning and when I started testosterone, and just sort of realising like [pauses]. I don't know, there's a lot of talk about testosterone and how it makes you more, you know, quick to anger or more or less emotional and for me, it's almost like I can't compare because I just didn't really...feel a lot of emotion or a lot of investment in a lot of things. Ummm, until I started transitioning and actually took an interest in myself...I definitely didn't understand that it was like related to gender...Having not like experienced a lot of investment in myself, I didn't know what I was missing.<sup>18</sup>

In taking time to reflect on his memories and emotions Grayson created a tension which Abram's describes as 'narrative coherence': concerning the self and the expression of the self in the current moment.<sup>19</sup> I as a researcher was questioning Grayson about his level of disengagement from his family life, friends, expected cultural and gender dimensions, his own disengagement from his birth sex and gender expression. It was a difficult passage to listen to despite the hope and sense of self in the moment when testosterone made Grayson feel alive, engaged and finding value in himself and his own body. It also revealed a turning point for Grayson – not a pivotal trans moment – in realising he did not know what he had been missing at the time of his disengagement.<sup>20</sup> However, Grayson's outlook reflected Stryker's theorising of erasure in the naturally seen and socially adhered to body 'Every circumstance of life seemed to conspire against me

---

<sup>17</sup> Interview, Grayson (2016).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Abrams, *Oral*, p. 49.

<sup>20</sup> Boyd and Ramirez, *Bodies of Evidence*, p. 7.

in one vast, composite act of invalidation and erasure. In the body I was born with, I had been invisible as the person I considered myself to be.<sup>21</sup> In this invisibility and erasure, it could also be argued that Grayson regretted not realising or investigating his feelings or lack thereof, or gender variance earlier. In not following this up, I could argue that his comment was revealed in how young he was and how much social pressure from his sister he was under at the time. It was challenging to hear him say that he took no interest, not investing in himself until he began transition, again, mirroring Stryker's invisibility.

Delving deeper into Grayson's narrative, he talked of having an inferiority complex in relation to his sister. His example of choosing an optional instrument - the viola - because his sister had chosen to play the violin had him admitting 'because it was like her, but not as cool. You know, you don't get to play the melody'. He was the literal 'second fiddle' to his sister.<sup>22</sup> Grayson did not pause after this statement. His pace continued steadily, disclosing that he did not think he was as good as his sister. I found his 'you don't get to play the melody' very poignant and intimate, but this oppressed, lesser position difficult to process. I could argue that his feeling of inferiority prevented Grayson from exploring and finding out who he was earlier. His disinterest was curious, removing his opportunity of being a trans teenager during the 1990s and early 2000s, when the trans community across America was experiencing - as Stryker describes - 'a rapid revolution and expansion'?<sup>23</sup> The term 'transgender' had been coined during 1990 and LGB groups were beginning to adopt the 'T' into their names and organisations by

---

<sup>21</sup> Stryker, 'My Words', p. 246.

<sup>22</sup> Interview, Grayson (2016).

<sup>23</sup> Stryker, Transgender History, p. 123

1995.<sup>24</sup> I feel it could suggest he did not know where to begin in his exploration - feeling alone - as in Beemyn and Rankin's study or invisible in Stryker's work. However, he answered this question himself '[I] had a strong sense of myself being [pauses], being super young and waiting on something to happen, but like, waiting to grow into myself'.<sup>25</sup>

At this point in his narrative and in correlation to Mandelbaum's life history analysis, Grayson abided by the power of his biological dimensions and social pressures of the gender binary myth and ideals, despite noticing his feeling of being different from his siblings, especially his sister.<sup>26</sup> However, again he did not relate it to gender variance. Instead he continued with the notion he was a girl, playing his then female role in activities, despite his level of indifference. His rebelliousness in not wanting to be like his sister - his feelings of inferiority - was to reflect it in his outward appearance of apathy in dress and hair. Yet emotionally, he went through the steps of accepting himself and his role as a sub-standard clone of his sister, especially in choosing to play a relegated instrument and never being as good as she was.

However, Grayson poignantly began talking about waiting to grow:

The way that people did understand me was as, a tomboy...I would constantly be told I would grow out of the tomboy thing and you're going to be this beautiful butterfly, or whatever. Ummm, and so I think that I, I spent a lot of time waiting for that to happen, yeah, just sort of like waiting for, my life to start. And it's funny, because I still have that sense now. Ummm, in that you know, like the process of transition is like so consuming. Ummm, and so I to a certain extent, I am sort of like waiting, waiting to live through that to engage with my life really, fully in ways that like I'm not able to right now.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 137

<sup>25</sup> Interview, Grayson (2016).

<sup>26</sup> Mandelbaum, Life History, p. 181.

<sup>27</sup> Interview, Grayson (2016).



The complexity of Grayson's inward apathy; the matching of his outward indifference - while with real conviction - waiting to blossom into a 'beautiful butterfly' contrasted significantly with the other trans men's narratives of childhood and adolescence in this chapter. It additionally feeds into liminality theory's space of 'betwixt and between' - a chrysalis waiting to hatch, a 'temporal being' - but contrary to the traditional liminal space which Turner describes - a space which should encourage reflexivity and awareness.<sup>28</sup> Instead Grayson's space was that of a dormant person who hoped to change via outside influences, rather than from within: his own making, own decisions, his own fluidity, his own trans-embodiment. It featured a lack of 'progressive movement' found in traditional liminal terms.<sup>29</sup> However, the only similarity of Grayson's narrative to the other narrators in this chapter was his being perceived as a tomboy - and unlike the others - believed he was a tomboy waiting to be a woman. In Beemyn and Rankin's study, those trans men who were given permission by their families to be 'tomboys' mostly until puberty reported that they did not feel 'an overwhelming sense of themselves as male', which would relate directly to Grayson. One respondent viewed themselves as 'a part time kind of girl' as they did not feel fully female nor fully male.<sup>30</sup> Feeling like a tomboy and presenting as one reflects a fluidity of gender and speaks in many ways to Kate Bornstein's writings and experience, within which she states 'I never did feel like a girl or a woman; rather it was my unshakable conviction that I was not a boy or man. It was the absence of a feeling, rather than its presence that convinced

---

<sup>28</sup> Turner, *The Ritual*, p. 69; E. T. Booth., 'Queering Queer Eye: The Stability of Gay Identity Confronts the Liminality of Trans Embodiment', *Western Journal of Communication*, 75:2 (2011), p. 187.

<sup>29</sup> Turner., *The Ritual*, p. 46.

<sup>30</sup> Beemyn and Rankin., *Lives of*, p. 46.

me to change my gender'.<sup>31</sup> I'd like to argue that Grayson's feeling like a tomboy, the absence of the female within him, moved him into this liminal space and fluidity.

Grayson went on sharing how much he enjoyed the outdoors 'I wanted to be outside all the time' and was aware of the things that he wanted in life 'I wanted to own a pickup truck and I wanted to, like I wanted to work in construction, which was definitely frowned upon in a very middle-class family'.<sup>32</sup> Grayson's father was a lawyer and his reaction to his child wanting to work in construction was patronised: 'aww, that's cute'.<sup>33</sup> His experiences both contrasted and drew similarities to Daphne Scholinski's in her autobiography *The Last Time I Wore a Dress*. In it she described a situation in third grade - around age 8 or 9 - where she was sent to a Mrs. Stein, her school counsellor. One of Mrs. Stein's favourite games was 'The Career Game' in which she held up picture cards of a farmer, policeman, nurse, farmer, construction worker, and a secretary. In response, Daphne told her:

...I said I'd like to be: police officer and construction worker...She was the first one who said I had a problem with my gender. I didn't know what that meant but later I found out she thought I wanted to be a boy. I didn't really know if I wanted to be a boy, but I wanted to go shirtless outside in the summer and play rough...I wore tee shirts and hooded sweatshirts, pants, sneakers...I wasn't concerned with being pretty. I wanted to be free to run.<sup>34</sup>

Daphne's and Grayson's life experiences and outlooks relate on many levels; they both wanted to undertake predominantly masculine-orientated roles and activities in childhood and adulthood as vocations but without considering them in relation to their

---

<sup>31</sup> Bornstein, *Gender outlaw: On men, women*, p. 24.

<sup>32</sup> Grayson, interview (2016).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> D. Scholinski., and J. M. Adams., *The Last Time I Wore a Dress* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1997), p. 30.

gender identity. However, Grayson - unlike Daphne - did not receive the same outright critical input or gender judgement towards his tomboyish-ness as she did. Furthermore, Daphne was just a child who was openly criticised by a school counsellor, someone who should have been on her side, supporting, advocating and protecting her. Instead, she was told there was an issue with her gender because of her choices and clothing at such a young age, to which even Daphne was puzzled.

The criticisms made by the counsellor were questionable given that historically the rise of the second wave feminist movement in America during the 1960s consequentially brought about the freedom in the 1970s for women to commonly wear unisex fashions and a larger societal acceptance of masculine styles and clothing on women.<sup>35</sup> By the 1990s and early 2000s when Grayson was so fatigued by his own lack of feeling for his female presentation - unknowingly adopting an air of masculinity - he was patronised by his father for his working class vocational aspirations, rather than his gender. This also suggests that Grayson lacked the belief that he could break into a gender segregated, male dominated industry, where men were known to define their masculine identity 'in relation to their 'tough' job...[and] a culture of taking safety risks, and working long hours in primitive working conditions'.<sup>36</sup> Grayson's female presence, body and abilities would potentially not be welcomed there, nor wanted.

Grayson insightfully gazed into his future in construction. He described how his interest in building homes 'is something that is very wrapped up in like cultural ideals of masculinity...I think I was interested in masculinity without being able to articulate that's

---

<sup>35</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*, p. 91 & p. 98.

<sup>36</sup> K. Ness., 'Constructing Masculinity in the Building Trades: 'Most Jobs in the Construction Industry Can Be Done by Women' ', *Gender, Work and Organization*. 19:6, 2012, p. 654.

what, [pauses], that's what drew me to it'.<sup>37</sup> He was aware that he did not have a background in 'building things' but found the idea fascinating. Grayson felt that a physical job was for him but there was an expectation that because his father was a lawyer, he would be going to college. He did and studied history. Grayson left at 22 not knowing what he wanted to do - or who he was - but knew he wanted to try out a life which revolved around construction and physical labour.

Artemus' life history is an important enhancement to Grayson's overall narrative because it adds to the current understanding of trans men's experiences. In addition, Artemus' story has elements of being a tomboy but also is very much one of achievement, self-direction and determination, therefore bringing significant contrasts and experiences. His childhood contrasts greatly with Grayson's in equal complexity. However, Artemus was aware from an early age that he firmly felt and identified as a male/boy.

I met Artemus when I first arrived at the GIC to begin volunteering on the front desk in reception. As he was a volunteer receptionist too, our shift times overlapped giving us time to talk and get to know one another. Artemus was 32 years old - two years older than Grayson - born in 1984. He had a bubbly, fun, outgoing personality, and an infectious laugh. Artemus always dressed smartly for his shifts: dress shirt or polo shirt, black trousers and shiny shoes. He had sallow skin, short black hair and a moustache and beard. Artemus had an excellent reputation around the GIC and everyone talked about him with the utmost respect and praise. I thoroughly enjoyed talking to him and he

---

<sup>37</sup> Interview, Grayson (2016).

became a good friend over time - and as a consequence - I asked him to share his life history with me. We met one afternoon after a shift in one of the GIC's therapy rooms.

Artemus was born and spent his early childhood in Wheat Ridge, Jefferson County: a suburb of Colorado. He described it as a 'very American suburban area' with his family home situated across from a park. His family moved 'at some point' to a bought house about 25 miles from where Artemus grew up. His father was an opera singer, travelling frequently throughout his childhood and his mother was a registered nurse. Artemus had one sibling - a young brother - whom he described as being very close to, so much so that people used to mistake them for twins despite being three years apart and different sexes. He defined their relationship as 'comrades in arms' and 'troublemakers', sharing he had a 'very suburban' childhood.<sup>38</sup>

In talking about childhood friends Artemus said he was introverted, but had the ability to seem extroverted, still having the ability to 'turn it off' so people think he is extroverted.<sup>39</sup> He said he had very few friends - one of whom he was still close to - but everybody liked him. Already, Artemus' childhood compared with Grayson's varies significantly in describing his childhood activities. This included playing the violin from 3 years old and changing to cello in his teens, as well as writing, sketching, painting and involvement in theatre. On reflection, Artemus noticed that his interests separated him from a lot of his peers as they were sports-orientated, which he mentioned was 'a very big division'.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Artemus Samarzia, (8<sup>th</sup> June 2016).

<sup>39</sup> Artemus, Interview (2016).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

Like Grayson, Artemus described himself as having been viewed by those around him as a tomboy when he was a child: ‘that’s not a problem until you get to be of age, and then you start to, ah, hormones kick in and everything and then I became bullied because children didn’t understand that so much’.<sup>41</sup> Artemus said he did not know he was trans at that time, but knew ‘I felt like a man’ and was bullied in junior high. He disclosed that junior high was horrible, that nobody enjoys those years.<sup>42</sup> In articulating these words at the same pace and tempo he had chosen from the outset of his narration, reflective but steady, Artemus had an ease to his word choice and expression. In light of being bullied, he decided to be ‘good at sports’ which he saw as being a way ‘I could fend for myself and be more popular as opposed to [pauses] to, to being bullied’.<sup>43</sup> However, his strategy backfired when he became the ‘teacher’s pet’ in gym class. In what could have been read as a chain reaction, or suggest silence, Artemus did not disclose the fallout from the back firing any further, proposing it was too painful to recall. Instead he moved quickly on to talking about getting out of public school to pursue an audition entrance only performing arts high school in Denver, where he successfully gained a place. Reflecting on this, it was clear that Artemus’ move to a performing arts school was not only one of survival but according to Mandelbaum life history framework as an influence of Artemus’ social and cultural dimensions, ‘...acts of personal choice that are characteristic of the person’s group and the common ways of working out the recurrent conflicts of life’.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Mandelbaum, ‘The Study’, p. 180.

Artemus' artistic background, from his father's operatic singing career, suburban, middle-class lifestyle, intersects here, suggesting firm 'cultural expectations for a life course'.<sup>45</sup> I highlighted this because Artemus was one of the few narrators in the cohort who had the financial means, opportunity and/or social/ personal option of making a major social transition with the support of his family. The purpose of which was not only escape the bullies but simultaneously nurture his musical abilities and theatrical talent. His educational transition could be viewed as being influenced by Artemus' gender - or gender presentation relative to his peers - but I believe it is important to note that it showed Artemus' level of self-confidence, power and willingness to make changes for his own benefit. This was in significant juxtaposition to Grayson's experience of waiting for change rather than creating or influencing it himself.

When Artemus was 17, he was introduced through his high school classes to psychology and additionally undertook credits in clinical psychology. They all contributed to college credits and Artemus shared that he did not find high school difficult. This was despite a year of illness during which he found himself bedbound. However, Artemus described having amazing friends, who all accepted him for who he was:

Most of my friends knew me as a man at that point, even though there was no transgender, I hadn't done anything to transition, but it was just natural. People just looked at me and identified me that way so, I went with it because it's how I wanted to identify. It was good.<sup>46</sup>

This moment in Artemus' life was a very positive one in comparison to his earlier school experiences. His self-perception and others' perception of him as male was what he wanted, and his gender expression matched his inward identity despite his biology's

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Artemus, Interview (2016).

betrayal. In terms of his liminal position, Aretmus intrinsically viewed his gender as stable: he was ‘a man’, in his own words, ‘there was no transgender’.<sup>47</sup> In biological terms his body was fluid, only changing when and if he made that decision. There was a possibility that his gender could become unstable and liminal however, if he confided in those around him who were not privy to his past or his birth sex.<sup>48</sup> However, at this stage in his life, Artemus was happy with how he had been perceived, and to him ‘it was good’.<sup>49</sup> Artemus’ gender regulation and invisibility could additionally be seen as a double-edged sword: he passed easily within society, blending in with the gender normative population and by choice, only disclosing his gender identity to those he trusted. However, his ability to pass or ‘go stealth’ prevented him from representing or involving himself with the gender variant community out with the confines of the GIC.<sup>50</sup>

Going stealth has received criticism from the trans community ‘because their desire to maintain the pseudo cis privilege they currently have trumps being open and honest to the world about being trans’, nor would the community have made so many gains in recent years without trans visibility.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, disclosing trans status is a difficult choice for gender variant individuals, especially when it comes educational establishments, employers and/or health care. It is well known that trans individuals and the community as a whole, experience widespread discrimination and systemic injustice, especially for those who are trans people of colour, homeless, young people and/or

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> E.T. Booth., ‘Queering Queer Eye: The Stability of Gay Identity Confronts the Liminality of Trans Embodiment’, *Western Journal of Communication*, 75:2 (2011), p. 190.

<sup>49</sup> Artemus, Interview (2016).

<sup>50</sup> To ‘go stealth’ means that an individual does not disclose one’s trans status.

<sup>51</sup> M. Roberts, *Transadvocate*, “Stealth Doesn’t Help the Trans Community”, last modified July 25, 2013. [http://transadvocate.com/stealth-doesnt-help-the-trans-community\\_n\\_9817.htm](http://transadvocate.com/stealth-doesnt-help-the-trans-community_n_9817.htm)



involved in sex work. Policy, law and legislation in the US is against them.<sup>52</sup> Studies from the US, Australia and South Africa, involving trans men at various stages highlight the temptation to ‘go stealth’ because of the pressure on the individual to not only legitimise oneself as an ‘authentic’ man, but also to survive under the threat of America’s dual gender paradigm, which dominates society, along with social stresses and the pressure to abide by established stereotypes.<sup>53</sup> T. Jones, A.P. Bolger, T. Dune, A. Lykins, and G. Hawkes in their study *Female-to-Male (FtM) Transgender People’s Experiences in Australia: A National Study* argue that those individuals who live as stealth and pass as male state that, in short, they simply wish to be seen and received in society as male, much like Artemus ‘I don’t want to be known as a trans, I want to be known as a man. Nothing else, just a man’.<sup>54</sup> Some said that if they came out it left them open to scrutiny by those they told, much like being analysed for authenticity in their masculinity and found out in their femininity:

“I don’t want people picking the feminine features out and chucking them in my face” said one, “Some people start trying to find ways they might have been able to tell (e.g. small hands, no Adams apple)” said another. Others worried they would not be treated “as every man is treated”.<sup>55</sup>

In Aaron Devor’s 1997 textbook, *Female to Male Transsexuals in Society*, and furthered in his 2004 paper, *Witnessing and mirroring: A fourteen stage model of transsexual identity formation* his second to last stage is Integration whereby he argues,

---

<sup>52</sup> See Chapter 2 section 2.4.

<sup>53</sup> E.C. Davis., ‘SITUATING “FLUIDITY” (Trans) Gender Identification and the Regulation of Gender Diversity’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 15:1 (2009), p. 106.

<sup>54</sup> T. Jones, A.P. Bolger, T. Dune, A. Lykins, and G. Hawkes., *Female-to-Male (FtM) Transgender People’s Experiences in Australia: A National Study*, SpringerBriefs in Sociology (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2015), p. 97.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

in most cases, trans men achieve integration more ‘seamlessly...into society at large’ than trans women:

As transsexed people become more able and more comfortable functioning as unremarkable men...in their everyday lives, the facts of their transitions and of their transsexuality become less salient. As time passes and as transsexed people become more firmly embedded in their post-transition lives, they and most of the people around them will tend to allow the past to recede until it only rarely intrudes upon life in the here and now.<sup>56</sup>

However, Devor states that in the final Pride stage no one can escape their past and even if an individual can pass in their gender normative society, there are always risks, disadvantages and dangers.<sup>57</sup> This returns to the internal struggle between disclosing transness or going stealth: the danger from institutionalised and structural inequalities that trans individuals have experienced historically and currently due to their societally perceived gender transgression. It was clear at 17 however, that Artemus was content in being read as male and feeling male in all the intersections of his life without the need to transition for the sake of societal norms physically or biologically.

To remain in the realm of disclosure and stealth, Luke’s narrative has significant importance; not only was he the only other trans voice of colour within this thesis as a Latino trans man, but he additionally experienced long-term mental health issues and homelessness. Luke was aged 22 at the time of interview and was originally from Arizona. He moved to Boulder, Colorado with the intention of engaging and listening to trans activists and advocates including Jennicet Guterrez at Colorado University [CU]

---

<sup>56</sup> A. Devor, Witnessing and Mirroring: A Fourteen Stage Model of Transsexual Identity Formation. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, 8:1-2 (2004), pp. 63-65; H. Devor, *FTM: Female-to-male transsexuals in society* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1997).

