

**VISUALISING THE TRANSSEXUAL SELF:
PHOTOGRAPHY, STRATEGIES, AND IDENTITIES**

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of the visual world in negotiations of gender, self-image, the body, and the social domain, and the impact this has on the visualisation of transsexual gender identities. These issues are brought into sharp analytical focus through the personal experiences of transsexual people.

The inquiry brings a new approach to transgender studies by using visual research methods that reflect specifically the centrality of the visual in negotiations of gender in society. This thesis is a practice-based PhD that uses the methods of photography and interview in dialogue with theoretical approaches. In this photography constitutes both a methodology and a form of evidence in the research. The social expectation of photography is that it reproduces reality. Yet, it also offers a form of communication, one beyond the spoken or written word. The research builds on these concepts, while exploring photography's potential to be used collaboratively and reflexively. What emerges, I shall argue, is a highly discursive and performative 'photo space'.

The core material is presented in four case studies that explore the key themes that came to the surface through the inquiry. These are: the impact of the visual world in negotiations of gender, the role of images in transsexual self-visualisation, the capacity for photography to reveal insights into the transsexual self-image, and the dysfunctional dialogue that exists between atypical gender identities and social gender categories. A context for the structure of the argument

is provided by a review of historical and cross-cultural transgender identities, intersex conditions, the emergence of the transsexual identity in a medical sphere, and social visibility.

Two significant areas of concern and exploration involving the visual world previously ignored in research into transsexuality: 'seeing' the body and 'being seen' by others, emerged in the inquiry. These concerns have been central to the debates around the construction of gender stereotyping in society in general and in particular with regard to the media. However, in transsexual discourses these issues become heightened and self-consciously performative. It is this heightened awareness of the visual realm with regard to gender that is the focus of this thesis. The issues of 'passing', the performance of gender, and 'the wrong body', which are central to the understanding of transsexual experiences to date, are examined in relation to these areas of concern because they provide important new perspectives on these concepts.

The research demonstrates that gender is not necessarily contained within the binary categories, that the genitals are not always the defining feature of transsexual gender identities, and that surgery is not a necessary outcome of transsexuality. The evidence that surfaces in this study contests the widely held belief in the two-sexes/two-genders system, founded on the assumption that gender follows biology. Following this, I suggest that photographs of the atypically gendered body have the potential to question pre-conceptions of gender and the body, contest the boundaries of the binaries, and present a challenge to the gender system.

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CHAPTER ONE

CONTEXTS, HISTORIES, AND THEORIES

Introduction

This study explores the relationship between gender, self-image, the body, and the social domain, through the experiences of transsexual people. The inquiry developed out of research that began in 2001 involving twenty-three transsexual people. This study analyses the accounts of four people as case studies and examines four key themes. These are: the impact of the visual world in negotiations of gender, the role of images in transsexual self-visualisation, the capacity for photography to reveal insights into the transsexual self-image, and the dysfunctional dialogue that exists between atypical gender identities and social gender categories. The research is a practice-based photographic inquiry. It was undertaken over a four-year period from 2002 to 2006.

The four people whose experiences will be presented as case studies are Karen, Michael, Kitty, and Robert. Karen and Michael have transitioned through one complex and contested gender role to another whilst Robert and Kitty self-identify beyond the binary categories. Each one of these four people presents a different gender identity and all have modified their bodies to align with their gender.

The first two chapters outline my theoretical position and the contexts for the case studies that follow. This introductory chapter will begin by defining the terminology used in the thesis and will follow with a discussion of the emergence of the transsexual identity in a medical sphere and intersex conditions (atypical

configurations of anatomy, chromosomes, or hormones). Further contexts for the structure of my argument will be provided by an outline of historical and cross-cultural transgender identities and political visibility. A strand running through this chapter is the central role of the visual realm in issues of gender and the impact this has on medical, social, and political spheres. The significance of visibility is further explored with regard to the development and externalisation of the self-image.

Terminology

The language used to describe transsexual issues is complex, evolving, and highly politicised. Widely used terminology is largely inappropriate whilst there is little, if any, knowledge in society of language developing out of the transgender sub-cultural communities.¹

Both mainstream and sub-cultural terminology is, on the whole, polarised, for instance: female-to-male, male-to-female, transman, transwoman. Such language reinforces the binary gender system and the assumption that if a person does not belong to one category, then they must belong to the other (Feinberg, 1996: ix). Thus further difficulties are encountered in articulating genders that are not aligned with the binary categories.

In this thesis, and in my interactions with people, I refer to individuals with the terminology and pronouns they use to describe themselves. I believe this is important, as it empowers the individual. The language is also significant because of the way in which people talk about themselves. Thus it is essential to understand the terminology in relation to the people concerned. Before I can proceed with the discussion, it is necessary to define and clarify these terms to ensure clarity of my arguments.

¹ Further discussion of transgender terminology can be found in Ekins and King (1997), Cromwell (1999), Namaste (2000), and Green (2004).

The fact that the 'transsexual' emerged in Western society in a medical sphere has had a significant impact on the widely-used language that is employed to describe transsexual people and this, in turn, has affected how they are viewed in society. The language is indicative of a pathologised phenomenon with all of the negative, stigmatising connotations that accompany 'illness'.² The term 'gender dysphoria' was introduced by Fisk in 1973 (1973: 7). It is currently the preferred medical term for transsexualism. 'Gender identity disorder' is also used. Whereas 'transsexual', 'transsexuality' and 'transsexualism' retain an element of the "intermediate sex" (King, 1996: 96), the term 'gender dysphoria' names a 'disease' (Fisk, 1973: 7).

New language is developing in transgender sub-cultures as people name and define themselves, thus re-framing how they perceive themselves and how they are comprehended by others. This is leading to increasing recognition of gender diversity in the sub-cultural communities. The following terms: transgender, trans, FTM/MTF, and she-male have developed in this context.

The term 'transgender' is an all-inclusive term for people who transgress gender boundaries, whether physically, through dress, or by any other means, in any combination, on a temporary or permanent basis. Friedemann Pfäefflin and Eli Coleman, editors of the *International Journal of Transgenderism*, assert that: "Transgender is a new term which transcends the restricting and extant categories of gender identity, is more neutral regarding etiology, and encompasses a vast complexity of gender manifestations and identities." (1997: n.p.) Whilst Jason Cromwell, a self-identified transman, argues that: "Transgender is a move away from a physically based definition (sex of body), and the sexual connotations implied by 'transsexual', toward a social definition (gender or gender identity)." (1999: 23) In contrast, Vivienne Namaste, a self-identified transsexual person argues:

² Raj (2002) elaborates on this issue and highlights 'transphobia' (having an aversion to transsexual and/or transgender people) in the medical profession.

While the term 'transgender' has entered into public discourse within certain Anglo-American academic and activist contexts, its use is challenged by transsexuals. What does it mean to group the very different identities of FTM transsexuals [female-to-male] and heterosexual male cross-dressers?...Are some bodies rendered invisible within this debate? (2000: 61)

Namaste's assertion highlights the fact that for transsexual people the body plays a central role in their experiences and that this needs to be recognised.

In this thesis I use the term 'transsexual', as the participants in my research self-identify through the term. Moreover, an important aspect of this study is the role of the body in self-identity and negotiations of gender. In order to distinguish between people who undergo physical changes and those that do not, I only use 'transgender' when referring to the wider all-inclusive category.

Robert, who has had a bilateral mastectomy (surgical removal of the breasts) and hormone treatment but has no desire to have genital surgery, uses the term 'trans' to describe himself. The prefix 'trans' acknowledges "multiple terms that express transidentities" (Cromwell, 1999: 26). Thus the terms trans, transman, trans activist, and other related terminology has developed. A 'transman' is a person given a female sex and gender at birth who has changed their gender role and their appearance with hormones and/or surgery, and vice versa with regard to the term 'transwoman'. Some people, for instance Robert, self-identify through these terms specifically, as they do not wish to have genital surgery and 'transsexual' implies changing sex and thus undergoing genital surgery. 'Trans' can also refer to the broad remit of transgender identities. However, in this thesis I limit its use to people undergoing physical changes.

The terms FTM and MTF are also used in referring to female-born and male-born people, respectively, who have changed the gender they were allocated at birth. Female-to-male and male-to-female are interchangeable with FTM and MTF.