<sup>57</sup> Devor, Witnessing and Mirroring, p.65.

Boulder's 'Tenth annual TRANSforming Gender Conference' in March 2016.<sup>58</sup> He wished to establish himself at the conference in anticipation of joining CU's gender department. However, when Luke entered the conference, the delegates read him, not as female or male but as a homeless individual, stating 'people look at you like you're a lost cause'.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, in Luke's mind his dream to receive the help or assistance he felt he would get from academia was dashed expressing 'I went into the night, with nowhere to go and slept under a bridge...It was strange'.<sup>60</sup>

Luke had contacted me about interviewing for the study through a mutual contact and I met with him at the Boulder Public Library. I hired a small quiet meeting room which featured a long white plastic table, matching chairs and a flip chart easel at the front displaying scribbles from a previous meeting. Luke was small in stature with short but wild red hair tamed only by a black beanie which had cat ears. He wore an oversized black hoodie, blue jeans and sneakers. The most notable item of Luke's attire was his large black backpack which seemed to engulf his slight form. Luke was extremely articulate, self-aware, politically motivated and knew exactly what he wanted from his life. However, he did not know how to bridge the gaping chasm of daily inequality and discrimination he faced in getting there. Luke's situation reflects the expansion of Stryker's transgender rage by Benavente and Gill-Peterson when they argue that this rage and anger extends to those trans individuals of colour who use it as a 'vehicle of critique

---

<sup>58</sup> Washington Blade: America's LGBT News Source, "EXCLUSIVE: I interrupted Obama because we need to be heard", last modified June 25, 2015. <http://www.washingtonblade.com/2015/06/25/exclusive-i-interrupted-obama-because-we-need-to-be-heard/>; CU Boulder Today, "Tenth annual TRANSforming Gender Conference begins March 10," last modified March 2, 2016.

<https://www.colorado.edu/today/2016/03/02/tenth-annual-transforming-gender-conference-begins-march-10>

<sup>59</sup> Luke; 18th May 2016. [Luke chose not to give his last name on the record].

<sup>60</sup> Luke, Interview (2016).

that takes the specific form of Stryker's commitment to knowledge production directly out of...the embodied livelihood of trans people'. His experience of being trans and Latino intersects of marginalisation, homelessness and experiencing violence in being rejected by society.<sup>61</sup>

During his narrative Luke talked about his current living conditions, revealing he lived with 'a drug addict' whom he had met in one of the homeless shelters in Boulder. Prior to interview Luke regularly stayed in shelters. He shared that he worried he 'might get kicked out' of his current living arrangement giving several speculative reasons why.<sup>62</sup> My past experiences of having worked and gotten to know individuals dealing with homelessness indicated that they predominantly live with a feeling of uncertainty in all intersections of their lives. However, Luke had the additional concern of being trans and possibly outed thus leading to higher physical risk and further homelessness.<sup>63</sup>

Luke worked in a recycling plant, a position he saw advertised on 'Craigslist'; \$5 per hour for crushing cans ten hours a day.<sup>64</sup> He was confident in his skills and abilities to fulfil his role 'I struggle, work hard' but he was also aware that if he did not turn up to a shift or could not keep up with the rate of can-crushing, he would easily be replaced.<sup>65</sup>

Luke briefly talked about his childhood. He came from a working-class household where his mother was always working, and his dad had died early in Luke's life. At the age of 9 he got into trouble in school, enough to be removed from home and placed in a

---

<sup>61</sup> Benavente and Gill-Peterson., 'The Promise of Trans Critique', p. 26.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> V.Y. MD., 'Shelter and Transitional Housing for Transgender Youth', *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, 14:4 (2010), p. 341-342.

<sup>64</sup> Craigslist is an American based classified advertisement website with ads ranging from flat mates to sex workers.

<sup>65</sup> Luke, Interview (2016).

treatment centre then consequentially into foster care. Luke's narrative was a startling contrast to Grayson's and Artemus' childhood stories. Luke described how he was bullied for presenting as masculine instead of feminine. However, gender dysphoria did not hit him until puberty:

I didn't come out or anything like, I was learning about what it is [trans], and I was just keeping it to myself and thinking, I clearly can't do this because I'm not in a situation where it can happen so I'm just going to keep it under wraps. So, yeah when I was 14 like, I started going, going through puberty, and ummm, like trying to grow myself up into a girl and try to become more feminine and that's really when I realised like I started thinking about my future and stuff. I realised that I really can't do it...I would just not make it. You know, so that's like, difficult, because there's nothing I could about it, I couldn't change it...<sup>66</sup>

Luke's experience of knowing he was in the wrong body but not having the ability to share that fact or the finances to change it compared significantly with Artemus and Grayson. In addition, unlike both of these narrators and the participants in Beemyn and Rankin's study, Luke was fully aware and frustrated by his inability to be a girl - despite trying his best to conform to America's oppressive gender myths despite being sure of his masculinity and trans status at an early age.<sup>67</sup> Luke researched what trans was, identifying fully with the term of gender dysphoria. Despite their age difference of 10 years or so and technological access to information at similar ages, Grayson said his young age prevented him from knowing anything other than having to be a girl, whereas Luke was resourceful and explorative. I could argue that both Grayson and Luke have very different personality types. However, it endorses Mandelbaum's argument that '...biological

---

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Beemyn and Rankin, *Lives of*, p. 46.

factors set the basic conditions for a life course' and cultural factors mould and shape life aspirations and decisions.<sup>68</sup>

Luke's additional contrast to Artemus and Grayson was his perceived social standing in life and at times - not seeing himself as human. Both Artemus and Grayson in being raised in middle class households had more opportunity to be supported financially by their families. Luke reflected on his inability to afford transition by expressing that 'being trans is for privileged people'.<sup>69</sup> Until this point, Luke's short life had a difficult narrative which reflected not just class, race and financial inequality, but also a body which existed as 'a...self between the social performances of gendered behaviors'.<sup>70</sup> Luke's inability to transition forced him to keep his transness under wraps. This decision could have been viewed as a form of passing and stealth, but also to protect as argued earlier. In Luke's case he presented himself at work as a woman sharing '[chuckles] I wouldn't get a job if I was out'.<sup>71</sup> His female performance dangerously overlapped with his male identity in describing a time when he was on the bus to work with his co-workers to whom he was not out. His friends who knew him as Luke greeted him by using his male name and that worried him for a while. In adding to this risk, he legally changed his name to Luke which changed his social security number, with possible dire consequences 'I will almost definitely lose that job when that happens [new code arrives]...because I'm trans...it's too much trouble...they can replace me'.<sup>72</sup> In order to negate this Luke planned to gain a job which upheld employment rights for trans people.

---

<sup>68</sup> Mandelbaum, 'The Study', p. 180.

<sup>69</sup> Luke, Interview (2016).

<sup>70</sup> Nagoshi and Brzuzy, 'Transgender Theory', p. 435.

<sup>71</sup> Luke, Interview (2016).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

His lived experiences represented stages one and two of Turner's liminality theory in a traditional sense and in relation to experiencing homelessness: stage 1: social and cultural separation from all that is previously known, friends, family etc; and stage 2: passing through a realm which has none or few of familiarities of one's past or coming 'state'.<sup>73</sup> However, I would argue further that Luke's liminality added another two facets; namely stage 3: his gender identity and stage 4: his working class identity. Luke underwent both theoretical social stages simultaneously but additionally processed liminality in his physical body and masculine identity: remaining closeted at work while being out to his peers therefore living in a constant gender negotiation. Moreover, this continuous gender negotiation underpinned fluidity within trans theory - Luke occupied the space in between the gender binary in a physical and embodied sense. This in turn contributed to his working-class status, homelessness and financial restrictions preventing transition and the easing Luke's gender dysphoria. He straddled this fluid and liminal existence until he had enough money to pay for testosterone via Planned Parenthood. According to Luke a \$200 initial appointment paid for blood tests, a demonstration of how to inject and at what dosage, as well as a ten month supply of testosterone.<sup>74</sup> Luke described that once this initial period had passed it was \$50 every ten months for a new prescription which he had paid off and on for two years.<sup>75</sup> Grayson and Artemus whose middle-class standings enabled them to access trans health care via parental or employment insurance policies confirms that working-class and homeless trans individuals have to navigate and negotiate their identities differently. This is especially

---

<sup>73</sup> Turner, *The Ritual*, p. 47.

<sup>74</sup> Planned Parenthood Federation of America, 'is a non-profit organization that provides sexual health care in the United States and globally'. <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/> consulted, 02/03/18

<sup>75</sup> Luke, Interview (2016).

when accessing healthcare while homeless.<sup>76</sup> In discussing testosterone use and similar to Grayson, Luke felt better on hormones:

...it makes you more energetic, it gives more energy [laughs]...it just feels better, like I don't know. Like when you have dysphoria and you just feel uncomfortable all the time, when you're like always looking at yourself and like feeling like things aren't where you expect them to be, it's hard to explain.<sup>77</sup>

Grayson was unable to articulate what was at the foundation of his apathy, but hormones definitely made a positive difference. Artemus on the other hand did not consider himself trans but felt like a man and clearly did not feel the same level of dysphoria, if any.

Artemus went on to college to study music and on graduating started his own quartet and had a successful acting career within the theatre. However, in 2006 he decided to enter into law enforcement, describing it as 'a drastic difference' that was motivated in having gained a DUI [Driving Under the Influence] 'very foolishly'.<sup>78</sup> Artemus vehemently stated he had never done anything against the law prior to or since and said 'the system was so messed up':

I uh, I hadn't started to transition then, but I did do things, like I uh, I compressed, I compressed my chest ummm, and I packed. Uh, so I did both of those things. And when I got the DUI, ummm, there was no room in detox, so they took me to jail. I had a very bad experience in jail. They didn't know where to put me, ummm they put me in confinement. Ummm, it was just overnight, because it's when you have to sober up before they release you, ummm in the State of Colorado, and so I said, this system is horrible, I hate this system, I need to do something about it and go into law enforcement, and that's what I did.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> Grayson, Interview (2016); Artemus, Interview (2016); S.S. Spicer., 'Healthcare Needs of the Transgender Homeless Population', *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, 14:4 (2010), p. 333.

<sup>77</sup> Luke, Interview (2016).

<sup>78</sup> Artemus, Interview (2016).

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.



It was clear that Artemus' overnight in jail was not just a difficult and life changing experience but according to Mandelbaum, a turning point. To further this, there was evidence that it was a turning point in a gender normative sense; his experience pivoted around making a change in a systemically discriminative environment. However, it was also a pivotal trans moment in relation to Artemus' experience of being a trans man who did not fit into the narrow gender roles and ideals that America and its systems embraced.<sup>80</sup> Artemus did not go into detail surrounding his experience of arrest or having to declare his documents/ID which did not match his gender presentation. However, he eluded to it, simply saying it was 'a very bad experience'.<sup>81</sup> Artemus' silences here support the historical experience of trans individuals when interacting with law enforcement. One report on how the criminal justice system fails trans people expressed:

Being asked to present identity documents in interactions with police is a very vulnerable moment for transgender people. If one's identity document does not match an individual's gender expression or the officer's perception of what the person's gender is, this may result in increased scrutiny by law enforcement.<sup>82</sup>

The consequence of this was the point made earlier that despite Artemus' assuredness of his masculinity in passing successfully and his stable male identity, the interaction with a homonormative system turned his stability into vulnerability; his male gender presentation versus his female identification. As a consequence, the law enforcement officers' lack of interaction with trans individuals and/or the lack of procedure or policy to positively house gender non-conforming people possibly led to

---

<sup>80</sup> Boyd and Ramirez, *Bodies of Evidence*, p. 7.

<sup>81</sup> Artemus, Interview (2016).

<sup>82</sup> Center for American Progress, and Movement Advancement Project. *Unjust: How the Broken Criminal Justice System Fails Transgender People*. (Washington DC, 2016), p. 14.

Artemus' mistreatment via transphobic reactions and his inappropriate housing in solitary confinement. It also reflects the justice systems desire to remain gendernormative, and reluctance to come into contact with anyone other than gendernormative individuals – creating a web of surveillance for those who are not.<sup>83</sup>

This experience in Artemus' narrative could be viewed as one of danger and powerlessness, denying disrupting what trans theory promotes in being himself 'seek[ing] to subvert and/or move beyond the binary divide'.<sup>84</sup> I feel that because of Artemus' middle class background, including family and access to excellent school and higher education establishments, the experience could have been much worse - for instance - if Luke had been arrested. It was however enough of a turning point for Artemus, promoting a clear alteration in career path into law enforcement and adopting an internal activist approach to change the system. In completing police academy training and a degree Artemus realised 'I can't change the system. There's too much bad in it. Plus, I wanted to help people, I always wanted to help people, and people, when you're an officer, don't want help. You're the bad guy. So, I thought, this is greater than I can make a difference...'<sup>85</sup> With this revelation, Artemus returned to college in 2013 to study medicine and psychology intending on becoming a psychiatrist, hoping to one day return to law enforcement and the legal system. He felt there was a need within the medical system owing to a shortage of psychiatrists, and if he did not end up in law enforcement he wanted to work with the trans community, 'I'm doing what I finally want to do, so I'm

---

<sup>83</sup> E.A. Stanley., 'Introduction', in E.A. Stanley., and N. Smith (eds.), *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 2015) p. 13.

<sup>84</sup> Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 'Transgender Theory', p. 439.

<sup>85</sup> Artemus, Interview (2016).

happy about it'.<sup>86</sup> Artemus' feeling for which direction his life should take him had multiple pivotal trans moments and adaptations in line with Mandelbaum's framework.<sup>87</sup> Despite the silences within his narrative in relation to his direct experiences at the hands of law enforcement, it was clear that his gender journey, identity and his involvement with the trans community played a significant role in his decision-making towards aligning his career. He returned to reflecting on his trans identity:

I really knew at about 3, I didn't want to wear girl's clothes. There was nothing about girl's clothes that I wanted anything to do with, ummm. As soon as I was old enough to dress myself, I did...I ummm, my parents were very good about it. My grandparents were very good about it. It took them a while to kind of realise. I think at one point maybe I was [pauses] uhhh, I don't know, ten. Nine or ten. Grandma finally said, "I'm going to stop buying clothes for you. I'm just going to take you shopping [laughs]".<sup>88</sup>

By the time Artemus hit puberty he knew that 'things weren't normal' and that from high school onwards he identified as a man, saying that he was very lucky because 'it wasn't even questioned'.<sup>89</sup> Artemus made the decision to transition in 2008. He did comment that he had come out as a lesbian prior to coming out as trans, though he didn't provide further details. In starting the transition process Artemus underwent a range of tests and it was found that his testosterone level was 'naturally' high while his oestrogen level was low. This gave him the realisation that his feelings of being a man were natural and exactly what he wanted. Again, in terms of liminality theory Artemus had his maleness confirmed via his physiology inwardly stabilising his outward identity and becoming secure in his presentation. However, he still had to go through the first stage

---

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Boyd and Ramirez, *Bodies of Evidence*, p. 7; Mandelbaum, 'The Study', p. 181.

<sup>88</sup> Artemus, Interview (2016).

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

of liminality theory - informing his family about his trans identity and his medical confirmation from doctors.

Artemus decided that he would tell his brother first because he knew he would support him fully. Then his mother and dad, whom he assumed ‘would be easy’. This method caused his coming out to ‘totally backfire’ as his mother stated, ‘we always knew you were’ and his dad responding with ‘oh my god’.<sup>90</sup> Artemus laughed when reflecting on his dad’s reaction and it was resoundingly clear that he was fully accepted by his family, contrary to most trans research and narratives. On further recalling his parent’s reactions he shared that his mother revealed a story where the doctors had predicted Artemus would be a boy and they had expected a boy until the birth. He followed this statement with ‘they helped me pick my new name’, expressing ‘I had a great experience’.<sup>91</sup>

Artemus’ most poignant moment was when he talked about his maternal grandmother and her full acceptance of his transness; she called a family dinner to which Artemus came out to his immediate and extended family as trans:

I told everybody, I just got it all out on the table and grandma says, if ummm, “this is how it is, this is how it’s going to be and if you have a problem with it you talk to me” ...and I thought, oh my gosh, I’m so blessed with an amazing family in comparison to some people, a, just a lot of people don’t have what I had.<sup>92</sup>

He continued, saying his grandmother was quite religious and came from a Catholic and Jewish family. Therefore, he was surprised by her support. Artemus’

---

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

experience contrasted significantly to the typical trans narrative of being rejected by family and much like Luke - experiencing instability - homelessness and acute gender dysphoria. This rejection narrative is both historical and current.<sup>93</sup> However, Artemus' acceptance narrative complicates the rejection narrative, revealing that some trans individuals are accepted by family, especially by those retain conservative religious views where gender and queerness is involved. Artemus' trans narrative is one of celebration and acceptance.

In his brief description of his physical transition, Artemus stated that he waited until Obamacare could pay for his 'top' surgery; known as chest surgery or a mastectomy. 'I said, I gotta get this now before somebody changes Obamacare [laughs]'.<sup>94</sup> He felt there were good things that came out of Obamacare, especially having to only pay \$5 co-pay from a \$26,000 surgery. In terms of 'bottom' surgery, Artemus expressed that it was presently too experimental and therefore had too many uncertainties for him. Despite this, he was happy with where he was, who he was and 'the path I am on'.<sup>95</sup>

In his narrative, Grayson described his passion for construction work and his first taste of it post Hurricane Katrina in 2008.<sup>96</sup> Prior to this he had graduated college but unsuccessfully attempted to acquire posts in museum studies, blaming potential employers' unwillingness to hire individuals who had not undertaken further study. As

---

<sup>93</sup> Please see D.B. Hill., 'Dear Doctor Benjamin: Letters from Transsexual Youth (1963-1976)'. *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 10:3-4 (2008), pp. 149-70. S. D. Snapp., J. M. Hoenig., A. Fields., and S. T. Russell., 'Messy, Butch, and Queer: LGBTQ Youth and the School-to-Prison Pipeline', *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 30:1 (2015), pp. 57-82, for examples.

<sup>94</sup> Healthcare.gov, 'Transgender health care', <https://www.healthcare.gov/transgender-health-care/> consulted 28/07/16; B. Gibson., 'Care of the Child with the Desire to Change Genders - Part II: Female-to-Male Transition', *Paediatric Nursing*, 31:4 (2010), p. 231; Artemus, Interview (2016).

<sup>95</sup> Gibson, *Care of*, p. 232; Artemus, Interview (2016).

<sup>96</sup> Joseph B. Treaster and Abby Goodnough, "Powerful Storm Threatens Havoc Along Gulf Coast", *New York Times*, August 29, 2005.

consequence, Grayson was unsure he even wanted to pursue this course of employment or further education. His narrative continued to reflect tensions between his family's opinions on his middle-class status and his working-class vocation. These pressures contributed to his inability to imagine a future for himself in construction work and lead him consider grad school. However, in 2008 he joined a non-profit programme which took him to New Orleans to assist in the clean-up and rebuilding of the area. After six weeks in construction Grayson had 'fallen in love with it', contradictorily spurring him to go for grad school. During the application process he described wanting to continue building and being useful, rather than working in a coffee shop. He applied and successfully gained long term volunteering in New Orleans, where he received housing, and a small financial stipend while building houses. Grayson intended on his further volunteering role lasting just 6 months, but it turned into 5 years:

I just really loved it and so, was just really, kind of immersing myself in this like, this life that I wanted but didn't know that I wanted, in terms of like, I had the pickup truck and the construction job and was openly living as a lesbian...But I think that when, when I really started to move like towards transition, was like, one, there was a growing awareness that like, you know, I was getting things that I wanted, but like it just like didn't, I don't know, it just didn't quite feel right.<sup>97</sup>

His observation of the situation was both frustrating and tantalising. He described being so close but still so far from a pivotal trans moment in his self-awareness/realisation and trans identity.<sup>98</sup> In that moment he understood what he wanted but he did not know why he was not satisfied and why it did not feel right. He had not talked about his sexuality in his narrative up until this point - which I feel suggested it was not important

---

<sup>97</sup> Grayson, Interview (2016).

<sup>98</sup> Boyd and Ramirez, *Bodies of Evidence*, p. 7.

enough to factor into his identity - much like Artemus. However, Grayson gained some semblance of self-awareness, of not just of his vocational wants, but of his gender variance. Being a lesbian was clearly not enough.

He expressed that his partner at the time was very 'analytical' in her thinking and wanted Grayson to be more self-aware. He explained how in making comments such as 'I wish I was a man because of...' his partner would 'call him out' on it and ask him questions to make him think more around the subject of his gender.<sup>99</sup> Further to this, they began to joke that they would tell Grayson's parents that he was a man, and what his name would be. He said this went on for a few weeks. However, on reflection, Grayson realised that at the time it was not a joke and it had been his way of coming out to his partner. He felt that his coming out was significantly influenced by her.

Grayson's experience speaks loudly to the liminal space of a trans person being initiated at times via an 'in-group collaboration act to 'fashion' [individual] biographical stories that define into existence a differently gendered 'true self'.<sup>100</sup> Wilson does not specify whether the 'in-group' collaborators are trans people coming to an individual's aid to help them build their true gendered identity. In Grayson's case, it was a supportive, cisgender partner who helped him reach a pivotal trans moment, accomplishing a different stage or liminality: identifying as a trans man rather than tolerating the status quo.<sup>101</sup> He furthered this moment by sharing a discussion he had had regarding phalloplasty [also referred to as bottom surgery] with a close friend at the time, rating this experience as

---

<sup>99</sup> Grayson, Interview (2016).

<sup>100</sup> M. Wilson., ' 'I Am the Prince of Pain, for I Am a Princess in the Brain': Liminal Transgender Identities, Narratives and the Elimination of Ambiguities'. *Sexualities*, 5:4 (2002), p. 436.

<sup>101</sup> Boyd and Ramirez, *Bodies of Evidence*, p. 7.

bringing him to a place of closer examination of himself.<sup>102</sup> His conversation led him to remember he had written a paper on trans people in high school, claiming at the time that it was an interesting subject to write on. However, in writing the paper, he had gotten to know the normative trans narrative: knowing since early childhood, which Grayson did not identify with, much like Jacqui. However, having access to more nuanced trans stories and meeting his first ‘out trans person’ made him realise that ‘this is a real thing that people do. This is not just some news story about some, a couple of people here and there. Like, real people in my life were trans’.<sup>103</sup> Meeting trans individuals helped Grayson to ‘expose all the assumptions’ he had about male, female and trans experiences.<sup>104</sup> Grayson’s journey to his own enlightenment reflects Mandelbaum’s turning points perfectly, in that it was ‘accomplished when the person takes on a new set of roles, enters into fresh relations with a new set of people, and acquires a new self-conception’.<sup>105</sup> His story tied in clearly with trans liminal spaces and trans theory’s embodied in the experience of the current narrative, or in Grayson’s case, exposing the normative trans narrative and replacing it with his own.<sup>106</sup>

Once Grayson began coming out to people in his life in 2013, he said, ‘I went full speed’.<sup>107</sup> He kept trying to remind himself to be patient, that it was a process and said that patience was the biggest challenge for him. I feel that this resonated with his earlier statement of missing out on so much of his life because of his indifference towards

---

<sup>102</sup> Gibson, *Care of*, p. 232; Grayson, interview (2016).

<sup>103</sup> Grayson, interview (2016).

<sup>104</sup> Grayson, Interview (2016).

<sup>105</sup> Turner, “The Study”, p. 181.

<sup>106</sup> G. Aiello et al., ‘Here, and Not Yet Here: A Dialogue at the Intersection of Queer, Trans, and Culture’, *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 6:2 (2013), p. 108.

<sup>107</sup> Grayson, Interview (2016).



himself. Grayson could be criticised for wanting everything to change in a moment. However, because of him having missed out on so much, there was a sense of urgency to blossom into the trans man he identified as. As he laughed, Grayson he described his birthday party in 2013: everyone sang ‘Happy Birthday’, half of the room ‘said Grayson and half the room said my old name’. By June 2014, he has started testosterone, articulating it as an ‘emotional awakening for him’.<sup>108</sup> At this point he had come out to all of his friends and co-workers in New Orleans.

Telling his family, Grayson admitted, was easier than expected. By the time of interview, he had developed a close relationship with his brother and viewed him ‘as the safest’. He told his sister over the phone while she was in her car and ‘that has vastly improved our relationship...and she is very supportive’.<sup>109</sup> More poignantly, Grayson no longer felt inferior to his sister, sharing that he had realised this because they were so different. As a consequence of his openness with his sister, she accompanied him to his top surgery. Where coming out to his parents was concerned, Grayson expressed his fear in telling them but they both supported him, despite his Mom pushing back with questions to understand his actions and further need to transition. Again, like Artemus, Grayson’s narrative complicated the historical and research based trans narrative with regards to rejection and lack of support for those coming out and was refreshing to encounter.

Grayson said that in taking testosterone, he was ‘intentional’ with his family, posting Facebook photos of his changes and talking to them regularly on the phone so that his voice change would not be a shock for them. He then had surgery in November of the

---

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

same year. He shared, ‘once I realised, I was allowed to transition, I was like, well I’m not waiting anymore, I’ve waited so long’.<sup>110</sup> When asked about his state at the time of interview, Grayson expressed that he was happy and feeling excited for the future.

Ultimately, Grayson’s, Artemus’ and Luke’s narratives, are all unique but all spoke to and contrasted with the normative narrative for trans individuals, especially for those who identify as trans men. Each narrator experienced and continues to experience a liminal place within their lives, identities and transition; outlook and self-perception; and financial/insurance situations, as well as the support of their families and friends. Therefore, their liminality in identity and place on the gender spectrum could alter in the future. Each experience pivotal trans moment was contrasting, depending on outlook, placement of the gender journey or exploration into gender identity and growth moments. It was clear that support/medical facilitates, coming out and the process of transitioning for all concerned, varied significantly, whether from middle-class or working-class families. Each narrative dealt with power, conflict of gender identity and where the narrator belonged in the wider world: with two out of the three narratives challenging and complicating research around familial rejection, and life trajectories for trans individuals. In addition, their narratives reflect transgender theory’s challenge to essentialism in embracing a fluid-embodiment – whether living in stealth or secrecy – and gender as a temporal practice, which intersects with class, race etc. and living on an axis which will eventually lead them to a place of person authenticity and satisfaction.<sup>111</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> Grayson, Interview (2016).

<sup>111</sup> Stryker et al, ‘Introduction’, p. 14.

## Chapter 7 Genderqueer lived experiences

Two narratives feature fully in this chapter and despite identifying as genderqueer they sit in very different places on the gender spectrum. Our main narrator, Jess, used female pronouns at the time of interview and was coming to grips with her identity, which rejected classification into male or female gender categories.<sup>1</sup> However, she was not all that comfortable with her own label - exuding her outward liminality and retaining remnants of self-policing. Jess' story has importance because she transitioned from female to male, but after a period of living as a man, transitioned back to female, which western medicine stipulates as impossible due to 'irreversible' factors.<sup>2</sup> Jess' underlying reasons for rejecting her gender fluidity was an internal struggle in having to abide by America's gender binary ideals, rather than exploring her possible fluidity on the gender spectrum and Stryker's axis and accepting herself.<sup>3</sup> Jess' history 'pivots on the active relationships between past and present, subjective and objective, poetic and political'.<sup>4</sup> Within this she unravelled her personal, social and culturally instilled myths regarding gender and identity. To add to her struggle, Devor poignantly states '...anything that is not feminine can only be seen and understood as masculine; anyone who is unfeminine is masculine. So, females who, for whatever reason, are perceived as unfeminine are

---

<sup>1</sup> Oparah, 'Feminism and the (trans)gender Entrapment', p. 240.

<sup>2</sup> 'Standards of Care for the health of transsexual, transgender, and gender nonconforming people', World Professional Association for Transgender Health (7<sup>th</sup> Version, 2012), <http://www.teni.ie/attachments/92d213ab-8474-4f34-a931-ab95489b2afe.PDF>, date accessed: 17 November 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Stryker et al, 'Introduction', p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Samuel and Thompson, *The Myths*, p. 5.

perceived to be in the same measure masculine.<sup>5</sup> Jess continued and continues to struggle with her sought after identity and expression of androgyny.

The other narrator featured in this chapter is Asher, who was born female but situated their fluidity to what felt right for them at any one time. Furthermore, these narratives were steeped in the embodied experience of trans theory, bodies transgressing the binary in places, spaces and at times in sexuality and sex.<sup>6</sup> Both Jess and Asher have similar gender stories of their early years to Grayson's and Luke's in that they tried their very best to act and pass as girls for a time to abide again by their ingrained cultural learned behaviour - or biological factors as Mandelbaum would state -, of America's well-established binary ideals and strict gender roles.<sup>7</sup>

I was first introduced to Jess via a mentor and colleague in Laramie, Wyoming. Laramie is infamous where LGBTQI+ issues are concerned, as the home of the hate crime and brutal murder of gay teenager, Matthew Shephard, in 1998.<sup>8</sup> In our early off the record discussions, Jess mentioned Matthew: how his murder remained a negative legacy in Laramie and in her eyes, Laramie continued its intolerance of anyone not heteronormative, gender-normative or white, even in 2016. My own observations in visiting Laramie gleaned that it had a reputation for being the epitome of America's covered wagon, as well as holding firmly to a romanticised vision of the Wild West. Laramie conveyed this position in academia, choosing a cowboy as the local university's

---

<sup>5</sup> H. Devor., 'Gender Blending Females: Women and Sometimes Men', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 31:1 (1987), p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Aiello et al., 'Here, and Not Yet Here: A Dialogue at the Intersection of Queer, Trans, and Culture', *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 6:2 (2013), p. 108.

<sup>7</sup> Mandelbaum, 'The Study', p. 180.

<sup>8</sup> *New York Times*, 'Gay Man Dies From Attack, Fanning Outrage and Debate', 13 October 1998, <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/10/13/us/gay-man-dies-from-attack-fanning-outrage-and-debate.html>.

emblem and mascot. In addition, I was very much aware Laramie's hard-right political leanings and its whiteness. It made me feel uncomfortable about my whiteness and ability to pass where others so readily could not, especially those of colour.

For the interview, I met Jess at the University of Wyoming, where she was a graduate student in Creative Writing. Our interview room was a small mustard-coloured office. It contained brown office furniture and a brown couch behind the door which looked like the 1970s wanted it back. The space was quiet and private but very unappealing in its welcome and atmosphere. The town of Laramie itself sits at just over 7000 feet above sea level and despite my constant drive to remain hydrated, I easily succumbed to symptoms of altitude sickness, having travelled over 3 hours from Fort Collins, Colorado, that morning. Fort Collins in comparison sits at just over 5000 feet above sea level.

I was also aware I was influenced by my blatant dislike of a town where a young gay man was killed for being himself and the remaining LGBTQI+ community continued to be ostracised well in 2016.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, Jess's interview was one of my first using oral history as a method and on my fieldwork. I had not yet gotten my natural groove for asking open-questions nor was I skilled in 'deep listening' for meaning and not just fact.<sup>10</sup> There was a chance I did not possess the confidence, intuition or calibre of the oral historian I was by the end of the trip.

---

<sup>9</sup> 'Matthew Shepard Was Brutally Murdered in Laramie, Wyoming, in 1998. Last Night, the City Passed the First LGBT Nondiscrimination Ordinance in the State', *ACLU* (2015), <https://www.aclu.org/blog/lgbt-rights/lgbt-nondiscrimination-protections/matthew-shepard-was-brutally-murdered-laramie>, date accessed: 2 June 2018 [see comments section].

<sup>10</sup> A. Wong, 'Listen and Learn', in A. Sheftel and S. Zembrzycki (eds.), *Oral History off the Record: Toward and Ethnography of Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 99.

Stacey Zembrzycki in relation to beginning oral history projects would say that Jess and I were strangers, but we connected immediately, bonding midway through her story, and were friends by the end.<sup>11</sup> On reflection, I felt that there were other avenues of questioning I could have taken Jess but did not. This could have been due to nerves and the possibility of not wanting to veer from the interview schedule due to my specific inexperience with oral history interviewing. I additionally felt on reflection that I was through newness and nervousness ‘outcome’ and ‘product driven’ as Zembrzycki would describe, not realising that ‘the product and outcome would not exist without...relationships...’<sup>12</sup> At the time, I felt that the interview went well, and I listened to a rich and informative narrative. I remember asking Jess that if I had any further questions could I email them, and Jess had said yes. However, when I did so I never received a reply and despite prompting her once or twice, I did not want to press her or our newfound friendship.

To return to the day of the interview, I set the room up so that I was on the couch, which was of lower seating position and Jess sat on the higher office chair. We briefly chatted beforehand, getting to know each other. Jess was a tall, physically and seemingly emotionally strong woman, with a muscular build and long legs. Her hair was short and androgynous, and her clothes were neutral and unassuming: she wore a three-quarter length navy scooped necked fitted top, black dress trousers, black flat shoes, and no

---

<sup>11</sup> S. Zembrzycki, ‘Not Just Another Interviewee’, in A. Sheftel and S. Zembrzycki (eds.), *Oral History off the Record: Toward and Ethnography of Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 130.

<sup>12</sup> H. Attrian, ‘Vulnerability, Familiarity and Friendship’, in A. Sheftel and S. Zembrzycki (eds.), *Oral History off the Record: Toward and Ethnography of Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 79.

jewellery. Her smile was very friendly, and she struck me as extremely intelligent and expressive.

Jess was 35 years old at the time of interview and was born in Michigan but grew up in the Bay Area of San Francisco, in a 'wealthy' neighbourhood. Her family was made up of her mother and father, one younger sister and one younger brother.<sup>13</sup> They all had their own rooms and the house had a large outdoor play area. Jess did not linger at all on her family, instead moved towards talking about attending school in the local Bay Area. She expressed that she was a very 'gifted' child and her teachers did not appreciate it, which was especially true when she asked for additional work, having finished before the rest of her class. Jess admitted that she was the kid 'that was always reading and withdrawn, because I was bored all the time' and despite having some friends she felt she was viewed as 'withdrawn, strange and smart' by those around her.<sup>14</sup> Jess sounded disappointed as she talked about her teachers not wanting to undertake any additional work to nurture her intelligence. As a response her Mom approached the school to complain that Jess was not getting enough work: her teacher then gave her five book reports to write on five children's books, instead of giving her a more challenging book to read and report on. Admitting that by age 7 Jess was reading novels such as *The Hobbit*. She spoke further of her teachers - those who were nice and those who were not - pushing her to 'act like a little prisoner of war', spurring her parents to move her into a private school which was 'in one of the wealthier, smaller towns'.<sup>15</sup> Jess felt her advanced educational abilities were supported there, but her social life was not, and she found it

---

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Jess [no last name given on the record], 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Jess, interview (2016).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

very difficult to make friends; she was travelling 25 minutes to get to the school and she felt she was shy, but mostly the other students had grown up with each other in their school and town, making her an ‘interloper’.<sup>16</sup>

However, during this period Jess developed ‘health problems’ which manifested as gastroenteritis. Her parents’ reaction was to move her back into a Middle School within her community feeling that Jess would recover, but she did not. Jess shared that her school had to abide by regulations to provide her with work while she was off. In having to undertake less work while sick, Jess expressed that the quality of her work was ‘through the roof’, making the school suspicious and they tried to fail her, which continued, according to Jess, throughout high school.<sup>17</sup> After 9<sup>th</sup> grade she began taking community college classes alongside high school and enjoyed the work. However, she admitted that her love for more challenging classes meant that she neglected her high school classes and grades, failing in the process. On leaving school Jess’ transcripts were ‘bulging’ with the amount of community college classes achieved and her health had begun to improve.

Jess - gender identity aside, which had not been raised at this point in her narrative - was living in an almost continual liminal period throughout her formative years. From this ‘interstructural situation’, as Turner would argue, her liminality originated from her social isolation and orientated by her focus on attaining educational success.<sup>18</sup> It seemed almost sacrificial. Jess moved through a ‘transitional rite of passage’ or instability of movement, when attending school. It appeared in the level of social isolation she suffered

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Turner, ‘Betwixt and Between’, p. 46; Jess, interview (2016).



and experienced because of being ‘gifted’.<sup>19</sup> In her early schooling Jess’ need for more difficult work made her isolated, while her need for more challenging classes in middle school granted her an outsider status in a new learning environment. Her isolation continued into high school when she became unwell long term, ending up essentially home schooled and retaining an isolated and liminal ‘...undesirable state’ of having no friends or peers.<sup>20</sup>

In relation to Mandelbaum’s analysis element of turning points, it was clear from the outset of Jess’ narrative that she had both experienced major turning points, or what could be perceived as a new role. This came in the form of changing education contexts, adapting to environmental and psychological changes in order to obtain academic success.<sup>21</sup> It suggests that her determination to succeed outweighed her socialisation, yet in the end, she failed her high school classes. Jess revealed that on attending college, she took too many classes:

I overworked myself in college because I thought by that point like, my experience in high school had convinced me that I was a failure and I would never succeed in college and so I made up my mind that I would never, ever, miss anything or be sick or have any problems and so I signed up for way too much/ many classes and ummm, partly because of the gastroenteritis and also because of stress and also because I gained some weight, I developed an eating disorder when I was in about 10<sup>th</sup> grade. And my parents were oblivious, like they didn’t notice at all. Ummm, but then that got much, much, worse in college and it stayed with me through undergrad.<sup>22</sup>

On proceeding to describe her eating disorder in detail, which was both ‘anorexic and bulimic’, Jess talked about how she would ‘purge’ to stop feeling hungry and went to

---

<sup>19</sup> Wilson, *I am*, p. 442.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid; Jess, interview (2016).

<sup>21</sup> Mandelbaum, ‘The Study’, p. 181.

<sup>22</sup> Jess, interview (2016).

the gym 6-8 hours per day ‘...like it was my fucking job’. Despite her skin turning grey, she laughed as she said she looked ‘great’. She was ‘muscular’ and resembled ‘a super model’.<sup>23</sup> Reflecting on this Jess said, ‘I miss that’, which was followed by a sigh and pause. Her statement surprised me at the time of the interview and surprised me again on repeat listening. Her reflections suggested she missed the ritualistic control she had over her body to the point of addiction, to be thin and muscular. It could be argued that on one hand Jess was adhering to America’s social ideology that women should be thin and beautiful. However, her quest to be thin via an eating disorder did not relate to the picture of a healthy, athletic body, especially with a grey pallor. However, she had found a sense of power and control in gaining a body she wanted.

Moreover, Jess’ liminality did not directly relate the eating disorder to her gender at this point. Although, she did not state that she looked like a female supermodel, nor did she stipulate the need to perform and achieve femininity in her control ritual. She stated she was muscular, which most supermodels were and are not, especially those of the ‘heroin chic’ era of the late 1990s in which Jess grew up.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, her ritualistic behaviour moved from achieving academically to achieving a perfect body by controlling her food intake in order to gain a super model like status. In Turner’s framework, this allowed her to leave the liminal stage and enter into an ‘achieved status’. He does not however determine whether different states are positive or negative in outcome or longevity. Furthermore, Turner describes ritual during the liminal stage as ‘invisible’ and

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> *New York Times*, ‘Clinton Calls Fashion Ads 'Heroin Chic' Deplorable’, <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/05/22/us/clinton-calls-fashion-ads-heroin-chic-deplorable.html>, 22 May 1997; *New York Times*, ‘The Model Who Invented Heroin Chic’, <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/09/07/arts/the-model-who-invented-heroin-chic.html>, 7 September 1997.

it seemed in Jess' case that both her ritual and her embodiment was invisible not only to her parents, but also to herself.<sup>25</sup> This invisibility was confirmed:

I came out when I was a lesbian, I was 13 and my mom's response was, "No you're not honey". And, I mean my parents wouldn't describe themselves as homophobic, but I don't think they believed in being gay exactly. I think they just sort of, [pauses] they're straight, and they have a happy straight relationship and I think they associate that with being normal and adult. I think that lately having me has begun to challenge all of that but I think it was just there. And I think without exactly meaning to, they put a lot of pressure on me to be normal and straight and heterosexual and feminine. And I have a sister who is conventionally very beautiful and thing and straight and happily married and never had any trouble with any of this stuff and I felt a lot of pressure to be like her. It wasn't like [pauses] they said negative things to me about what I was doing, it's that they praised her constantly...she has the body of a super model and the posture of a ballerina.<sup>26</sup>

Jess stated that her father regularly commented on how beautiful and thin her sister was and that 'just got in my head'.<sup>27</sup> Pullen, Robichaud, and Dumais-Michaud's study conducted with parents of gender non-confirming children, stated that even though parents had little or no knowledge of their children's gender identity, they refused to problematise them. Instead they looked for affirmations and relinquished conventional parenting to the benefit of the child's wellbeing.<sup>28</sup> The study additionally revealed that at times the parents were criticised by gender normative parents in their peer group for not 'doing their jobs'. Their answer was that they did not do a job but were engaging in a relationship.<sup>29</sup> Jess' parents behaviour seemed to suggest they embraced and conformed heavily to heteronormativity and gender normativity, abiding by America's strict gender

---

<sup>25</sup> Turner, 'Betwixt and Between', p. 47.