Kitty describes herself as a she-male woman. 'She-male woman' is Kitty's own invention that indicates that she sees herself as both a woman and a she-male. A 'she-male' is a male-born person who changes to a female gender role and undergoes physical changes through hormone treatment and/or surgery, but retains male genitalia. Kitty has had hormone treatment but no surgery.

'Sex reassignment surgery' is the clinical term for genital surgery. In a female-born person this involves the construction of a penis out of living tissue (phalloplasty)³ and in a male-born person, the construction of a vagina and labia using penile tissue. Karen and Michael have both had genital surgery. Other terms have evolved to replace sex reassignment surgery, for instance, 'gender reassignment', 'gender assignment', 'sex and/or gender congruence surgery', 'sex confirmation surgery'.

In this thesis, following the trans activist and author Jamison Green (2004), I use the term gender confirmation surgery. I believe this is an appropriate term because of the different ways in which biological 'sex' can be ascertained other than through the genitals (chromosomes, gonads, hormones). Thus genital surgery does not necessarily reassign a person's 'sex'. Furthermore, the accounts of the transsexual people participating in my research indicate that they do not change genders. Rather, they are changing their gender role and external appearance, including the body, to match what they perceive to be their gender. Thus 'gender confirmation surgery' aligns more closely with their experiences.

With regard to the issue of sex, the term 'intersex' also needs to be defined here. Intersex is a term given to a variety of manifestations of biological sex (anatomical, chromosomal, or hormonal) that are at odds with the polarised norms of female and male. This issue is important to my thesis as I will argue that the natural configurations of sex beyond the polarisations of female and male that intersex conditions give rise to afford a challenge that extends to the gender

³ A less complex operation is also available, metoidioplasty, whereby the clitoral hood is released allowing a hormonally enlarged clitoris to reposition and thus resemble a micro penis.

dichotomy. This has considerable implications with regard to how transsexual people are viewed in society.

In order to provide a background to the widely-held perceptions of transsexual people I will continue by exploring the history of transsexuality, and the theoretical base that has emerged from it.

The History of Transsexuality

The concept 'transsexuality' is a socially constructed category of the West. It has a relatively brief history. Before 1910, a number of terms were used with regard to forms of cross-dressing. The meanings and definitions of the terms varied and same-sex desire, now defined as 'homosexuality', was understood to belong to the same categories as cross-dressing (King, 1996: 80).

In 1913 the sex researcher Henry Havelock Ellis used the term 'sexo-aesthetic inversion' in order to define instances of cross-dressing as a separate issue from same-sex desire. In the medical journal *The Alienist and Neurologist* Ellis outlines a case study in which he recognises a difference between the



Figure 1.
'The man with the diamond dress', 1920.
Anonymous photographer. The Library of
Congress, Washington, DC.



Figure 2.
 'The Chevalier d'Eon as an old woman'.
 Unattributed photograph. Harvard Theatre
 Collection, Pusey Library, Harvard
 University, Cambridge, MA.

subject's experiences and those related by people classified as transvestites. The subject, identified as R.M., claims: "...my feminism is almost entirely mental." Ellis argues that the term 'transvestitism' is "unsatisfactory" in this case owing to the fact that: "The inversion here is in the affective and emotional sphere." Ellis suggests that transvestitism and what would now be classified as transsexualism are different degrees of 'sexo-aesthetic inversion'. Transvestitism centres on wearing clothing of the opposite sex. Ellis's case study, R.M., although born anatomically male was claiming that he was "actually feminine", thus Ellis construed this to be an intensified form of 'sexo-aesthetic inversion' (1913: 249, 273, 275).

In 1920 Ellis developed the term 'eonism' as 'sexo-aesthetic inversion' retained a reference to 'inversion', which was used to describe same-sex desire. 'Eonism' was named after the Chevalier d'Eon de Beaumont, a well-known cross-dresser at the court of Louis XV (Figure 2). Following his earlier

research described above Ellis asserts that there are primarily two types of ‘eonist’ (1928: 36). These relate to the current categories of the transvestite and the transsexual.