<sup>26</sup> Jess, interview (2016).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> S.A Pullen., M.J. Robichaud., and A.A. Dumais-Michaud., 'The Experience of Parents Who Support Their Children's Gender Variance', *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 12:1 (2015), p. 41.

<sup>29</sup> Pullen, *The Experience*, p. 41.

binary roles and policing Jess' sexuality and her body. This could have been without realising, or without intention. It could be argued that in accepting and embracing Jess' lesbian identity they viewed themselves as not doing a conventionally 'good job' of parenting - that in pathologizing her, they were doing what was 'best for her'.<sup>30</sup> It was obvious from Jess' narrative that in her parents not embracing her, but pushing social, sexual and potentially gender conformity onto her, Jess was taken to a place where the only aspects of control she had over her life were her educational accomplishments, her diet and her body.

Moreover, I also feel there is relevance in drawing brief parallels of Jess and her sister to Grayson and his sister. Both individuals suffered negatively via pressure from their parents but embraced very different roads: Grayson embraced femininity, then apathy: and Jess embraced extreme control over her body and her academic achievement. Both Grayson and Jess acted as apologists for their parent's behaviour towards them. However, they could also, as Valerie Yow expresses, be understanding 'anew some things that happened and a means of coming to accept the things that have hurt'.<sup>31</sup> However, it could be argued that despite these apologies and difficulties, both individuals fought against gender and sexual conformity, undermining traditional gender expectations on their own - and at the time - mostly self-destructive terms.<sup>32</sup>

As Jess described her body and anorexia getting 'worse and worse' stated that in moving from home to college she played with androgyny for the first time; she cut off all

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Yow, *Recording Oral History*, p. 186.

<sup>32</sup> R. Bulldagger, 'The End of Genderqueer', in in M.B. Sycamore (eds.), *Nobody Passes: rejecting the Rules of Gender and Conformity* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2006), p.139.

her hair ‘for the first time ever’ and her parents were furious with her. On return for Christmas, Jess’ father oddly and critically stated ‘it doesn’t look as bad as I thought’.<sup>33</sup> At this Jess laughed - recalling her experiments with men’s clothing, jeans and baggier men’s shirts - ‘I really, really liked being androgynous and I still do. I enjoy dressing that way. I like being butch, I have this profound affinity with butch women, all of that’.<sup>34</sup> She reflected ‘on the one hand I felt more at home in my body and my gender presentation than I ever had, but on the other I was engaged in this destructive unsustainable thing’.<sup>35</sup> However, she felt at the time that she was not thinking of what she was doing to herself in physical or psychological terms, but existentially ‘[I] processed my experience of living in my body, a sense of my body and its potential’.<sup>36</sup> I’d like to argue here that liminally, Jess had moved from a ‘socially imposed liminality’ and imposed ritualistic phase which produced ‘insecurity and/or vulnerability; especially for individuals who exhibit ambiguity in their gender presentation’.<sup>37</sup> This was a production of her parents normative approach to Jess’ sexuality and gender presentation which moved her into a place where she was becoming secure in her own experimentation of androgyny. Moreover, she was progressing along a continuum from feminine to masculine and spaces in-between while starting to feel at home in her body.<sup>38</sup> Similarly and in line with transgender theory, Jess was self-constructing her gender identity while dynamically interacting with a fluid self-

---

<sup>33</sup> Jess, interview (2016).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Dentice and Dietert, ‘Liminal Spaces’, pp. 70-71.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

embodiment within the already established context of social expectations on her life, reflecting her lived experience.<sup>39</sup>

In Mandelbaum's life history framework, Jess' movement would be viewed as a turning point, in her acquiring a new self-conception.<sup>40</sup> However, I felt that her exploration could be best described as a pivotal trans moment because of the opportunity to try-out where she felt she landed on the gender spectrum. She had freedom, ability and opportunity to embrace and play in her transmasculinity without the oppressive influence of her parents to quash it and experienced her joy in presenting and feeling butch.<sup>41</sup>

I did not label Jess' experimentation with masculine clothes cross-dressing in the traditional sense. Can playing with an androgynous/ masculine identity be defined as cross-dressing in this context? Or is it because female experimentation or wearing items of men's clothing is socially acceptable that I am omitting it from the realm of cross-dressing? If I look at it in its official definition, then Jess was in fact cross-dressing. Much like Katy, Maddie, Corina, Wilma and Suzy, Jess felt secure in herself, in her identity and comfort while dressed in men's clothing.

Unlike many of the other narrators in the cohort, I did not have an established relationship with Asher but recruited her through Karen, the director of the GIC via email.<sup>42</sup> I was extremely excited to meet with Asher, as his reputation around the GIC

---

<sup>39</sup> Benavente and Gill-Peterson., 'The Promise of Trans Critique', p. 77.

<sup>40</sup> Mandelbaum, 'The Study', p. 181.

<sup>41</sup> Boyd and Ramirez, *Bodies of Evidence*, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> Asher uses what she describes as 'rotating pronouns: she/he/they' and out of respect for Asher, I will use these pronoun choices while writing about him. It should be noted that Asher did not specify the order for using pronouns in identifying them conversationally or this thesis, instead stating, '...just call me as you see me'. However, because Asher identifies herself as equal parts female, male and neutral, I will use the rotating pronouns in that order throughout.

was one of success and accomplishment; I had been told by Karen that Asher owned their own successful therapy practice in downtown Denver, specialising family therapy of children and young people who identified as trans/ gender variant. Via a couple of introductory emails, Asher invited me to her practice to be interviewed.

As I drove to downtown one day after my shift at the GIC, I remembered vividly how hot the day was and the air conditioning in my car was cranked up to the maximum while the external temperature gauge read 98-degrees Fahrenheit. I had sat in traffic along one of the major roads in Denver and was incredibly worried about being late for the interview. On arrival to Asher's building, a large, impressive glass skyscraper, I parked in the underground parking, both nervous and excited. The underground garage was stiflingly hot, and I was relieved to get into the cool elevator to Asher's practice's floor. His floor and practice were impressive. Immaculately shiny glass doors, flowers in vases and a receptionist sitting behind a sleek white desk made me more nervous. I gave my name to the receptionist and was asked to take a seat.

Asher arrived into reception and I was met with a person whom I was instantly attracted to and felt an instant connection with, which had not happened to the same extent in any of my other interviews. The feeling completely disarmed me and within minutes of hand shaking and chatting, I knew the interview would not go as planned. I admit this attraction because Yow states in her paper, *Do I like them too much?* 'we must view our difficulties [and I would add, pleasure as well] as important data in their own right'.<sup>43</sup> Granted Yow is referring to the relationship between the interviewer and the narrator

---

<sup>43</sup> V. Yow., "'Do I like Them Too Much?': Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice-Versa', *The Oral History Review*, 24:1 (1997), p. 78.

within the interview itself. However, I felt that my attraction to Asher essentially turned me into a giddy teenager, greatly affecting my ability to not only concentrate on her story, but listen to him with depth, and ask follow-up questions. The interview therefore has - in my opinion - a disjointed and unnatural flow. It contains a lot of paper shuffling and high-pitched, giddy praising of Asher's answers as I scramble to find follow up questions: a consequence of mind going blank each time they finished answering. Nan Boyd briefly considers flirtation within oral histories which focus on talking about sex 'Flirtation was seen as a tool for both the narrator and interviewer to open up and enable conversations which were viewed as 'sometimes very productive'.<sup>44</sup> I however, was very disappointed with myself, not only as a researcher but also in the inability to enable my flirtation to open up the interview. This was not to say that the interview was a waste of time, but my bias towards Asher and my constant awareness of my attraction to her can be heard on the recording which at times I admit, still makes me cringe.

Asher had a short blonde buzzcut, and he was wearing a baby blue polo shirt, dark blue jeans and shoes. They took me into their office, which had panoramic views of Denver, was minimally furnished but felt comfortable and inviting for a therapy room. Asher placed me in the clients' chair, and she sat in his therapists' chair. On hindsight, this set up may have made the sharing of authority 'not exactly shared; rather, it was distributed differently according to the interest of the parties' in the power balance swayed in Asher's favour, but not to his detriment if that is what they wanted.<sup>45</sup> It made me reflect

---

<sup>44</sup> N. A. Boyd., 'Talking About Sex: Cheryl Gonzalez and Rikki Streicher Tell Their Stories', in in N.A. Boyd and H.N.R Ramirez (eds.), *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 103.

<sup>45</sup> Shopes. 'Commentary: Sharing Authority', p. 103.



on whether the power dynamic would have been more balanced had we had met in a more neutral location and was not related directly to Asher's role as a therapist; who was more used to asking personal questions, rather than answering them.

Asher - age 36 at the time of interview - was one of the few narrators born in Denver, Colorado, but raised in Littleton, Colorado with their Mom, Dad and a sister, 19 months younger than Asher. He said his hometown was:

Suburbia, for sure. All the houses you know, like all the same, covenant controlled, paint your house only a few handfuls of colours. Like lots of neighbourhood blocks parties. Very community based but very white, like no diversity at all. It was just like, here's a bunch of white middle to upper class people in this same neighbourhood for miles.<sup>46</sup>

She went onto say that people in the community fell under some kind of Christian denomination and that the high school that he attended was forty percent Mormon, which added a 'religious lens' to life.<sup>47</sup> On asking about childhood friendships Asher juxtaposed the strict Mormon culture, sharing,

They were mainly all boys. Ummm, I virtually dressed like a boy since I was 2 years old. I refused at that age to wear dresses, unless I had to for church or recitals. You know that's part of the story too...All boys, we'd climb trees, play like He-Man, I'd dress like them, had my hair cut like them. You know, my parents allowed all of that and were very supportive even when I was 9 my best friend Brian found out I was a girl and cried for a number of days. You know, I was like, 'yeah, I don't want to be a girl either', you know, and so I didn't really know that, but I felt it, right?<sup>48</sup>

At this point in Asher's narrative they were already confident and outgoing in their gender expression; erring on the side of masculinity and tolerates traditional femininity for the sake of formality. Asher's parents support contrasted greatly to that of Jess'

---

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Asher Eno, 6<sup>th</sup> June 2016.

<sup>47</sup> Asher, interview (2016).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

parents - who did not like her hair cut short, even as an adult. Asher overtly challenged her biological dimensions ‘pre-programmed for him in the course of human evolution’ according to Mandelbaum. Instead, they embrace cultural dimensions, the ‘understandings, and behavior patterns held by the people among whom a person grows up and in whose society he becomes a participant’.<sup>49</sup> Asher, at this juncture, existed in a liminal space.<sup>50</sup> His parents were in support of his liminality and gender non-conformity. However, they may also view them as a ‘tomboy’ or displaying ‘tomboy behaviour’, which was established in Grayson’s chapter as generally more widespread and accepted in girls and widely viewed as a childhood phase.<sup>51</sup>

Asher followed this very affirming memory of her positive gender variance in childhood, which eluded to happiness, then transitioning to a clearly difficult description of his family life, stating they were the person in the family who stayed ‘really quiet so to not already rock a possibly capsizing ship anymore that it was already. It was very chaotic right, in the family system and so my job was to maintain calm almost rescue everybody else from their shit. You know, take care of things, I grew up, I was kind of the adult’.<sup>52</sup> Asher admitted that even now they struggle with this role in the family, continually striving to ‘break out’ of it, confessing ‘I was the rescuer for a really long time [pauses] the family hero’.<sup>53</sup> On reflection, Asher believed the reason behind this behaviour was her dad’s ‘undiagnosed bi-polar’ disorder, with both him and the family experiencing ‘the

---

<sup>49</sup> Mandelbaum, ‘The Study’, p. 180.

<sup>50</sup> Terrill, *Going Deep*, p. 165.

<sup>51</sup> R. Feinstein., A. Greenblatt., L. Hass., S. Kohn., and J. Rana., ‘Justice for all? A report on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered youth in the New York juvenile justice system’, [http://njjn.org/uploads/digital-library/resource\\_239.pdf](http://njjn.org/uploads/digital-library/resource_239.pdf), consulted 10/12/2015.

<sup>52</sup> Asher, interview (2016).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

fun dad or the totally distant dad. You never knew what you were going to get'.<sup>54</sup> Conversely, their mother was the one who tried to make everything 'just look pretty', stating that Asher and her were both sharing the same role, but her mother was doing it from an 'adult perspective and I was doing it from the kid side'.<sup>55</sup> On describing his sister 'she just had a really rough temperament, just really explosive, could be kind of cruel' but worked through it and was a lawyer now. Most poignantly, and similarly to Suzy's comment of her family looking 'exactly what you saw in a 1970s TV show', Asher said their family 'looked pretty to the outside, we looked like sort of that TV *Beaver Cleaver* type family, but on the inside that was not how it was'.<sup>56</sup>

I was surprised at the ease with which Asher described her home life and the difficulty he must have felt in taking on such a responsible role throughout their childhood and into adulthood in making sense of this difficult time. The pace and tempo of her narrative was fast, detached, contradicting the idea in emotions history that a slow, laboured pace indicates difficult painful memories.<sup>57</sup> However, it also reflected Clifford's observations that the 'most troubling memories, can be difficult, if not impossible, to describe in their emotional complexity' when a narrator she was listening to told a similar, difficult memory in a flat, emotionless tone.<sup>58</sup> It could be argued that Asher wanted to expel the memory, as quickly as possible. Interestingly, he said soon after this memory:

'I always knew, "wow there's a lot of emotions out here in all of you [family] so I'm gonna just keep everything to myself, deal with it on my own" [pauses] and I looked like the easy going kid, but I was highly, highly

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Clifford, 'Emotions and Gender', p. 210.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 217.

anxious and struggled with that on my own and a lot of gender and sexuality things were playing into that for me personally as well too'.<sup>59</sup>

Their narrative here contradicts her easy-going story of playing He-Man and being supported by his parents in their gender variance. Instead it reflects the quick narrative pace as discussed above, person who has dealt internally with their emotions for most of their life. Again, this section has the feeling that the intensity of the emotions behind the narration is reflected in Asher's velocity and pace in the telling.<sup>60</sup> In relation to Mandelbaum's life history framework, Asher's role as 'the hero' in the family reflects forced adaptations; these are caused by Asher having to change 'his ways in order to maintain continuity, whether of group participation or social expectation or self-image or simply survival'.<sup>61</sup> However, Asher was not dealing with a single change featured in Mandelbaum's list. Instead they were dealing with all of them, simultaneously.

Asher shared 'because I was the family hero, to get like any recognition, I was just really good at sports, really good at academia'.<sup>62</sup> Admitting they loved academia and viewed it as a safe space but also where she received external feedback which fed into his need for worth, laughed, 'that's probably why I have three degrees and finally made myself stop'.<sup>63</sup> Their velocity and pace at this point in her narrative is unceasing but also erratic. He bounces back and forth on being in college to study engineering, during which they broke up with their first girlfriend while Asher was still closeted, failing college because of the break up and moving back home with his mother, and their father

---

<sup>59</sup> Asher, interview (2016).

<sup>60</sup> Murphy et al, 'What Makes Queer', p. 9.

<sup>61</sup> Mandelbaum, 'The Study', p. 181.

<sup>62</sup> Asher, interview (2016).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

‘suiciding’ when Asher was 21.<sup>64</sup> She shared that his father initially came out as gay to the family, which surprised everyone in the family, and the ‘religious guilt and shame’ behind it contributed to his suiciding. This action motivated a now openly lesbian Asher into a career in mental health focusing on sexuality, gender and religion.<sup>65</sup> Asher stated that it was ‘heavy’, and she did not deal with his emotions regarding their father’s ‘gay shame’ and how it contributed to her own shame until years later because of the grief and loss associated with their father’s death.<sup>66</sup>

Asher did not share her story in a linear way, but then memory is known not to be linear. Instead, as Passerini states, it ‘unfolds in concentric layers...like an onion’ because of the stories within the stories.<sup>67</sup> In Asher’s case, his identity is balled in up in the story of their father’s suicide, sexual and gender identity, and situation within his family. Asher not only exists liminally within their gender but in every other aspect of her life at this juncture. He has liminal understanding of himself, to their father’s actions and I could argue that she is ‘deeply divided’ from other individuals in his family, and even their self.<sup>68</sup> Turner states that, socially there are ‘long periods of seclusion and training of novices rich in the deployment of symbolic forms and esoteric teachings’ in the process of the liminal phase.<sup>69</sup> In relation to these periods or seclusion be it socially or psychologically, Asher admits that it was not until undertaking a master’s degree in human sexuality that she learned there was, ‘nothing wrong with me’:

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Luisa Passerini., ‘Response on Borders, Conflict Zones, and Memory’, *Women's History Review*, 25:3 (2016), p. 454.

<sup>68</sup> Wilson, *I am the Prince*, p. 434.

<sup>69</sup> Turner, ‘Liminal to Liminoid’, p. 72.

It's all of the systems in society that are the issue, whether it be religion, family, just whatever system you want to say, impacts all of us. None of us are the issue, it's like, we're doing alright, we just have to really survive in these arenas that aren't necessarily supportive of who we are. So, I think I just learned like, oh, I just learned to except myself. That was cool.<sup>70</sup>

Asher shared in not coming to this place until undertaking his second master's degree, expressing that they did know 'how it clicked, when it clicked, where I was standing. It was an epiphany moment...' However, she did remember transitioning names from their birth name to Asher, and from she pronouns to rotating pronouns, stating 'like – just call me as you see me. I have all different parts of me, so why not honour all of them right?'<sup>71</sup> It is clear in terms of liminal theory that Asher reached his socially and culturally 'fixed state' as described by Turner, in knowing and embracing their gender fluidity, and finding this fixed state in the comfort of knowing exactly who they are.<sup>72</sup> However, Asher also contradicts Dentice and Dietert's argument that 'liminality may produce insecurity and/or vulnerability; especially for individuals who exhibit ambiguity in their gender presentation'.<sup>73</sup> Asher's confidence and comfort within who they are now continued as she reflected on the past:

It just clicked, "I do not feel like a girl" [laughs], you know, I don't feel like a guy either. I identify as genderqueer, gender non-conforming, gender non-binary, I don't really...I go with labels for the sake of other people, you know, never really for myself, so somebody can put me somewhere if they need to. For me, you know, it's just, I feel as much masculinity and femininity and neither and both. I feel all of it and so, for me, it was just like, "Oh, I don't have to stay in this label", cause I just knew again lesbian was wrong, I was not a woman who liked women. Like I can't identify as a lesbian if I don't feel like I'm a female you know what I mean. And that just somehow made sense.<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> Asher, interview (2016).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Turner, 'Betwixt and Between', p. 47.

<sup>73</sup> Dentice and Dietert, 'Liminal Spaces', p. 70.

<sup>74</sup> Asher, interview (2016).

Asher's statement suggests he had completely accepted who they are, there is no longer an ambiguity in her identity. Additionally, his full acceptance of their trans embodiment; how she is viewed by individuals, society and culture, using rotating pronouns and respecting all the aspects of who he is. This encourages a space for rejecting America's established gender norms, embracing fluidity on the spectrum without self-labelling, yet being willing and secure enough to allow others to label and potentially question, leading to education and an expansion of knowledge of non-binary identities. Furthermore, Asher reflects Stryker, Currah, and Moore's vision for gender beautifully:

Rather than seeing genders as classes or categories that by definition contain only one kind of thing (which raises unavoidable questions about the masked rules and normativities that constitute qualifications for categorical membership), we understand genders as potentially porous and permeable spatial territories (arguable numbering more than two), each capable of supporting rich and rapidly proliferating ecologies of embodied difference.<sup>75</sup>

She expressed that he educates others about being trans via public talks and has a supportive family who when coming out asked Asher, 'the right questions' regarding their gender fluidity and pronouns. At 36, Asher has lived openly as Asher for 5 years. Further to this, her family continue on supporting him.<sup>76</sup>

In line with Mandelbaum's life history analysis, Asher's fragmented and non-linear memory of events running up to their coming out and finding her fluidity contained a number of pivotal trans moments, turning points and adaptations, all deriving from his established dimensions of family and childhood, but especially from the death of their father. The pursuit of a mental health and gender related fields while seeking her own

---

<sup>75</sup> Stryker et al., 'Introduction', p. 12.

<sup>76</sup> Asher, interview (2016).

answers on his personal shame produced freedom, fluidity and adaptations from ‘changes that have major effect on a person's life and on his basic relations with others...[they] are both the source of social adaptation and also responses to it’.<sup>77</sup> Much like liminality theory, Asher entered a state of periodic adaptation, which changed to the new identity and behaviour established around it.<sup>78</sup> Asher’s ability to situate their fluidity contrasted significantly with Jess, who struggled with all aspects of her identity at college, but took the opportunity to freely experiment with androgyny in her clothing and hair while away from home.