The actual terms ‘transsexualism’ and ‘transvestite’ were coined by the physician Magnus Hirschfeld in 1923 and 1910, respectively (Benjamin, 1966: 11, 12). In Berlin in 1919 Hirschfeld opened the Institute of Sexual Science which continued until the Nazis destroyed the Institute in 1933. Hirschfeld, who was himself a homosexual man, was committed to facilitating education and gaining equality for sexual minorities (Kaes, Jay, and Dimendberg, 1994: 693). At this point in history, the Weimar Republic, Germany was going through a period of considerable cultural re-evaluation that resulted in social innovations, artistic developments, and new political ideologies. It was against this background of social change, fresh departures, and the “acknowledgement of the concerns of the real world” (Willet, 1984: 13) at the centre of Weimar culture, that Hirschfeld was able to openly carry out his research on sex, gender, and sexuality.

Hirschfeld argued “that although the two sexes had usually been regarded as dimorphic, this was much too simplistic since there were many varieties of intermediaries.” (Bullough, 2000, n.p.) This view was sustained by Ellis who

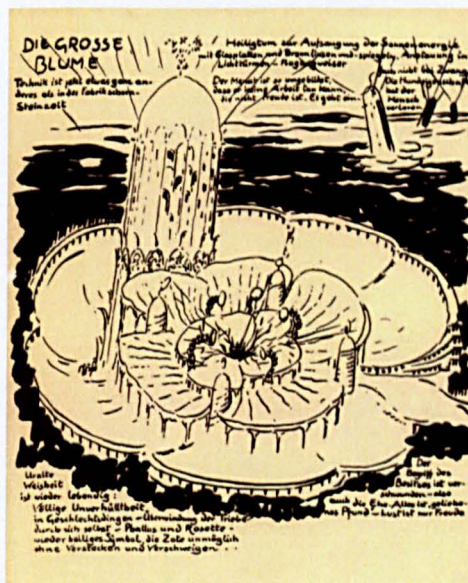


Figure 3.

‘Die grosse blume, kraftquelle’, 1920, by Bruno Taut. Published in Taut, 1920, *Die Auflösung der Städte oder Die Erde eine gute Wohnung oder auch: Der Weg zur Alpenen Architektur*, Hagen: Folkwang-Verlag.

claims: "...we encounter an endless number of individual variations but they do not easily admit to being arranged in definite groups." (1933: 198)⁴

My research provides evidence that would appear to support the claims made by Hirschfeld and Ellis that there are "an endless number of individual variations" of sex and gender (Ellis, 1933:198). The case studies presented in this thesis represent four different gender identities. Karen was born male and self-identifies as a 'female'. However, I will argue that in relation to the fact that she also identifies as a 'tomboy' and acknowledges her masculine and feminine characteristics, that if further gender options were available in society she might not position herself in the 'female' category. Michael was born female and has now become 'male'. Kitty, as I have discussed, defines herself as a 'she-male woman' whilst Robert identifies as 'trans' and asserts that he is in-between the gender polarities, but that he is more male than female.

The issue of gender variance established by Ellis and Hirschfeld appears to have become lost over time with regard to how transsexual identities have been defined by the medical profession and portrayed through the media. The more extreme category described by Ellis above of 'sexo-aesthetic inversion' or 'eonism' that translates into 'transsexuality', I would suggest, has come to stand for any number of genders beyond the categories established at birth. I will endeavour to demonstrate that this definition is inadequate in relation to the experiences of gender that are being articulated by atypically gendered people. Whilst the case studies that will be discussed represent four different gender identities, it is important to stress that these are not intended to constitute a definitive set of genders. Rather, they demonstrate that the two-sexes/two-genders system is not a fact of life.

It was not until the 1950s that the category of the 'transsexual' was distinguished from that of the 'transvestite' and the 'hermaphrodite' by the

4 Further early reports on cases of transsexuality, transvestitism, intersex conditions, same-sex desire, and the development of terminology can be found in Krafft-Ebing (1893), Hirschfeld (1910), and King (1996).

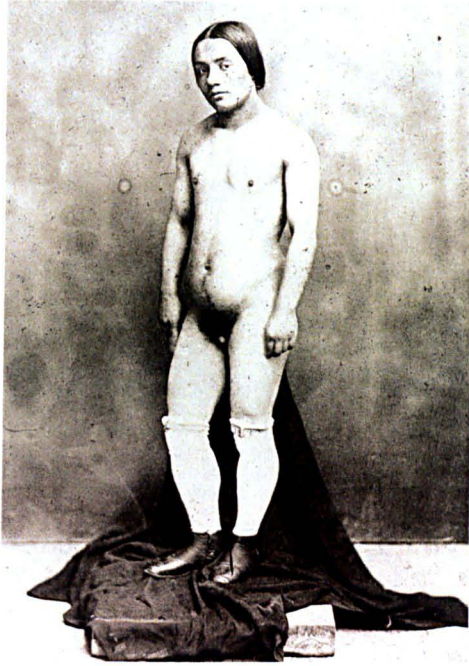


Figure 4.
 ‘Hermaphrodite’, 1861. Photograph by Nadar
 (Gaspard-Félix Tournachon) (1820 – 1910).
 Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris.