On graduating college Jess said she was considering transitioning having met her first trans man. She recalled ‘it was really, really intriguing in a lot of ways, it still is. I mean there are things about being a man and being masculine that really key into something’.<sup>79</sup> Her decision to transition was made, having not only mulled it over for a while, but in having an epiphany which revolved around both feeling that it was right, but also of possibility:

I had a lot of internalised fear and self-loathing around transition, because...the transmasculine body, becoming more muscular, becoming more androgynous, looking more like man, passing for male, having a deeper voice. All of that appealed to me very profoundly, but at the same time, it was coded on a social level as ugly, mutilated, ruined. I mean being a masculine woman is a bad thing, you’re not supposed to that. You’re not supposed to have facial hair, you’re not supposed to have muscles, you’re not supposed to have like this deep gravelly voice. You’re not supposed to have this stocky figure. And so, there was a lot of cognitive dissonance around that...because I gravitated towards that. I like that. I think that women with stubble are attractive, [laughs] I think that women with big muscles and sailor like tattoos are attractive, I think women with salt and

---

<sup>77</sup> Mandelbaum, ‘The Study’, pp. 180-181.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. p. 180.

<sup>79</sup> Jess, interview (2016).



pepper buzz cuts are attractive. Like those are my people and that's sort of what I want to look like, but you're not supposed to feel that way.<sup>80</sup>

Despite her epiphany around transitioning and firmly making her decision, Jess admitted in her own words to internalised transphobia and how it spoke deeply into her from a social standpoint. A standpoint of 'ugly, mutilated and ruined'. Jess had fallen victim to America's gender ideals at this point in her narrative. Her inability to embrace her fluidity and androgyny inadvertently pushed her to determine her identity by social forces and expectations.<sup>81</sup> This tumultuous place housed both love and hate; of possibility and repulsion in the possibility of her future gender identity. Jess held her own unconscious criticism of America's idealistic binary gender system and her tolerance for herself in it, as well as in her liminal persona.<sup>82</sup> Jess' liminality, according to Turner, existed prior to her new achieved status. He argues for the status of social maturity but in Jess' case I feel it was a pre-transition, pre-solidified trans identity phase: 'structurally if not physically invisible'.<sup>83</sup> In Cavalcante's research he found this outlook in his participants, stating that even when transition was thought of as a possibility, society in the form of structural discrimination and messages from the media bred 'entrenched perceptions[s] that transgender is essentially abject, undesirable, and untenable'.<sup>84</sup> This ultimately left his participants questioning whether, in their own possibility of transitioning, their lives would be viable and/or real.<sup>85</sup> In Jess' case, she described much

---

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Benavente and Gill-Peterson., 'The Promise of Trans Critique', p. 79.

<sup>82</sup> Turner, 'Betwixt and Between', p. 47.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Cavalcante, *Struggling for Ordinary*, p. 13.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

of what she found attractive in women, but not wholeheartedly in herself. This was especially true when she said, ‘that’s sort of what I want to look like’.<sup>86</sup>

Jess expressed that to counteract her internalised transphobia, she decided to become very thin ‘to even out into someone who was more attractive’. Bringing discipline to her body, to make it a ‘project’, determined to feel less, ‘...unruly and wrong’.<sup>87</sup> Jess shared ‘if I could be like an attractive young man, I wouldn’t have to worry about looking like an ugly old butch’. Smiling, she admitted that she was not thinking about ‘any of this on that level, but I think that was how it was working’.<sup>88</sup> Jess’ reflection at this point in her narrative provided an excellent example of an oral history narrator subjectively working out their memories; her personal experience of gender, transition and how they are connected both personally and socially to the present, using them to interpret her life and the world around her.<sup>89</sup> Jess noted that in becoming comfortable with her transition she had to learn or ‘convince myself I could be a hot young man’.<sup>90</sup> This returned Jess to her previous narrative around driving her body to become disciplined and perfect, but this time it revolved around her transition ‘it had to be done perfectly if it was going to work’.<sup>91</sup>

After college, Jess spent a year in Italy studying Italian and ‘looking at art’, returning to San Francisco being ‘intent on transitioning’. She moved in with her parents and found a job in a law firm.<sup>92</sup> Her plan was to ‘transition in San Francisco, get all of

---

<sup>86</sup> Jess, interview (2016).

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> R. Perks and A. Thomson., ‘Part I Critical Developments: Introduction’, in R. Perks and A. Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 3.

<sup>90</sup> Jess, interview (2016).

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

that finished, then quit my job and travel the world'. Jess' plans however took a little longer due to her parents' disbelief in her being male:

they were very adamantly against the idea, they were horrified and when Mom thought it was mutilatory [*sic.*], they just sort of didn't believe I was male that I identified as male, that that really made sense...and they weren't transphobic per say, they just didn't believe that I was'.<sup>93</sup>

However, her parents' feelings did not deter Jess. She moved to San Francisco, making trans friends, mostly trans men and a few months after starting hormones she enjoyed both the feeling they gave her and the attention she received as being read as 'a hot young gay man'.<sup>94</sup> This was especially true for Jess when she moved near the Castro District, 'San Francisco's well-known gay enclave.'. <sup>95</sup> When Jess dated, she dated trans people. She disclosed she enjoyed feeling like a man, being read as man and even fetishized as a trans man. She shared being attracted to men while on testosterone but began to feel 'dislocated and depressed' thinking it was a 'hormonal problem, or just stress' not connecting her feelings to gender dysphoria, or questioning her gender.<sup>96</sup> Jess had a therapist while transitioning but felt they were not very helpful and did not listen to her enough to drill down into her feelings of possible dysphoria and depression. Instead she continued to think she was perhaps just tired.

Jess expressed that on reflection, the more comfortable she became in her male identity the more dysphoric she became. This despite loving the sensation of being on testosterone - the respect she received in her male identity and being read male for the most part -especially enjoying being listened to and not challenged on her thoughts and

---

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid; Reck., 'Homeless Gay and Transgender Youth', p. 223.

<sup>96</sup> Jess, interview (2016).

opinions by anyone. There is a gap in the literature which concerns individuals who have re-transitioned, possibly because of what it would indicate both socially and politically for the trans rights movement. Instead of being comfortable in the knowledge that transition was inevitable - bringing Jess from a liminal phase into a fixed or stable state of gender identity once surgery was pursued and completed - she was more dysphoric, hidden behind tiredness from pursuit of the perfect body and stress from her job.<sup>97</sup>

Unlike Asher, who found seeing a therapist - and more so in training as one - helpful with regards to working out their internalised shame and gender identity, Jess did not. Despite her underlying feelings of dysphoria, Jess continued on with hormone therapy and her parents began to come around to the idea of Jess transitioning. Her sister and brother as well as friends were also all very supportive. She said, 'my workplace was a little bit weird about it but well meaning'.<sup>98</sup> After 18 months of being on testosterone:

I had top surgery and that was a catalyst for me really, I mean it sent me back in the other direction. Cause I felt, I didn't feel dysphoric about my breasts, ever, ummm and, particularly when you're chubby when you're a teenager, ummm, you invest them with a lot of beauty. They were nice tits, and when you're fat, your tits are the nice thing about your body and I thought of that giving up my breasts was giving up beauty as a woman and so that was something that was very difficult for me and was scary for me and after doing it I think it was something I felt a lot of shame and fear about. I think that started to tear down the extent to which I felt uncomplicatedly male, whether or not I wanted to do this for the rest of my life. Then I sort of went screaming back in the other direction.<sup>99</sup>

While laughing at this, Jess said the last statement was not true because 'there was a period of a few months when I just sort of waited for everything to [pauses], I guess

---

<sup>97</sup> Jess, interview (2016); Turner, 'Betwixt and Between', p. 47; Dentice and Dietert, 'Liminal Spaces', p. 73.

<sup>98</sup> Jess, interview (2016).

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

to feel ok again'.<sup>100</sup> Unfortunately, she did not begin to feel better instead she felt worse. Hansbury states that trans individuals have to 'get used to occupying middle spaces' especially those who straddle the genderqueer/ transmasculine identity.<sup>101</sup> However, Jess - similarly to Grayson - in finishing with the liminal phase of androgyny, moved quickly into the transition phase. Unlike Jess though, Grayson was sure of his identity from the moment he realised, grounding himself in his transness. It was clear throughout Jess' narrative that she was never fully committed or comfortable in her decision to transition. However, she was also unable to accept her body as being like those butch lesbians she was so attracted to.

Jess' discomfort was also mixed up with America's gender ideals for women and their bodies, and therefore did not get used to or even contemplate occupying Hansbury's middle spaces, or accepting her body to be liminal, like Asher. Instead she seemed to need a fixed binary identity.<sup>102</sup> Jess' narrative sounded painful both physically and mentally. She lived in a liminal phase with regards to her identity without knowing it, while tethered to an essentialist binary ideal, only experiencing clarity when her breasts were removed in surgery; instead of the removal of her breasts alleviating her dysphoria, as with most trans individuals who undertake reassignment surgery, Jess' surgery only exacerbated her dysphoria.

Jess is an immediate representation of trans theory's lived experience which intersects deeply within embodiment and identity, fluidity and movement on the gender

---

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Hansbury, 'The Middle Men', p. 254.

<sup>102</sup> Turner, 'Betwixt and Between', p. 46.

spectrum, while falling victim to gender oppression, America's 'act that enjoined my complicity in the non-consensual gendering of another'.<sup>103</sup> Jess expressed that five months after her top surgery she wanted to go back 'but by that point I was convinced I couldn't, like I'd never be a woman again', feeling she looked<sup>104</sup>:

...hideous [and] still relating to it as this thing that wasn't really for me. I was trying to construct being a woman again, more or less the same way I'd tried to be a man, except I didn't want to be a woman. I mean [pauses], I didn't want to be feminine, I didn't want to be heterosexual, I didn't want to be not androgynous.<sup>105</sup>

She admitted that she attempted to pass as female again: wearing florals and bright colours; always wearing women's shoes; shaving her legs and wearing makeup, which she did for several years after surgery. However, she:

...hated it. It made me feel weird about my body and the way I looked and my gender. And now gradually I'm moving back to being more androgynous, but it's scary and it feels like I've kind of lost the knack [laughs]. And I'm not really sure, I don't really know how to get that self-confidence back. I mean I've gotten to a point where I can associate androgyny and masculinity with something that's attractive and ok, that's permissible and supportive, but now I think of it as something that is ugly and wrong [laughs].<sup>106</sup>

This is a very powerful passage from Jess and so juxtaposed to Asher's stable, genderqueer identity. Her punctuated laughter spoke volumes to her lack of self-confidence and comfort in the fluidity in her own body and identity. Jess continued, much like individuals with eating disorders to be fixated on her embodiment, her looks and her struggle finding a balance in who she was and in her gender presentation. Her painful existentialism paired with her need for authenticity within herself and her daily being was

---

<sup>103</sup> Stryker, 'My Words', p. 250.

<sup>104</sup> Jess, interview (2016).

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

difficult to listen to and to read. It felt as though Jess continued to grapple and contend with a core component of gender dysphoria; distress.<sup>107</sup>

Jess described how she told her parents about moving back towards being a woman and they supported and validated her while denying her ever being a man. Therefore, Jess equated the inability to identify as androgynous and/ or genderqueer because of her parents. Their denial ‘was dislocating and it screwed with me’ she said.<sup>108</sup> Jess confessed that at one point they believed she was a ‘normal straight woman’ and that her lesbianism was a phase which she would grow out of. However, in some respects Jess expressed ‘I think they’re getting it now’.<sup>109</sup> On asking Jess where she was in her identity at the time of interview, she said she was looking forward to leaving Laramie and going to a cosmopolitan city - Chicago - where she could just be androgynous. ‘I like wearing suits, I like looking like a dude, I like being mistaken for a dude, I like using my real voice instead of this one, which is a little bit higher than normal. It’s for Laramie. I like not, not socially compromising all the time’.<sup>110</sup>

Throughout her life, Jess moved through multiple pivotal trans moments and in Mandelbaum’s life history framework analysis, turning points and adaptations ‘Personal adaptations, are changes that have major effect on a person's life and on his basic relations with others’.<sup>111</sup> Much like her then and now liminal status, Jess pivoted depending on

---

<sup>107</sup> S. Murjan., and W. P. Bouman., ‘Psychiatry’, in C. Richards, W. P. Bouman and MJ. Barker (eds.), *Critical and Applied Approaches in Sexuality, Gender and Identity: Genderqueer and Non-Binary Genders* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 131.

<sup>108</sup> Jess, interview (2016).

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Mandelbaum, ‘The Study’, p. 181.

what she felt was possible for her within her own top down policing and limited gender embodiment. In terms of transition, she abided by what she felt at the time to be a solely male identity, all the while wishing to revolve around a loose androgynous, transmasculine identity of genderqueer and queerness. Her resilience and strength, despite feelings of depression, dysphoria and negative feelings towards her body, allowed her to pursue who she was becoming on the gender spectrum. Jess' pursuit had a clear link in her mind to space and geography: seeing the possibility of a genderqueer identity once having left the very conservative, self-policing environment of Laramie and away from her doubting parents. Jess' story, much like all oral histories, will never be finished. However, unlike many of the other narrators featured throughout this thesis, her identity was not solid: she was not where or who she wanted to be. Jess struggled under the weight of America's gender ideals, clearly damaged by their lack of flexibility and constant social policing. Asher however, embraced her fluidity from an early age, contrastingly having the support from family that he needed to reach a place of authenticity and respect for all the aspects of their gender identity within their daily gender expression and pronouns. Her support from family and friends clearly made a significant impact on his ability to challenge America's gender ideals and live confidently within their embodiment while straddling essentialist gender categories. Ultimately, I hope that Jess will one day, like Asher, find a comfortable place in how she wants to be read by others, who she is on the gender spectrum and finally freeing herself from gender binary altogether.



## Chapter 8 Conclusion

In this thesis I have demonstrated how American popular culture, including news media, medical literature, and TV from the 1950s onwards perpetuated societal, familial, and self-policing of trans individuals. In the process, I have gauged the gender binary's effect on trans people's ability to negotiate a life which allows them to express their authentic selves. In examining how gender-variant people view themselves through an extensive series of oral history life stories and define their identities within the restriction of binary rules, I have discussed the power of a national gender myth which continues to legitimise the marginalisation and often extremely violent treatment of those who struggle to find a place within it, especially trans women and young trans people of colour.<sup>1</sup>

While reflecting on narrators thoughts of being trans under America's established essentialist and medical based binary ideals of male and female, many narrators like Corina, Asher, Luke, Jenn, Jacqui and Sable expressed that it was difficult to find fluidity and their own sense of embodiment due to the lack of positive trans presentation and this lack caused internalised transphobia and top-down policing of gender. However, these feelings and experiences were By Katy, Sarah Marie, Sheri, Wilma, Suzy, and Maddie, who throughout their narratives felt the world - via the latest trans rights wave and liberal progression - was changing American perspectives on trans lives for the better. Despite possible encouragement of growth towards positive changes, I have argued that all 15 life histories examined within this thesis have included narratives of multi-faceted personal

---

<sup>1</sup> Samuel and Thompson, *The Myths*, p. 15; 'Violence Against the Transgender Community in 2018', *Human Rights Campaign*, <https://www.hrc.org/resources/violence-against-the-transgender-community-in-2018>, date accessed: 30 September 2018.

repercussions of living under America's gender binary myth of male and female. Narrators reflections and the review of literature and consequences for trans young people have supported my argument throughout this thesis that the gender binary myth continues to be an oppressive power in trans and gender-variant lives, policing on multiple levels – cultural, societal and familial – consequently morphing into ones' own self-policing of outward gender identity and expression, especially at times of identity formulation in childhood – for those whom it is relevant. In these conclusions I have demonstrated the effects of gender policing on gender-variant lives, manifesting not only as a feeling of gender dysphoria (for some) but as the shame, guilt and internalised transphobia that accompanies the transgression of these ideals through cross-dressing, a destructive use of porn, the denial of their true identities, and self-harm in diverse forms. I have found that trans lives that struggle to exist in a binary system - that has 'no place' for them – are at high risk of danger from depression, alcohol and/or drug use, bulimia, transitioning/ re-transitioning, fulfilling assumed birth sex roles with damaging and dangerous results.

Furthermore, I have shown that the long-term effects of living under the gender binary differs depending on intersecting influences, most notably the period of history in which the narrators grew up, parental/peer and partner values around gender, and their adherence to and belief in the gender binary and heteronormativity. The result was – in each case - a story, unique to each narrator in which most trans and gender-variant individuals constantly have had to negotiate, traverse, deny, and/or live stealthily for the sole purpose of survival, until such a time as they felt safe to embrace who they were on the inside, (re)constructing their authentic selves on the outside to align with their inner identity.

Moreover, I have provided voices and stories which have complicated the marginalised trans narrative promoted in American popular culture; trans TV tropes, mental instability, preconceived lives of homelessness, societal rejection, involvement in sex work, and unemployment. Only Jenn and Suzy shared their engagement in sex work at points in their pasts, but at the time of their interviews both either owned their own business or were in full-time employment as out trans women. In addition, out of a cohort of 22 interviewees, Luke was the only narrator who had experienced homelessness and most of the narrators were in employ or owned their own businesses, while being out as trans. The majority of the research cohort for this thesis did not possess a sex work or homelessness narrative in their overall life history; while my conclusions significantly contribute to the fields of trans studies and trans oral history, these elements constitute an area of necessary future research. Most importantly, each narrative featured in this thesis exudes remarkable resilience, perseverance and for most, making real personal change to themselves and the world around them.

In this thesis I have shown that trans representation in popular culture remains complicated. Intersected by long held trans tropes established in the 1950s it is currently improving and progressing in some areas of T.V. (as seen in and promoted by GLAAD). The perceived improvement to trans representation is thrown into question while reflecting on Sables' narrative in relation to the progress of the second wave trans rights movement's success in influencing American pop culture. During my period of fieldwork in 2016 trans activism was visible in the #TRANSISBEAUTIFUL Twitter hashtag coined by Laverne Cox, which she began in 2015 after reflecting on a period of her life when she

was regularly misgendered and called out on the street.<sup>2</sup> American trans teen Jazz Jennings secured a reality show on TLC in 2015 called ‘I am Jazz’.<sup>3</sup> Now in its fourth season owing to its popularity, Jazz wants to raise awareness of growing up trans and to make normative America aware of trans issues.<sup>4</sup> It has won several GLAAD Media Awards, including one in 2018, for its contribution to Outstanding Reality TV and positive trans representation.<sup>5</sup> GLAAD additionally stated that trans representation on TV was at an all-time high in 2016, a watershed moment in trans visibility.<sup>6</sup> Why did this visibility and more poignantly, positive trans representation via media exposure not reach street-level activists such as Sable? She was the only narrator in the cohort actively involved in the trans rights movement as a personal and professional pursuit. These conclusions raise further questions about whether (and how?) positive trans media representation intersects with race, class, and gender amid the daily volume of American pop culture and social media exposure. Even if narrators and trans activists such as Sable did not tap into these representations, interaction with other factions of the trans community in activism must encourage discourse with those who do. Or are the role models of Laverne Cox and Jazz Jennings viewed as unrelatable or unobtainable?

Cavalcante argues that trans individuals wish to see their kind of ‘normal’ in the media and in pop culture. To expose gender normative and heteronormative audiences to

---

<sup>2</sup> C. Manning, ‘Laverne Cox Opens Up About Her Struggle to Accept Herself in a Transphobic Society’, [www.cosmopolitan.com](http://www.cosmopolitan.com), <https://www.cosmopolitan.com/style-beauty/news/a46179/laverne-cox-interview-trans-is-beautiful-nyfw/>, consulted 12/12/2018.

<sup>3</sup> TLC, *I am Jazz*, 2015-

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> K. Nordyke, ‘GLAAD Media Awards: ‘Call Me by Your Name’ Wins Best Film’, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/lists/glaad-media-awards-complete-list-winners-2018-1078487>, consulted 12/12/2018.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Where we are on TV ’16-’17: GLAAD’s Annual Report on LGBTQ Inclusion’, GLAAD (2016), <https://www.glaad.org/whereweareontv16>, date accessed: 3 August 2018.

the ‘outside’ audiences, ‘a certain palatable kind of normal... [such as] trans individuals situated in conventional, safe contexts’ thus breaking-in audiences and in turn softening their potential resistance to them.<sup>7</sup> Would this element of breaking-in gradually encourage outsider audiences to accept trans embodiment as normal? Would it reach all gender-variant identities across the US? Moreover, what would this level of acceptance mean “normality” for activists such as Rocko Bulldagger, who in their genderqueer or gender non-conformity, do *not* wish to be viewed or accepted as normal, but viewed as uniquely themselves? Bulldagger explains that their own definition of genderqueer includes ‘(i) A person who is painfully deliberate and consciously political in their gender expression’. In this political expression they wish ‘genderqueer to be a true ‘umbrella term that includes all of us who fuck with gender, who have gender on the brain, and who never take gender for granted’.<sup>8</sup>

According to lived experiences of trans women, such as Sable and Sheri trans women are not welcome in society - ‘they are not wanted’ – confirming a primary argument of this thesis.<sup>9</sup> These thoughts, outlooks and anxieties are what Robert Philip would call ‘abjection’ referring to ‘the vague sense of horror that permeates the boundary between the self and the other. In a broader sense, the term refers to the process by which identificatory regimes exclude subjects that they render unintelligible or beyond classification. As such, the abjection of others serves to maintain or reinforce

---

<sup>7</sup> Cavalcante, *Struggling for Ordinary*, p. 91.

<sup>8</sup> Bulldagger, ‘The End of Genderqueer’, p. 139.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

boundaries.’<sup>10</sup> This juxtaposition of striving for normal in trans identity versus those who fuck with gender in their politics and outward expression, is an important one and more scholarly exploration in line with visibility and in American pop culture and is needed to fill this gap in current oral history research.

The conclusions I reached in the wake of all the narratives featured in this thesis, especially Sable’s, Asher’s and Wilma’s is that activism is very much a personal mindset, existing on a private level, rather than a community or organised activity within a social movement. The likes of Katy, Sheri and Suzy all actively lived liminal identities which represented their own form of secret activism, in advocating for themselves with family, peers, co-workers and loved ones. This not only influences their acceptance of their own identity but also for the wider trans and variant individuals societally. The cohort of this thesis generally believed in (or personally benefitted from) the ideology that individual activism for one’s own place as a gender-variant individual will encourage involvement in more widely organised activism in the future. However, it was acknowledged that each of these narrators had more of an ease in blending into the gender-normative society. It could be argued that trans people of colour are more involved in activism for trans rights because of their visibility, especially when looking to a historical context. Sylvia Rivera and Martha P Johnson for example, were trans women/drag queens involved in initiating the Stonewall Riots in 1969 and co-founded the *Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries* in 1970.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> R. Phillips., ‘Abjection’, in Transgender Studies Quarterly (eds.), ‘Abjection’, *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1:1–2 (2014), p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*, p. 83-86.

Trans is viewed as a cutting across of ‘lines of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, nationality, ability, sexuality, religion, and age’. However, the range of voices and experiences I have presented in this thesis is not representative of people of colour, nor any other trans communities across the U.S.<sup>12</sup> The narrators skewed white on the whole and narrator numbers were few. My research site was restricted to Denver, Colorado, a city *The Guardian* newspaper described as, ‘White privilege and gentrification in Denver, ‘America’s favourite city’ reflecting academic and activist Salvador Vidal-Ortiz’s argument that ‘constructions of whiteness are geopolitical, hierarchically placed, and structured around class and status.’<sup>13</sup> Notwithstanding an attempt to link in with a specific trans groups of colour within the Denver area, I was warned off the record by one of the narrators who also worked on the reception of the GIC, that because of their mostly sex worker status and past negative experiences with researchers, it was highly unlikely they would engage with me or my research. What does this mean for trans voices of colour in this oral history thesis? Bar Corina and Luke, their silence is deafening. Vidal-Ortiz states, ‘Black constructions of beauty often fell outside the perception of beauty in transitioning...African American transgender individuals enounced their desire for transition before Christine Jorgensen but did not achieve such recognition.’<sup>14</sup> He argues that ‘constructions of gender are about being white, being perceived to be white, or sometimes they are deeply ingrained in perceptions of beauty as white.’<sup>15</sup> In

---

<sup>12</sup> Cavalcante, *Struggling for Ordinary*, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> *The Guardian*, ‘White privilege and gentrification in Denver, ‘America’s favourite city’’, Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> July 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/jul/14/white-privilege-gentrification-denver-america-favourite-city>; S. Vidal-Ortiz, ‘Whiteness’, in Transgender Studies Quarterly (eds.), *Abjection, Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1:1–2 (2014), p. 264.

<sup>14</sup> Vidal-Ortiz, ‘Whiteness’, p. 265.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

acknowledging that American history does overwhelmingly skew white, especially where limited trans history is concerned, I believe that further research regarding life history interviews involving trans people of colour should be undertaken and added to this bank of new oral histories, perhaps with particular reference to activism and visibility.

During my fieldwork, I became aware that the overall use of the GIC by trans and gender variant individuals was utilitarian in nature; there were people who stopped attending groups without warning; those who chose to blend or “go stealth” in gender normative society on reaching authenticity in their identity. Going stealth, as featured throughout this thesis, remains somewhat taboo in the trans community, perceived as a denial of activism and trans identity. For some, however, it could be viewed as arriving at a place of stable identity, safety and authenticity on the gender spectrum. It could also be argued that those having reached their authentic place no longer identify with the liminality of others, especially if they can pass and blend. Regardless of the varying motives, those who fully want to integrate into a gendernormative America in their gender identity leave this gap in trans activism.

In autumn 2017, I returned to Denver and the GIC to undertake follow-up interviews with some of the original narrators. The Center had been moved to an entirely different part of Denver, but it was a much larger space with chairs in the group room for 40, 15 or 20 more than in the old building. Moreover, all of the GIC-based narrators who had participated in my research had disappeared, migrating to different states or cities. Katy, another *pro bono* counsellor told me, had handed in her notice via letter one day and simply never returned. While this was disappointing, as it prevented me from collecting unanswered questions on subjects, I was curious about from the main



interviews, it also gave me additional insight into whether trans activism has forward momentum in a support group setting, or whether it is more a relationship of convenience. Therefore, I recommend that further research be undertaken to investigate the phenomenon of trans activism in Centers such as the GIC.

This thesis is the first oral history thesis which investigates and complicates the established historical representation of trans individuals as portrayed in pop culture within the heteronormative and gendernormative historiography of America from the 1950s to present. This thesis contributes to the fields of trans oral history and oral history because of its endeavour to collect and promote the lived experience of gender variant individuals who have been previously omitted, silenced, or censored from the overall discourse of modern American history. This research therefore raises the profile of oral history because of its applications of oral history theory and methodology in conjunction with a trans friendly life history framework to the narratives of an intergenerational group of American trans and gender variant individuals. Moreover, it contributes to the fields of gender history, transgender studies and gender studies in examining trans representation in medical literature and its direct influence on popular culture, perpetuating trans tropes of monster, mentally ill and joke, for example, to this day. Its additional contribution to transgender studies is through the direct use of a transgender theory framework. It also contributes to the field of pop culture studies specific to America.

This thesis contributes to the history of medicalised literature by compiling it in relation to trans identity and its influence via trans representation in and on popular culture spanning over nearly seven decades. Moreover, it significantly contributes to television history in investigating trans representation on television in America from the 1950s,

amassing both popular and little-known TV shows featuring trans and gender variant characters of differing portrayals.

Throughout this thesis I have presented an argument for a gender spectrum to replace the established gender binary due to the uniqueness and fluidity of trans lives and identities as they negotiate America's mythical gender ideal of male and female. Therefore, this originality asserts that a gender spectrum is more suitable for gender variant individuals because their identities evolve their authentic and (re)constructed selves - or continue to move liminally in society, depending on their level of fluidity, security, and identity. The spectrum also relates to the underpinning theories of liminality and transgender which informed this study. Ultimately, the gender spectrum supports and is supported by Doan's argument that the gender binary myth in America, is 'a superfluous and unnecessary distraction from the reality of the human condition' of which these visual representations reflect exclusively.<sup>16</sup>

Ultimately, I conclude that trans as an embodiment does not exist in a vacuum. Instead, America's continued dangerous pursuit of mythical gender binary ideals via popular culture, negative trans representation, and societal policing dictates that gender variant lives experience constant complex societal interactions and negotiations laced with fear and uncertainty. Through these lived experiences there are intersections of race, class, biology, attachment, heritage, politics, tradition, masculinity, femininity, finance, resilience, strength, survival, agency, and power.

---

<sup>16</sup> Doan, 'The Tyranny', p. 638.

I have argued that the 15 life histories amplified in this thesis reflect these intersections and vary in experience tremendously. Some narrators such as Katy, Corina, Suzy, Jenn, Jacqui, Sarah-Marie, Maddie and Sheri struggled for an ordinary life of acceptance and existence by family and society; Grayson and Luke lived in stealth for the sake of safety or like Artemus, just because they felt it was not necessary to share due to their fixed state and ability to blend into normative society. Finally, Asher, Jess, Sable and Wilma wanted to be actively visible to gender normative society as a way to push back and show a societal and personal rejection of the gender binary altogether. I have argued throughout this thesis that the gender binary is dangerous and deadly and that gender, according to the narrators, exist on a spectrum of gender where binary norms are no longer adhered to and gender variance can be embraced and accepted. Rather than sum it up once more in my own words, I feel it appropriate to let a trans voice have that honour. In the words of Sable:

My partner had this thing that she would say at times, that her goal was to live in a *cis-free future* and a lot of people would take that as out and out aggression and hostility, right? Like, ‘oh she wants to kill all the cis people’, and while she does get very angry and there are times, I want to just kill everybody. What she is saying with this concept of a cis-free future is that ummm, gender normality itself, is gone. Like there is no more, what is it like, like these are cis gender or trans people, but that all presentations of styles and gender are equally valid and accepted.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Sable, interview (2016).

## Appendix I: Reflective Diary Excerpt

Date: 08/05/2016

Shift: 1pm until 9pm

Today I spoke to one of the intern clinicians/ therapists having taken part in the young adult's group and noticing the different levels of hormones, T and E circulating, not just in their bodies, but in their emotions when expressing themselves. My thoughts and reflections on a 'second puberty', seems to be confirmed. He agreed with me that little or no research has been done on a trans person's second puberty, which they seem to go through no matter what age an individual transition's, or at least begins to take hormones. They experience their original hormone levels deplete and stop while their emotions (and possibly behaviour!?) are overtaken by this new puberty and new hormones with unpredictable outcomes for themselves or those around them. Does each person regress back to a teenager? Not matter what age?

It makes me wonder. All these young adults, who are holding jobs, school, intimate relationships, marriages, raising children and dealing with supportive/ negative family members, are potentially having to cope with mood swings, but actually having to cope with physical changes such as to their voice, body air, growth or depletion of muscle tone, etc. How do they cope with all of this? Is it down to personal resilience? Or is it just sheer determination and grit, knowing that everything will settle down?

The trans guys in the group have stated that they have experiences being angrier, or quicker to anger than before taking T and some are prone to picking fights. They also admit to sexualising inanimate objects such as fire hydrants, which they found totally bizarre but pleasing.

The trans women in the group have said that their continuing course of E has made them feel much calmer, they listen more, and they are not as argumentative.

Should I consider doing a group interview of the different factions of the group and then bring them together for an interview? Or just interview them altogether? This is something to consider down the line.

## Bibliography

### Primary material

#### *Oral history interview testimonies*

The following interviews were conducted by Lorna C Barton and uploaded into ‘Stories Matter’.<sup>1</sup> The audio files will be stored confidentially and privately with Lorna C Barton until such times as America becomes politically safe for the recordings to be archived publicly.

B [no last name given on the record]; 8<sup>th</sup> June 2016

Chollar, Melissa; 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2016

Condolora, Julia Antonetta; 27<sup>th</sup> May 2016

Elisabeth, Sequoia; 12<sup>th</sup> May 2016

Eno, Asher; 10<sup>th</sup> June 2016

Duncan, Corina Feather; 1<sup>st</sup> June 2016

Garcia, Nicole; 6<sup>th</sup> June 2016

Grayson, [no last name given on the record]; 27<sup>th</sup> May 2016

Haenel, Madeline [Maddie]; 4<sup>th</sup> June 2016

Jess [no last name given on the record]; 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2016

Joan [no last name given on the record]; 8<sup>th</sup> June 2016

---

<sup>1</sup> Stories Matter, a ‘Free open source software built by Oral Historians, for Oral Historians’, Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling Concordia University, <http://storytelling.concordia.ca/storiesmatter/>, date accessed: 25 September 2016.

Kelly, Brian; 31<sup>st</sup> May 2016

Luke [no last name given on the record]; 18<sup>th</sup> May 2016

Malone, Katherine [Katy] Patricia; 27<sup>th</sup> May 2016

McCray, Jaqueline [Jacqui]; 11<sup>th</sup> June 2016

Peterson, Suzy; 28<sup>th</sup> May 2016

Peterson, Wilma Ann; 28<sup>th</sup> May 2016

Proctor, Sheri; 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2016

Samarzia, Artemus; 8<sup>th</sup> June 2016

Shultz, Sable; 14<sup>th</sup> June 2016

Walker, Sarah Marie; 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2016

Zen, Jennifer [Jenn]; 11<sup>th</sup> June 2016

***Newspapers and Magazines (online)***

*Advocate*

*Chicago Reader*

*Cosmopolitan*

*CU Boulder Today*

*Daily Beast*

*IndieWire*

*Financial Times*

*Guardian*

*Huffington Post*

*New York Times*

*Southern Illinoisan*

*Transadvocate.com*

*Washington Blade: America's LGBT News Source*

*Washington Post*

### **Secondary Material**

#### ***Journal Articles, Book chapters, Books, etc.***

Abrams, L., *Oral History Theory* (Oxon: Routledge, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 2016)

Ahmed, S., 'Interview with Judith Butler', *Sexualities*, 19:4 (2016), 482–492

Aiello, G., Bakshi, S., Bilge, S., Hall, L.K., Johnston, L., Pérez, K., and Chávez, K., 'Here, and Not Yet Here: A Dialogue at the Intersection of Queer, Trans, and Culture', *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 6:2 (2013), 96-117

Alston, M., and Bowles. W., *Research for Social Workers* (NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 2003)

Alves, T., "'Some Enchanted Evening' -- Tuning In the Amazing Fifties, Switching Off the Elusive Decade', *American Studies International*, 39:3 (2001), 25–40

Anguksuar, R.L.F., 'A postcolonial perspective on western [mis]conceptions of the cosmos and the restoration of indigenous taxonomies', in S.E. Jacobs, W. Thomas, and S.



- Lang (eds.), *Two-spirit people: Native American gender identity, sexuality, and spirituality* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press: 1997), pp. 217-222
- Attrian, H., 'Vulnerability, Familiarity and Friendship', in A. Sheftel and S. Zembrzycki (eds.), *Oral History off the Record: Toward and Ethnography of Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 77-81
- Balsiger, P., and A. Lambelet., 'Participant Observation', in D. Porta (eds.), *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 144-172
- Banks, S., *Ethics and Values in Social work* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., 2006)
- Beauvoir, S., *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973)
- Beemyn, G., and Rankin, S., *The Lives of Transgender People* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011)
- Bell-Metereau, R., *Transgender Cinema (Quick Takes: Movies and Popular Culture)* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2019)
- Benavente. G., and Gill-Peterson, J., 'The Promise of Trans Critique: Susan Stryker's Queer Theory', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 25:1 (2019), 23-28
- Benjamin, H., 'Transvestism and Transsexualism in the Male and Female', *The Journal of Sex Research*, 3:2 (1967), 107-127
- Benjamin, H., *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (New York: The Julian Press, Inc., 1966)
- Benjamin, H., 'Newer Aspects of the Transsexual Phenomenon', *The Journal of Sex Research*, 5:2 (1969), 135-141

Boellstroff, T., Cabral, M., Cardenas, M., Cotten, T., Stanley, E.A., Young, K., and Aizura, A.Z., 'Decolonizing Transgender: A Roundtable Discussion', *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1:3 (2014), 419–439

Booth, E.T., 'Queering Queer Eye: The Stability of Gay Identity Confronts the Liminality of Trans Embodiment', *Western Journal of Communication*, 75:2 (2011), 185-204

Borland, K., Co-Narration, 'Intersubjectivity, and the Listener in Family Storytelling', *The Journal of American Folklore*, 130:518 (2017), 438-456

Bornstein, K., and Bear Bergman, S., *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2010)

Bornstein, K., *My gender workbook* (New York: Routledge, 1998)

Bornstein, K., *Gender outlaw: On men, women, and the rest of us* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994)

Bosi, L., and Reiter, H., 'Historical Methodologies', in D. della Porta (eds.), *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 117-144

Boyd, N.A., 'Talking About Sex: Cheryl Gonzalez and Rikki Streicher Tell Their Stories', in N.A. Boyd and H.N.R Ramirez (eds.), *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 95-113

Boyd, N.A., and Ramirez, H.N.R., 'Introduction: Close Encounters: The Body and Knowledge in Queer Oral History', in N.A. Boyd and H.N.R Ramirez (eds.), *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 1-23

- Brannon, R., 'The male sex role: Our culture's blueprint of manhood, and what it's done for us lately', in D. S. David and R. Brannon (eds.), *The forty-nine percent majority: The male sex role* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1976), pp. 1-45
- Brown, B., *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are* (Minnesota: Hazelden, 2010)
- Building, H., 'Familial backgrounds and risk behaviors of youth with throwaway experiences', *Journal of Adolescence*, 21 (1998), 241–252
- Bulldagger, R., 'The End of Genderqueer', in M.B. Sycamore (eds.), *Nobody Passes: rejecting the Rules of Gender and Conformity* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2006), pp. 137-149
- Butler, J., *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015)
- Butler, J., *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004)
- Butler, J., 'Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig, Foucault', in S. Salih (eds.), *The Judith Butler Reader* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 21-39
- Butler, J., *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993)
- Butler, J., 'Critically Queer', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 1 (1993), 17-32
- Butler, J., *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990)

- Califia, P., *Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 2003)
- Carey, M., *The Social Work Dissertation* (Maidenhead, Berkshire, Open University Press, 2010)
- Cauldwell, D.O., 'Pyschopathia Transexualis', in S. Stryker and S. Whittle (eds.), *The Transgender Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 40-45
- Cavalcante, A., *Struggling for the Ordinary: Media and Transgender Belonging in Everyday Life* (New York: New York University Press, 2018)
- Center for American Progress and Movement Advancement Project, *Unjust: How the Broken Criminal Justice System Fails Transgender People* (Washington: Center for American Progress and Movement, 2016)
- Chaudhry, V. V., 'Centering the "Evil Twin": Rethinking Transgender in Queer Theory', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 25:1 (2019), 45–50
- Clifford, R., 'Emotions and gender in oral history: narrating Italy's 1968', *Modern Italy*, 17:2 (2012), 209-221
- Cochran, B.N., Stewart, A.J., Ginzler, J.A., and Cauce, A.M., 'Challenges Faced by Homeless Sexual Minorities: Comparison of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Homeless Adolescents with their Heterosexual Counterparts', *American Journal of Public Health*, 92:5 (2002), 773–777
- Cohen, C. J., 'Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 3:4 (1997), 437–465

Cornish, H., 'Gender, Mental Health and the Military', in R. Woodward and C. Duncanson (eds.), *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), pp. 275-289

Crenshaw, K., 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color', *Stanford Law Review*, 43:6 (1991), pp. 1241–1299

Creswell, J.W., *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Inc., 2014)

Crotty, M.J., *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process* (London, UK; Sage, 1998)

Davies, P., '“Me”, ‘Me’, ‘Me’: The Use of the First Person in Academic Writing and Some Reflections on Subjective Analyses of Personal Experiences', *Sociology*, 46:4 (2012), 744-752

Davis, E.C., 'Situating “Fluidity” (Trans) Gender Identification and the Regulation of Gender Diversity', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 15:1 (2009), 97-130

Davis, J.L., "“More Than Just ‘Gay Indians’” Intersecting Articulations of Two-Spirit Gender, Sexuality, and Indigenesness', in L. Zimman., J. Davis., and J. Raclaw (eds.), *Queer Excursions: Retheorizing Binaries in Language, Gender, and Sexuality* (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2014), pp. 1–30

Davy, Z., *Recognizing Transsexuals: Personal, Political and Medicolegal Embodiment* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011)

Decker, J.E., and Winchock, D., 'Introduction: Borderlands and Liminality Across Philosophy and Literature' in J.E Decker and D. Winchock (eds.), *Borderlands and*

*Liminal Subjects: Transgressing the Limits in Philosophy and Literature* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp.1-19

Denny, D., 'Transgender in the United States: A Brief Discussion' in Bockting, W. et al (eds.), *Siacus Report: The Construction of Gender, SIECUS Report*, 28:1 (1999), pp. 8-13