sexologist David Cauldwell (Ekins, King, 2001, n.p.). Up until the 1960s ‘transvestite’ continued to be widely used to describe people who cross-dressed and also people who wished to live in the other gender role (King, 1996:85).

The inadequacy of categories in relation to atypical gender identities is illustrated through the way in which one of the subjects in a photograph by the French photographer Brassai (1899 – 1984) has been interpreted (Figure 5). The two people in the picture are identified in the title as a lesbian couple. When I first saw this photograph, because of the title, I believed the person on the right to be a ‘butch dyke’. The clothing and hairstyle indicate a masculinity that implies that the person concerned might self-identify through this category. However, during the course of my research I discovered that the historian Xavier Demange has established that the subject is Violette Moriss, a French weight lifting champion who was nicknamed the ‘discus thrower of the cut breasts’ because she had a bilateral mastectomy (Brassai, 1999:43). In light of this information, and taking into account the experiences of the body articulated by the female-born participants in my study, I suggest that Moriss might perhaps more accurately be described as ‘trans’. The desire to change the body to more closely align it with



Figure 5.
'Lesbian couple at Le Monocle',
Montparnasse, Paris, c.1932. Photograph
by Brassai (Gyula Halász), 15" x 11".
The Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio.

the person's self-perception of their gender constitutes a significant difference between a lesbian and a transman.

The first major textbook on transsexualism, *The Transsexual Phenomenon*, was published by the endocrinologist Harry Benjamin in 1966⁵ (Whittle, 2000:42). Cauldwell, in 1949, had described the condition as 'psychopathia transsexualis' (1949: 274) and suggested that transsexual people were 'mentally unhealthy' (1949: 280). By contrast, Benjamin argued that environmental influences were important contributory factors but that the cause was biological (1966: 85).

The idea that gender, in other words femininity and masculinity, could be construed separately to biological sex in humans was suggested by the psychologist John Money in 1955. Money asserted that the term 'sex' should be used in relation to external genitalia, genetic sex or hormonal sex. He developed the terms 'gender

5 Benjamin started a clinical practice in New York and "trained psychiatrists and psychotherapists in the treatment of transsexual people". Almost all the treatment provided for transsexual people today has come directly from Benjamin's training. The Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association publishes a *Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorders* document outlining appropriate medical and psychological treatment for transsexual people. The majority of medical professionals now involved in arranging gender confirmation surgery are members of the organisation and follow their codes of practice (Whittle, 2000: 42).

identity' to describe the total perception the person has of her or his gender and 'gender role' for the perception of gender by others (Bullough, 2000, <http://www.symposion.com/ijt>, n.p.).⁶

The first reported male-to-female gender confirmation surgery was carried out in Germany in 1931 (Pfaefflin, 1997, n.p.). In the early 1920s Benjamin used an oestrogen hormone to induce breast development in an anatomical male (Bolin, 1993:454), a method that was improved in the 1930s with the use of synthetic oestrogens (King, 1996:85). In the late 1940s, in the United Kingdom, Sir Harold Gilles having developed the surgery that is now known as phalloplasty for war casualties, operated on Michael Dillon, an anatomical female, to create an artificial penis (Whittle, 2000:40).

There is evidence of considerable resistance from the medical profession in the 1950s and 1960s to working with transsexual people (Benjamin, 1966: viii, ix). A survey carried out in 1965, for example, revealed that only three per cent of US surgeons were prepared to consider a request for gender confirmation surgery (Billings and Urban, 1996: 100). In the words of one surgeon, we "thought we were just dealing with homosexuals and perverts." (King, 1996: 89)

Pauly cites twenty-eight cases of transsexual operations prior to 1953 (1965: 174)⁷. However, it was not until 1953, with the media attention given to the case of Christine Jorgensen, that transsexuality became acknowledged outside the medical profession (Benjamin, 1966: 15). Jorgensen was originally diagnosed as a homosexual man. Surgery and hormones were employed to 'treat'

⁶ Vern Bullough suggests that it is possible that between ten and fifteen per cent of the population do not conform to the norms of gender (Bullough, 2000, n.p.).