Dentice, D., and Dietert, M., 'Liminal Spaces and the Transgender Experience', *Theory in Action*, 8:2 (2015), 69-96

Derrida, J., 'The law of genre', in W.J.T. Mitchell (eds.), *On Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) pp. 51–77

Devor, A., 'Witnessing and Mirroring: A Fourteen Stage Model of Transsexual Identity Formation', *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, 8:1-2 (2004), 41-67

Devor, A., and Matte. N., 'Building a Better World for Transpeople: Reed Erickson and the Erickson Educational Foundation', *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 10:1 (2007), 47-68

Devor, H., *FTM: Female-to-male transsexuals in society* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1997)

DiGrazia, J., and Boucher, M., 'Writing InQueeries: Bodies, Queer Theory, and an Experimental Writing Class', *Composition Studies*, 33:2 (2005), 25-44

Dilley, P., 'Queer Theory: Under Construction', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 12:5 (1999), 457-472

Doan, P.L., 'The tyranny of gendered spaces – reflections from beyond the gender dichotomy', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 17:5 (2010), 635–654

Driskill, Q., 'Shaking our Shells: Cherokee Two-Spirits Rebalancing the World', *Beyond Masculinity* (2008), 121-141

Duncanson, C., 'Anti-Militarist Feminist Approaches to Researching Gender and the Military', in R. Woodward and C. Duncanson (eds.), *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), pp. 39-59

Dwyer, A., "'We're Not Like These Weird Feather Boa-Covered AIDS-Spreading Monsters": How LGBT Young People and Service Providers Think Riskiness Informs LGBT Youth-Police Interactions', *Critical Criminology*, 22:1 (2014), 65–79

Dwyer, A., "'It's Not Like We're Going to Jump Them'": How Transgressing Heteronormativity Shapes Police Interactions with LGBT Young People', *Youth Justice*, 11:3 (2011), 203–220

Dwyer, A., 'Policing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Young People: A Gap in the Research Literature', *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, 22:3 (2011), 415 – 433

Edelman, L., *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004)

Edelman, L., *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994)

Ehrensaft, D., 'From Gender Identity Disorder to Gender Identity Creativity: True Gender Self Child Therapy', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 59 (2012), 337–356

Ehrensaft, D., *Gender Born, Gender Made: Raising Healthy Gender-Nonconforming Children* (New York: The Experiment, LCC, 2011)

- Ekins, R., and King, D., 'Pioneers of Transgendering: The Popular Sexology of David O. Cauldwell', *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 5:2 (2001), [http://www.symposion.com/ijt/cauldwell/cauldwell\\_01.htm](http://www.symposion.com/ijt/cauldwell/cauldwell_01.htm)
- Ellis, H., *1928 Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, Volume 7 (New York: FA Davis & Co, 1938)
- Escoffier, J., 'Imagining the She/Male: Pornography and the Transsexualization of the Heterosexual Male', *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 12:4 (2011), 282–287
- Feinberg, L., *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996)
- Ferguson, H., 'How social workers reflect in action and when and why they don't: the possibilities and limits to reflective practice in social work', *Social Work Education*, 37:4 (2018), 415–427
- Ferguson, H., 'Outline of Critical Best Practice Perspective on Social Work and Social Care', *British Journal of Social Work*, 33 (2003), 1005-1024
- Freund, A., 'Toward an Ethics of Silence? Negotiating Off-the-Record Events and Identity in Oral History', in A. Sheftel and S. Zembrzycki (eds.), *Oral History Off the Record: Toward an Ethnography of Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 223-239
- Frisch, M., *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990)



- Galupo, M.P., Henise, S.B., and Mercer, N.L., ““The labels don’t work very well”:  
Transgender individuals’ conceptualizations of sexual orientation and sexual identity’,  
*International Journal of Transgenderism*, 17:2 (2016), 93–104
- Garber, M., *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (London: Penguin  
Books, 1993)
- Gardiner, J.K., ‘Female Masculinity and Phallic Women - Unruly Concepts’, *Feminist  
Studies*, 38:3 (2012), 597-624
- Gergen, K.J., and Gergen, M.M., ““Narratives of the Self””, in T.R. Sarbin and K.E.  
Scheibe (eds.), *Studies in Social Identity* (New York: Praeger, 1983), pp. 254-23.
- Gibson, K.E., *Street Kids: Homeless Youth, Outreach, and Policing New York’s Streets*  
(New York: New York University Press, 2011)
- Gibson, B., ‘Care of the Child with the Desire to Change Genders – Part II: Female-to-  
Male Transition’, *Paediatric Nursing*, 31:4 (2010), 230-235
- Gillig, T.K., Rosenthal, E.L., Murphy, S.T., and Folb, K.L., ‘More than a Media Moment:  
The Influence of Televised Storylines on Viewers’ Attitudes toward Transgender People  
and Policies’, *Sex Roles*, 78:7–8 (2018), 515-527
- Gilman, S.L., *Making the Body Beautiful: A Cultural History of Aesthetic Surgery*  
(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999)
- Gluck, S.B., ‘Why Do We Call It Oral History? Refocusing on Orality/Aurality in the  
Digital Age’, in D.A. Boyd and M.A. Larson (eds.), *Oral History and Digital Humanities:  
Voice, Access and Engagement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 35-53

Gluck, S.B., 'From California to Kufr Nameh and Back: Reflections on 40 Years of Feminist Oral History' in A. Sheftel & S. Zembrzycki (eds), *Oral History Off the Record* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), pp. 25-42

Goffman, E., *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 1956)

Graham, L.F., 'Navigating Community Institutions: Black Transgender Women's Experiences in Schools, the Criminal Justice System, and Churches', *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 11 (2014), 274-287

Graupner, H., and Tahmindjis, P., *Sexuality and Human Rights: A Global Overview* (New York: The Haworth Press, 2005)

Grele, R.J., 'Movement without aim: Methodological and theoretical problems in oral history', in R. Perks and A. Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 38-53

Grossman, A.H., and D'augelli, A.R., 'Transgender Youth: Invisible and Vulnerable', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 51:1 (2006), 111-128

Gwadz, M.V., Gostnell, K., Smolenski, C., Willis, B., Nish, D., Nolan, T.C., and Ritchie, A.S., 'The initiation of homeless youth into the street economy', *Journal of Adolescence*, 32:2 (2009), 357-77

Halberstam, J., 'Reflections on Queer Studies and Queer Pedagogy', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 45:2-4 (2003), 361-364

Halberstam, J., 'Transgender in a Global Frame', in S. Horlacher., (eds.), *Transgender and Intersex: Theoretical, Practical, and Artistic Perspectives* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 165-189

Halberstam, J.J., *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998)

Hansbury, G., 'The Middle Men: An Introduction to the Transmasculine Identities', *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 6:3 (2005), 241–64

Hausman, B.L., 'Recent Transgender Theory', *Feminist Studies*, 27:2 (2001), 465-490

Hausman, B.L., *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology and the Idea of Gender* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995)

Hein, L.C., 'Survival strategies of male homeless adolescents', *Journal of the American Psychiatric Nurses Association*, 17:4 (2011), 274–82

Heyes, C. J., *Self-Transformations: Foucault, Ethics, and Normalized Bodies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007)

Hill, D.B., 'Dear Doctor Benjamin: Letters from Transsexual Youth (1963-1976)', *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 10:3-4 (2008), 149–70

Hines, S., 'The feminist frontier: on trans and feminism', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 28:2 (2019), 145–157

Hines, S., 'Introduction', in S. Hines, and T. Sanger (eds.), *Transgender Identities: Towards a Social Analysis of Gender Diversity* (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 1-25

Hines, S., *Transforming Gender: Transgender practices of identity, intimacy and care* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2007)

- Hirschfield, M., 'Selections from The Transvestites: the erotic drive to cross-dress' in S. Stryker and S. Whittle (eds.), *The Transgender Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 28-40
- Hochreiter, S., 'Race, Class, Gender? Intersectionality Troubles', *Journal of Research in Gender Studies*, 4:2 (2011), 401–408
- Hok-Sze Leungr, H., 'Film', in *Transgender Studies Quarterly* (eds.), 'Abjection', *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1:1–2 (2014), 86-89
- Horton, P., "'I thought I was the only one": the misrecognition of LGBT youth in contemporary Vietnam', *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, 16:8 (2014), 960–973
- Howard, J., *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001)
- Irvine, A., "'We've Had Three of Them": Addressing the Invisibility of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Gender Non-Conforming Youths in the Juvenile Justice System', *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law*, 19:3 (2010), 675–701
- Jagose, A., 'Feminism's Queer Theory', *Feminism & Psychology*, 19:2 (2009), 157–174
- James, D., *Dona Maria's Story; Life History, Memory and Political Identity* (London: Duke University Press, 2000)
- Jones, T., Bolger, A.P., Dune T., Lykins, A., and Hawkes, G., *Female-to-Male (FtM) Transgender People's Experiences in Australia: A National Study*, SpringerBriefs in Sociology (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2015)
- Jorgensen, C., *Christine Jorgensen: A Personal Autobiography* (New York: Paul Eriksson, 1967)

- Kidd, S., 'Youth Homelessness and Social Stigma', *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 36 (2007), 291–299
- Kim, S.N., 'Whose voice is it anyway? Rethinking the oral history method in accounting research on race, ethnicity, and gender', *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 19 (2008), 1346-1369
- King, D., *The Transvestite and the Transsexual: Public categories and private identities* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1993)
- Kovats-Bernat, J.C., *Sleeping Rough in Port-au-Prince: An Ethnography of Street Children and Violence in Haiti* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2006)
- Kusalik, T., 'Identity, Schmidentity', in K. Bornstein and S. Bear (eds.), *Gender Outlaws: The next generation* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2010), pp. 44-49
- Laub, D.R., and Gandy. P., 'Proceedings of the Second Interdisciplinary Symposium on Gender Dysphoria Syndrome', in S. Stones, 'The "Empire" Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto', *Camera Obscura*, (1993), pp. 1-20
- Leach, T., 'It's the Cold War Stupid: An obvious history of the political Hitchcock', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 27:1 (1999), 3-15
- Leonard, S., 'Pornography and Obscenity', in H.G. Cocks and M. Houlbrook (eds.), *Palgrave Advances in the Modern History of Sexuality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 180-206
- Mandelbaum, D.G., 'The Study of life History: Gandhi', *Current Anthropology*, 14:3 (1973), 177-206

Marksamer, J., 'And by the Way, Do You Know He Thinks He's a Girl? The Failures of Law, Policy and Legal Representation for Transgender Youth in Juvenile Delinquency Courts', *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 5:1 (2008), 72–92

Mason-Schrock, D., 'Transsexuals' Narrative Construction of the "True Self"', *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 59:3 (1997), 176–192

Matias, C.E., Viesca, K.M., Garrison-Wade, D.F., Tandon, M., and Galindo, R., "“What is Critical Whiteness Doing in OUR Nice Field like Critical Race Theory?” Applying CRT and CWS to Understand the White Imaginations of White Teacher Candidates', *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 47:3 (2014), 289–304.

Maxwell, J.A., *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1996), quoted in A. Whittaker, *Research Skills for Social Work* (Exeter: Learning Matters Ltd, 2010)

McQueen, P., *Subjectivity, Gender and the Struggle for Recognition* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)

Meyerowitz, J., *How Sex Changed, A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (MA: Harvard University Press, 2002)

Miehls, D., and Moffat, K., 'Constructing Social Work Identity Based on the Reflective Self', *British Journal of Social Work*, 30 (2000), 339-348

Morris, J., *Conundrum* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1974)

Mottet, L., and Ohle, J., 'Transitioning Our Shelters: Making Homeless Shelters Safe for Transgender People', *Journal of Poverty*, 10:2 (2008), 77–101

Muñoz, J.E., *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999)

Murjan, S., and Bouman, W.P., 'Psychiatry', in C. Richards, W. P. Bouman and M.J. Barker (eds.), *Critical and Applied Approaches in Sexuality, Gender and Identity: Genderqueer and Non-Binary Genders* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 125-141

Murphy, K.P., Pierce, J.K., and Ruiz, J., 'What Makes Queer Oral History Different', *Oral History Review*, 43:1 (2016): 1-24

Musto, J., 'Domestic minor sex trafficking and the detention-to-protection pipeline', *Dialectical Anthropology*, 37:12 (2013), 257–276

Nadal, K.L., Whitman, C.N., Davis, L.S., Erazo, T., and Davidoff, K.C., 'Microaggressions Toward Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Genderqueer People: A Review of the Literature', *Journal of Sex Research*, 53:4–5 (2016), 488–508

Nagoshi, J.L., Nagoshi, C.T., and Brzuzy, S., *Gender and Sexual Identity: Transcending Feminist and Queer Theory* (New York: Springer, 2014)

Nagoshi, J.L., Brzuzy, S., and Terrell, H.K., 'Deconstructing the complex perceptions of gender roles, gender identity, and sexual orientation among transgender individuals', *Feminism & Psychology*, 22:4 (2012), 405–422

Nagoshi, J.L., and Brzuzy, S., 'Transgender Theory: Embodying Research and Practice', *Journal of Women and Social Work*, 22:4 (2010), 431-443

Namaste, K., 'Undoing Theory: The "Transgender Question" and the Epistemic Violence of Anglo-American Feminist Theory', *Hypatia*, 24:3 (2009), 11–32

Namaste, K., 'Tragic Misreadings: Queer Theory's Erasure of Transgender Subjectivity', in B. Beemyn and M. Eliason (eds.), *Queer Studies: A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Anthology* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), pp. 183–203

Namaste, K., 'The Politics of Inside/Out: Queer Theory, Poststructuralism, and a Sociological Approach to Sexuality', *Sociological Theory*, 12:2 (1994), 220–231

Namaste, V. K., 'The use and abuse of queer tropes: Metaphor and Catachresis in queer theory and politics', *Social Semiotics*, 9:2 (1999), 213–234

Ness, K., 'Constructing Masculinity in the Building Trades: "Most Jobs in the Construction Industry Can Be Done by Women"', *Gender, Work and Organization*, 19:6 (2012), 654–676

Nieder, T.O., Elaut, E., Richards, C., and Dekker, A., 'Sexual orientation of trans adults is not linked to outcome of transition-related health care, but worth asking', *International Review of Psychiatry*, 28:1 (2016), 103–111

Noga-Styron, K.E., Reasons, C.E., and Peacock, D., "'The Last Acceptable Prejudice: An Overview of LGBT Social and Criminal Injustice Issues within the USA.'", *Contemporary Justice Review* 15:4 (2012), 369–98

Oparah, J.C., 'Feminism and the (trans)gender Entrapment of Gender Nonconforming Prisoners', *UCLA Women's Law Journal*, 18 (2012), 239–271

Owen, G., 'Adolescence', in *Transgender Studies Quarterly* (eds.), *Abjection, Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1:1–2 (2014), 22–24



- Parent, M.C., Gobble, T.D., and Rochlen, A., 'Social Media Behavior, Toxic Masculinity, and Depression', *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, Advance online publication (2018), 1-11
- Passerini, L., 'Response on Borders, Conflict Zones, and Memory', *Women's History Review*, 25:3 (2016), 447-457
- Passerini, L., *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987)
- Passerini, L., 'Work Ideology and the Consensus under Italian Fascism,' *History Workshop Journal*, 8 (1979), 82-108
- Pattinson, J., '“The thing that made me hesitate...”: re-examining gendered intersubjectivities in interviews with British secret war veterans', *Women's History Review*, 20:2 (2011), 245-263
- Perks, R., and Thomson, A., 'Part I Critical Developments: Introduction', in R. Perks and A. Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 1-9
- Perks, R., and Thomson, A., 'Part II Interviewing Introduction', in R. Perks and A. Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 101-107
- Phillips, J., *Transgender on Screen* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)
- Phillips, R., 'Abjection', in Transgender Studies Quarterly (eds.), *Abjection, Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1:1-2 (2014), pp. 19-22
- Pink, S., *Doing Visual Ethnography* (Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications Inc, 2013)

- Plamper, J., *History of Emotions: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015)
- Portelli, A., *They Say in Harlan County: An Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)
- Portelli, A., 'What Makes Oral History Different', in R. Perks and A. Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 32-42
- Portelli, A., *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991)
- Portelli, A., 'The Peculiarities of Oral History', *History Workshop Journal*, 12 (1981), 96-107
- Poteat, T., Wirtz, A.L., Radix, A., Borquez, A., Silva-Santisteban, A., Deutsch, M. B., Operario, D., 'HIV risk and preventive interventions in transgender women sex workers', *Lancet*, 6736:14 (2014), 1-13
- Probst, B., 'The Eye Regards Itself: Benefits and Challenges of Reflexivity in Qualitative Social Work Research', *Social Work Research*, 39:1 (2015), pp.37-48
- Prosser, J., 'Judith Butler: Queer Feminism, Transgender, and the Transubstantiation of Sex', in S. Whittle., and S. Stryker., (eds.), *The Transgender Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 257-281
- Prosser, J., *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998)

- Pullen, S.A., Robichaud, M.J., and Dumais-Michaud, A.A., 'The Experience of Parents Who Support Their Children's Gender Variance', *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 12:1 (2015), 39–63
- Raymond, J., *The transsexual empire: The making of a she-male* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979)
- Reay, B., 'The transsexual phenomenon: A counter-history', *Journal of Social History*, 47:4 (2014), 1042–1070
- Reck, J., 'Homeless Gay and Transgender Youth of Color in San Francisco: "No One Likes Street Kids"—Even in the Castro', *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 6:2-3 (2009), 223–242
- Reese, E.D., Pollert, G.A., and Veilleux, J.C., 'Self-regulatory predictors of eating disorder symptoms: Understanding the contributions of action control and willpower beliefs', *Eating Behaviors*, 20 (2016), 64–69.
- Robles, R., Fresán, A., Vega-Ramírez, H., Cruz-Islas, J., Rodríguez-Pérez, V., Domínguez-Martínez, T., and Reed, G. M., 'Removing transgender identity from the classification of mental disorders: a Mexican field study for ICD-11', *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 3:9 (2016), 850 – 859
- Roen, K., 'Transgender Theory and Embodiment: The Risk of Racial Marginalisation', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 10:3 (2001), 253-263
- Rosario, M., Schrimshaw, E.W., and Hunter, J., 'Risk Factors for Homelessness Among Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youths: A Developmental Milestone Approach', *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34:1 (2012), 186–193

- Rosario, V.A., 'African-American Transgender Youth', *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, 13:4 (2009), 298–308
- Rubin, G., 'Blood under the Bridge: Reflections on "Thinking Sex."', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 17:1 (2011), 15–48
- Rubin, G., 'Thinking sex: Notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality', in H. Abelove., M.A. Barale and D.M Halperin (eds.), *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 3–44
- Samuel, R., and Thompson, P., *The Myths We Live By* (New York: Routledge, 1990)
- Sanders, T., 'Selling sex in the shadow economy', *International Journal of Social Economics*, 35:10 (2008), 704–716
- Sangster, J., 'Politics and Praxis in Canadian Working-Class Oral History', in A. Sheftel and S. Zembrzycki (eds.), *Oral History Off the Record: Toward an Ethnography of Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 59-77
- Schneider, W., 'Oral History in the Age of Digital Possibilities', in D.A. Boyd and M.A. Larson (eds.), *Oral History and Digital Humanities: Voice, Access and Engagement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) pp. 19-35
- Scholinski, D., and Adams, J.M., *The Last Time I Wore a Dress* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1997)
- Sears, C., *Arresting Dress: Cross-Dressing, Law, and Fascination in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015)
- Sedgwick, E.K., *Epistemology of the closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008)

Sedgwick, E.K., *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993)

Sedgwick, E.K., 'Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 3 (1993), 1-16

Seid, D.M., 'Reveal', in Transgender Studies Quarterly (eds.), *Abjection, Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1:1-2 (2014), pp. 176-177

Seidman, S., 'Identity and politics in a "postmodern" gay culture: Some historical and conceptual notes' in M. Warner (eds.), *Fear of a queer planet: Queer politics and social theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1998), pp. 105-142

Seligmann, N., "'If I Won't Be Myself, Who Will?'" The Making of a Star Persona in Alfred Hitchcock Presents and The Alfred Hitchcock Hour', in W. Schwanebeck (eds.), *Reassessing the Hitchcock Touch* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 113-135

Serona, J., *Excluded: Making feminist and queer movements more inclusive* (New York: Avalon Publishing Group, 2013)

Shaver, F.M., 'Sex work research: methodological and ethical challenges', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 20:3 (2005), 296-319

Sheftel, A., and Zembrzycki, S., 'Only Human: A Reflection on the Ethical and Methodological Challenges of Working with "Difficult" Stories', *The Oral History Review*, 37:2 (2010), 191-214

Shilts, R., *Conduct Unbecoming Lesbians and Gays in the U.S. Military, Vietnam to the Persian Gulf* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993)

Shopes, L., 'Commentary: Sharing Authority', *The Oral History Review*, 30:1 (2003), 103-110

- Singh, A.A., 'Transgender Youth of Color and Resilience: Negotiating Oppression and Finding Support' *Sex Roles*, 68:11-12 (2013), 690–702
- Sjoberg, L., 'Toward Trans-gendering International Relations?\*', *International Political Sociology*, 6 (2012), 337–354
- Skidmore, E., 'Constructing the "Good Transsexual": Christine Jorgensen, Whiteness, and Heteronormativity in the Mid-Twentieth-Century Press', *Race and Transgender Studies*, 37:2 (2016), 270–300
- Snapp, S.D., Hoenig, J.M., Fields, A., and Russell, S.T., 'Messy, Butch, and Queer: LGBTQ Youth and the School-to-Prison Pipeline', *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 30:1 (2015), 57-82
- Snorton, C.R., *Black on Both Sides: A racial history of trans identity* (Minneapolis: London University of Minnesota Press, 2017)
- Spade, D., *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015)
- Spade, D., 'Undermining Gender Regulation', in M.B. Sycamore (eds.), *Nobody Passes: rejecting the Rules of Gender and Conformity* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2006), pp. 64-71
- Spicer, S.S., 'Healthcare Needs of the Transgender Homeless Population', *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, 14:4 (2010), 320–339
- Squatriglia, H., 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth in the Juvenile Justice System: Incorporating Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity into the Rehabilitative Process', *Cardozo Journal of Law and Gender*, 14 (2008), 793–817

- Stanley, E.A., 'Introduction', in E.A. Stanley and N. Smith (eds.), *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 2015)
- Steinbock, E., 'Pornography', *TSQ \* Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1:1-2 (2014), 156-158
- Stieglitz, K., 'Development, Risk, and Resilience of Transgender Youth', *The Journal of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care*, 21:3 (2010), 192-206
- Stone, S., 'The "Empire" Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto', *Camera Obscura*, (1993), 1-20
- Stotzer, R.L., 'Violence against transgender people: A review of United States data', *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 14:3 (2009), 170-179
- Stryker, S., 'More Words about "My Words to Victor Frankenstein."', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 25:1 (2019), 23-28
- Stryker, S., *Transgender History* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2008)
- Stryker, S., 'Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity', *Radical History Review*, 2008:100 (2008), 145-157
- Stryker, S., '(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies', in S. Whittle., and S. Stryker., (eds.), *The Transgender Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 1-19
- Stryker, S., 'Transgender Studies: Queer Theory's Evil Twin', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 10:2 (2004), 212-215

- Stryker, S., 'My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 1, (1994), 237-254
- Stryker, S., Currah, P., and Moore, L. J., 'Introduction: Trans-, Trans, or Transgender?', *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly*, 36:3/4 (2008), 11–22
- Stumpff, L.M., 'The Essence of the Wild: Native American Perspectives and Practices', *Environmental Practice*, 1:2 (1999), 75–76
- Sullivan, N., *A critical introduction to queer theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003)
- Summerfield, P., 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews', *Cultural and Social History*, 1:1 (2004), 65-93
- Terrill, R.E., 'Going Deep', *Southern Communication Journal*, 71:2 (2006), 165–173.
- Thompson, N., *Anti-discriminatory practice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 4<sup>th</sup> edn., 2006)
- Thompson, P., *The Voice of the Past, Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., 2000)
- Thomson, A., 'Memory and Remembering in Oral History', in D.A. Ritchie (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011)
- Tropiano, S., *The Prime Time Closet: A History of Gays and Lesbians on TV* (New York: Applause Theatre Cinema and Books, 2002)



- Turner, V., 'Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology', *Rice Institute Pamphlet - Rice University Studies*, 60:3 (1974), 53-92
- Turner, V.W., 'Betwixt and between: The liminal period in rites of passage', in L.C. Mahdi., S. Foster., and M. Little., (eds.), *Betwixt and between: Patterns of masculine and feminine initiation* (Illinois: Open Court Publishing, 5<sup>th</sup> edn., 1987) pp. 46-55
- Turner, V.W., *Drama, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1974)
- Turner, V.W., *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1969)
- Turse, N., *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam* (New York: Picador, 2014)
- Uhrig, S.C.N., *An Examination of Poverty and Sexual Orientation in the UK* (Colchester: Institute for Social and Economic Research University of Essex, 2013)
- Valentine, D., *Imagining Transgender: an ethnography of a category* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007)
- Van der Wal, E., 'Crossing over, coming out, blending in: A trans interrogation of the closet', *South African Review of Sociology*, 47:3 (2016), 44-64
- Ventimiglia, N., 'LGBT Selective Victimization: Unprotected Youth on the Streets', *The Journal of Law and Society*, 13:2 (2012), 439-453
- Vidal-Ortiz, S., 'Whiteness', in *Transgender Studies Quarterly* (eds.), *Abjection, Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1:1-2 (2014), pp. 264-266

- Walls, N.E., and Bell, S., 'Correlates of Engaging in Survival Sex among Homeless Youth and Young Adults', *The Journal of Sex Research*, 48:5 (2011), 423-436
- Walsh, S.M., and Donaldson, R.E., 'Invited commentary: National Safe Place: meeting the immediate needs of runaway and homeless youth', *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 39:5 (2010), 437-45
- Weston, K., 'Me, Myself and I', in Y. Taylor, S Hines, M.E. Casey (eds.), *Theorizing Intersectionality and Sexuality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 15-37
- Williams, W.L., *The spirit and the flesh: Sexual diversity in American Indian culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992)
- Wilson, C., *Fear and Clothing: Unbuckling American Style* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2015)
- Wilson, M., 'I Am the Prince of Pain, for I Am a Princess in the Brain': Liminal Transgender Identities, Narratives and the Elimination of Ambiguities', *Sexualities*, 5:4 (2002), 425-448
- Wong, A., 'Listen and Learn', in A. Sheftel and S. Zembrzycki (eds.), *Oral History off the Record: Toward and Ethnography of Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 97-113
- Yow, V., "'Do I like Them Too Much?": Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice-Versa', *The Oral History Review*, 24:1 (1997), 55-79
- Yow, V.R., *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., 2015)

Yu, V., 'Shelter and Transitional Housing for Transgender Youth', *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, 14:4 (2010), 340-345

Zembrzycki, S., 'Not Just Another Interviewee', in A. Sheftel and S. Zembrzycki (eds.), *Oral History off the Record: Toward and Ethnography of Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 129-145

### ***Dissertations and Theses***

Davy, Z., "Transsexual recognition: embodiment, bodily aesthetics and the medicolegal system", (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2008)

### ***Internet Sources [with authors]***

B. Brown, 'Authenticity', [https://brenebrown.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Authenticity\\_download-1.pdf](https://brenebrown.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Authenticity_download-1.pdf), consulted 13/06/2019

B. Brown, 'Take a risk and put your true self out there', <https://edition.cnn.com/2012/04/15/opinion/brown-authentic-self/index.html>, consulted

B. Wauchope, 'Homeless Teens and Young Adults in New Hampshire'. <http://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1108&context=carsey>, consulted 10/04/16

C. Manning, 'Laverne Cox Opens Up About Her Struggle to Accept Herself in a Transphobic Society', [www.cosmopolitan.com](http://www.cosmopolitan.com), <https://www.cosmopolitan.com/style-beauty/news/a46179/laverne-cox-interview-trans-is-beautiful-nyfw/>, consulted 12/12/2018

E A. Greytak, J G. Kosciw, and E M. Diaz, 'Harsh Realities: The Experiences of Transgender Youth in Our Nation's Schools',

<http://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/Harsh%20Realities.pdf>, consulted 30/02/15

H. Hussey, 'Beyond 4 Walls and a Roof: Addressing Homelessness Among Transgender Youth',

<http://static1.squarespace.com/static/54873880e4b028ad7a710b0e/t/5513f2dce4b053108e5da8dd/1427370716570/TransHomeless.pdf>, consulted 06/06/16

J. Kiesewetter, '40 years of 'WKRP in Cincinnati'',

<https://eu.cincinnati.com/story/entertainment/2018/09/21/wkrp-cincinnati-show-premiered-40-years-ago/1377495002/> consulted 30/09/18

J M., Grant, L A. Mottet, J Tanis, J Harrison, J L. Herman, and M Keisling, 'Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey',

[http://www.thetaskforce.org/static\\_html/downloads/reports/reports/ntds\\_full.pdf](http://www.thetaskforce.org/static_html/downloads/reports/reports/ntds_full.pdf),

consulted 18/01/15

K. Nordyke, 'GLAAD Media Awards: 'Call Me by Your Name' Wins Best Film',

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/lists/glaad-media-awards-complete-list-winners-2018-1078487>, consulted 12/12/2018

L E. Durso, and G J. Gates, 'Serving Our Youth: Finding from a National Survey of Services Providers Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth Who are Homeless or At Risk of Becoming Homeless',

<http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Durso-Gates-LGBT-Homeless-Youth-Survey-July-2012.pdf>, consulted 28/01/15

L. Winn, 'U.S. State Department of Health and Human Services: Learning from the Field: Programs Serving Youth who are LGBTQ2-S and Experiencing Homelessness', [http://homeless.samhsa.gov/ResourceFiles/lgbt\\_listening\\_tour\\_report\\_v.3.6.pdf](http://homeless.samhsa.gov/ResourceFiles/lgbt_listening_tour_report_v.3.6.pdf)

consulted 20/11/16

M. Bowers, 'Dr. Bowers' Curriculum Vitae', <https://marcibowers.com/mtf/dr-bowers/>,

consulted 11/10/16

M. Dank, J. Yahner, K. Madden, I. Bañuelos, L. Yu, A. Ritchie, ... Conner, B., 'Surviving the Streets of New York: Experiences of LGBTQ Youth, YMSM, and YSWW Engaged in Survival Sex', <http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/2000119-Surviving-the-Streets-of-New-York.pdf>, consulted 05/12/2015

N. Peterson, 'The Health and Rights of Transgender Youth', <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/publications-a-z/2282-the-health-and-rights-of-Trans-youth>, consulted 30/05/2015

N. Ray, 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans Youth: An Epidemic of Homelessness', [http://www.thetaskforce.org/static\\_html/downloads/reports/reports/HomelessYouth\\_ExecutiveSummary.pdf](http://www.thetaskforce.org/static_html/downloads/reports/reports/HomelessYouth_ExecutiveSummary.pdf), consulted 28/11/16

N S. Quintana, J Rosenthal, and J Krehely, 'On the Streets: The Federal Response to Gay and Transgender Homeless Youth', <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2010/06/pdf/lgbtyouthhomelessness.pdf>, consulted 22/04/16

R. Curtis, K Terry, and M Dank, 'The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in New York City Executive Summary',

[http://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/CSEC\\_NYC\\_Executive\\_Summary.pdf](http://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/CSEC_NYC_Executive_Summary.pdf), consulted 22/01/15

R. Feinstein, A. Greenblatt, L. Hass, S. Kohn, and J. Rana, 'Justice for all? A report on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered youth in the New York juvenile justice system', [http://nijn.org/uploads/digital-library/resource\\_239.pdf](http://nijn.org/uploads/digital-library/resource_239.pdf), consulted 10/12/2015

T. Stevenson, and L. Jardine, 'Understanding the Housing Needs and Homeless Experiences of LGBT People in Scotland', [http://www.stonewallscotland.org.uk/documents/stonewall\\_housing\\_report\\_1\\_main\\_guide\\_final.pdf](http://www.stonewallscotland.org.uk/documents/stonewall_housing_report_1_main_guide_final.pdf) consulted 28/11/16

### ***Films***

*Screaming queens: The riot at Compton's Cafeteria* (2005), Directed and produced by Silverman, V., Stryker, S., Walsh, J., Constantinou, S., In Schmidt, L., Koskinen, H, (Frameline)

### ***Television broadcast***

ABC, *Charlie's Angels: Angel on the Line*, 14 February 1981

ABC, *The Love Boat: I Don't Play Anymore/Gopher's Roommate/Crazy for You*, 23 January 1982

ABC, *Twin Peaks: Masked Ball*, 12 December 1990

ABC, *Twin Peaks: The Black Widow*, 12 January 1991

ABC, *Twin Peaks: Checkmate*, 19 January 1991

Amazon, *Transparent*, 2014-

CBS, *Nash Bridges: Javelin Catcher*, 19 April 1996

CBS, *Nash Bridges: Cuda Grace*, 3 April 1998

CBS, *M\*A\*S\*H\**, 17 September 1972 – 28 February 1983

CBS, *Medical Center: The Fourth Sex (Parts 1 and 2)*, 8 September 1975

CBS, *The Jeffersons: Once a Friend*, 1 October 1977

CBS, *WKRP in Cincinnati: Hotel Oceanview*, 29 November 1980

HBO, *What sex am I?*, March 1985

NBC, *Gimme a Break!: Melissa*, 17 November 1983

NBC, *Night Court: Best of Friends*, 7 November 1985

NBC, *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour: An Unlocked Window*, 15 February 1965

Netflix, *Orange is the New Black*, 2013-

Netflix, *Sense8*, 2015-2018

PBS, *Tales of the City*, 3 January 1994

SBS-TV, *All in the Family: Archie the Hero*, 29 September 1975

SBS-TV, *All in the Family: Beverly Rides Again*, 6 November 1976

SBS-TV, *All in the Family: Edith's Crisis of Faith (Part 1)*, 18 December 1977

Showtime, *Twin Peaks: Part 4*, 21 May 2017

TLC, *I am Jazz*, 2015-

***Photographs***

Lorna Barton., Photograph, 'Gender Identity Center of Colorado', *Lorna Barton's private collection*, 2016

Unknown, 'Miss Christine Jorgensen', Photograph, *Digital Transgender Archive* (1960), <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/files/zw12z543s>, date accessed: 14 May 2018

***Online Resources [without authors]***

'Employee health insurance, Obamacare make sex change a new reality for 1.4 million Americans', *CNBC*, (2018) <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/03/27/work-health-insurance-obamacare-coverage-spur-sex-change-surgery-boom.html>, date accessed: 13 May 2018

'Gender Dysphoria DSM-5', *American Psychiatric Association* (2013), <http://www.dsm5.org/documents/gender%20dysphoria%20fact%20sheet.pdf>, date accessed: 19 January 2015

'Gender Nation: The Evolution Of Trans Representation In Hollywood', *Refinery29* (2017), <https://www.refinery29.uk/2017/11/181207/transgender-movies-tv-shows#slide-2>, date accessed 19 February 2018.

'Gender Variance (Dysphoria)', *GIRES* (2014), <https://www.gires.org.uk/category/research-archive/>, date accessed: 15 October 2014

'Growing recognition of transgender health', *World Health Organization* (2018) <http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/94/11/16-021116/en/>, date accessed: 30 June 2018

'How to identify an Addiction Replacement has occurred', *AddictionCenter.com* (2016), <https://www.addictioncenter.com/community/addiction-replacement/>, date accessed: 1 June 2017



‘Is David Duchovny's *Twin Peaks* Role Good for Trans Representation?’ *The Advocate* (2017), <https://www.advocate.com/television/2017/5/26/david-duchovnys-twin-peaks-role-good-trans-representation>, date accessed: 29 July 2018

‘Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, More than Two Decades Later’, *Columbia Law School* (2017), <https://www.law.columbia.edu/pt-br/news/2017/06/kimberle-crenshaw->, date accessed: 19 August 2019

‘Klinger was not trans in M\*A\*S\*H so stop bringing him up’, *SDGLN.com* (2017), <http://sdgln.com/commentary/2017/07/28/klinger-was-not-trans-mash-so-stop-bringing-him>, date accessed: 9 May 2018

‘Know Your Rights: Healthcare’, *The National Center for Transgender Equality* (2017), <https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/kyr/KYR-Healthcare-June2017.pdf>, date accessed: 15 January 2018

‘Matthew Shepard Was Brutally Murdered in Laramie, Wyoming, in 1998. Last Night, the City Passed the First LGBT Non-discrimination Ordinance in the State’, *ACLU* (2015), <https://www.aclu.org/blog/lgbt-rights/lgbt-nondiscrimination-protections/matthew-shepard-was-brutally-murdered-laramie>, date accessed: 2 June 2018

‘Media Reference Guide – Transgender Issues’, *GLAAD*, <https://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender>, date accessed: 14 December 2017

‘Methodological Killing; Losing Trans Film Characters Devalues them IRL’, *Bitch Media* (2017), <https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/stop-killing-trans-people-on-screen>, date accessed: 9 May 2018

'Orange is the New Black', Netflix, <https://www.netflix.com/gb/title/70242311>, date accessed: 15 September 2018

'Principles and Best Practices', *Oral History Association* (2009), <http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices/>, date accessed: 18 December 2015.

'Queer Theory: The Origins of Queer theory', *Science Encyclopaedia* (2019), <https://science.jrank.org/pages/10938/Queer-Theory-Origins-Queer-Theory.html>, date accessed: 4 November 2019

'Research Briefing: Young, hidden and homeless', *Crisis* (2012), <http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/Crisis%20briefing%20-%20youth%20homelessness.pdf>, date accessed: 22 January 2015

'Standards of Care for the health of transsexual, transgender, and gender nonconforming people', *World Professional Association for Transgender Health* (7<sup>th</sup> Version, 2012), <http://www.teni.ie/attachments/92d213ab-8474-4f34-a931-ab95489b2afe.PDF>, date accessed: 17 November 2017

'Stories Matter', *The Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling* (2010), <http://storytelling.concordia.ca/storiesmatter/>, date accessed: 15 September 2016

'Supplemental Document to the Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness: June 2010: Background Paper – Youth Homelessness'. *Unites States Interagency Council on Homelessness* (2010), [http://usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset\\_library/BkgrdPap\\_Youth.pdf](http://usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/BkgrdPap_Youth.pdf), date accessed: 18 October 2014

‘TDOR Press Release October 30 2014’, *Trans Europe* (2014), <http://www.transrespect-transphobia.org/uploads/downloads/2014/TDOR2014/TvT-TDOR2014PR-en.pdf>, date accessed: 20 November 2014

‘The PhotoVoice Manual: A guide to designing and running participatory photography projects’, *PhotoVoice* (2014), [http://www.photovoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/PV\\_Manual.pdf](http://www.photovoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/PV_Manual.pdf), date accessed: 2 December 2014

‘The Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association's Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorders’, *Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association* (Sixth Version, 2001), <http://www.cpath.ca/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/WPATHsocv6.pdf>, date accessed: 18 September 2017

‘Transforming Images: Four Decades of Trans-Inclusive Entertainment’, *GLAAD* (2014), <https://www.glaad.org/transforming-images-four-decades-trans-inclusive-entertainment>, date accessed: 15 March 2018

‘Transgender health care’, *Healthcare.gov*, <https://www.healthcare.gov/transgender-health-care/>, date accessed: 28 July 2016

‘Transgender Terminology’, *Cornell University*, <https://hr.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/trans%20terms.pdf>, date accessed: 10 January 2017

‘Transparent’, *Amazon*, <https://www.amazon.com/Transparent-Season-1/dp/B00I3MPZUW>, date accessed: 15 September 2018.

‘Victims or Villains: Examining Ten Years of Transgender Images on Television’, *GLAAD* (2012), <https://www.glaad.org/publications/victims-or-villains-examining-ten-years-transgender-images-television>, date accessed: 29 September 2017

‘Violence Against the Transgender Community in 2018’, *Human Rights Campaign* (2018), <https://www.hrc.org/resources/violence-against-the-transgender-community-in-2018>, date accessed: 30 September 2018

‘Vision and Mission’, *Photovoice* (2015), <http://www.photovoice.org/vision-and-mission/>, date accessed: 2 February 2015

‘What is the pituitary gland...and what does it do?’, *Pituitary Foundation* (2018), <https://www.pituitary.org.uk/information/what-is-the-pituitary-gland/>, date accessed 9 February 2018

‘What Made Twin Peaks’ Denise Such a Radical Trans Character on TV’, *Daily Beast* (2017), <https://www.thedailybeast.com/what-made-twin-peaks-denise-such-a-radical-trans-character-on-tv>, date accessed: 1 August 2018

‘Where we are on TV ’16-’17: GLAAD’s Annual Report on LGBTQ Inclusion’, *GLAAD* (2016), <https://www.glaad.org/whereweareontv16>, date accessed: 3 August 2018