⁷ Castration in relation to specific aspects of sexual behaviour has a long history in the West. During the 1920s and 1930s Switzerland, Holland, Germany, Finland, Iceland, and some American states had laws allowing for castration as a 'treatment' for sex offenders. Castration was also sometimes carried out on people who requested the operation. The female hormone oestrogen was additionally used as a form of 'treatment' for offenders (King, 1996:85). Oestrogen continues to be used today in hormone treatment for male-to-female transsexual people.

Jorgensen's 'homosexuality'. After the incident had been reported in the press the medical team decreed the operation to be a "sex-change" (King, 1996: 92). The publicity surrounding the case enabled other transsexual people to come forward. In 1953 Jorgensen's psychiatrist in Denmark, Dr Christian Hamburger, published a paper which was based on the letters of 465 men and women who wanted to 'change sex' (Benjamin, 1966: 15, 148).⁸ This, in turn, led to an increase in the number of medical professionals interested in the field (Benjamin, 1966: 148).

My interest in this history stems from the fact that I had an uncle, Ken, who wanted to transition from male to female in the late 1950s/ early 1960s. Because of his gender-identification and the lack of knowledge or acceptance of atypical gender identities at the time, Ken had an unhappy life. He was married to Hazel, my mother's younger sister. The first my mother knew of Ken's situation was through a letter my aunt wrote to her after they had been married for many years. Ken apparently tried to take female hormones on two different occasions and it is not known why he failed to continue. It is also not known if surgery was widely available at the time, although it seems unlikely. The only way Ken was able to ease his situation was by wearing female clothing at home in the evening and living secretly as a female. This was an unsatisfactory solution. He continued to work and presented as a male in all interactions with people other than Hazel. Ken's secretive existence as a female, his public male persona, and the difficulties this created in his life are evidence of the powerful internal drive that human beings have to become the gendered person they perceive themselves to be. There would seem to be a discrepancy between this experience and the apparent liberal individualism of society more generally, which then raises the question – in what ways does knowledge of gender need to be expanded to accommodate this diversity?

Around the time that my uncle wanted to transition to a female, research was being undertaken into a broad range of issues on sex and gender although there was very little knowledge of transsexuality beyond research and medical

⁸ Hamburger, C., 1953. 'The Desire for Change of Sex as Shown by Personal Letters from 465 Men and Women', *Acta Endocrinologica*, 14: 361 – 375.

realms. In 1938 Alfred Kinsey, a United States zoologist, had begun to study human sexual behaviour. However, it was not until after the Second World War, that the Kinsey Reports: *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female* (1953) were published (The Kinsey Institute, <http://www.indiana.edu/kinsey/resources/sexology>, n.p.).

These studies received considerable media publicity and thus generated public awareness of sexology. They were significant in paving the way for research into transsexuality.

The notion that gender existed separately to biological sex, suggested by Money, led to the medical rationale for providing gender confirmation surgery and hormone treatment. Billings and Urban discuss a report by Money, Hampson, and Hampson (1957) that demonstrates the separation of gender from biology in a study of 105 cases of hermaphroditism (1996: 101). In 1964 the American psychiatrist, Robert Stoller, argued that human beings have an immutable “core gender identity” (1964: 453). Following these arguments, transsexual ‘treatment’ was provided on the basis that: “If gender is immutable...and if harmony between sex and gender is a precondition of psychic comfort and social acceptability, it ‘makes sense’ to achieve harmony by altering the body.” (King, 1996: 94)

By the late 1960s psychiatrists and psychologists had assumed key roles in the field (Benjamin, 1966: 72). Theories and research on transsexuality were dominated by these professions and in the clinics psychiatrists and psychologists held responsibility for the decision to provide, or not to provide, surgery (King, 1996: 94). The number of recommendations for surgery began to increase and by the early 1970s gender confirmation surgery was “commonplace” (Billings and Urban, 1996: 100). By the early 1980s, over forty US gender identity clinics were offering gender confirmation surgery (Bolin, 1993: 453).

The Medical Perspective

The medical view of transsexuality constitutes a specific perspective. The photographs in Figure 6 illustrate this. The person in the pictures is rendered

anonymous and the emphasis is on bodily changes. The heading that is given to the photographs also highlights the view that the person has remained male despite the changes that have been made to the body. This is consistent with the position that a person's 'sex' cannot change.

The emergence of transsexuality within a medical sphere served to pathologise the condition. In the discussion of terminology at the beginning of this chapter I outlined the term 'gender dysphoria', the preferred medical term for transsexuality which classifies it as a 'disease' (Fisk, 1973: 7). King argues that the concept of gender dysphoria legitimised the fact that psychiatrists and

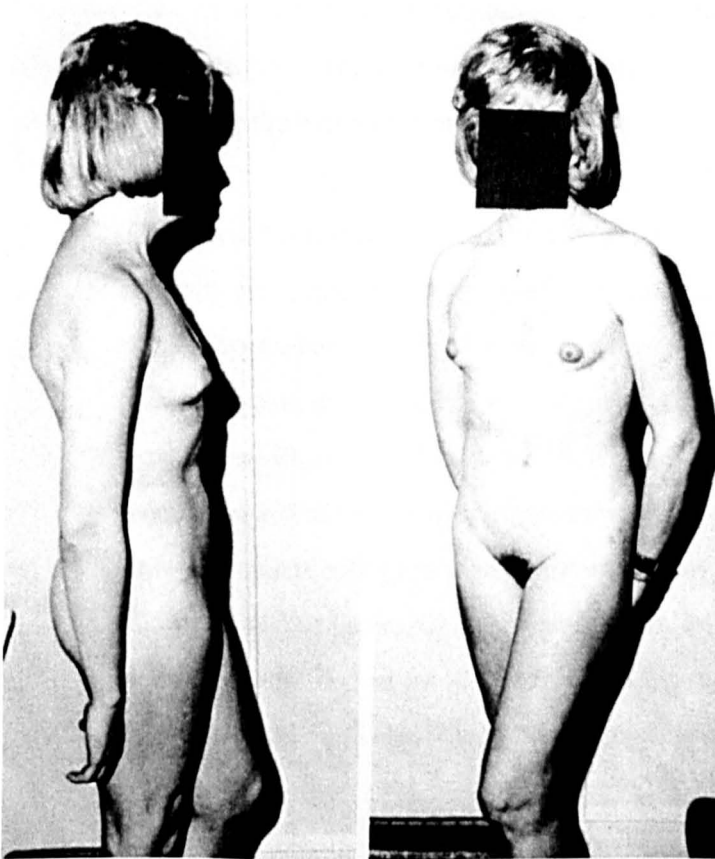


Figure 6.

'Male transsexual after hormone treatment and conversion operation.' Published in Benjamin, 1966, *The Transsexual Phenomenon*, New York: The Julian Press.

psychologists use the 'real life test' as a basis on which to make the decision to recommend surgery rather than on a "formal diagnosis" (1996: 96).

The 'real life test' is an unspecified period of time in which a candidate for gender confirmation surgery must live in the desired gender role. On the basis of this 'test', surgery may, or may not, be granted. The minimum period is one year, which can be extended indefinitely. The test is built on the assumption that there are two genders. No provision is made for individuals identifying beyond the gender dichotomy. Implementation of the test implies that the subject's ability to express a socially acceptable gender presentation, and to be accepted in role, are the only criteria necessary for the provision of surgery. In other words, the performance of gender takes priority over all other aspects. Through the 'real life test' the medical profession reinforces that gender presentations are of paramount importance, the correlation between gender and genitals, and the gender dichotomy. Billings and Urban describe how the diagnostic process operates:

Our own participant observation in a prominent gender clinic confirms that diagnosis in the post-Benjamin era remains a subtle negotiation process between patients and physicians, in which patient's troubles are defined, legitimised and regulated as illness. The ways in which patients prove their gender and physicians' cognitive frameworks for evaluating these claims are both grounded in commonsense knowledge of how gender is ordinarily communicated in everyday life. Physicians admitted to us that they are still groping in the dark: 'We just don't know. This whole thing is experimental', said one physician. (1996: 111)

Furthermore, Billings and Urban argue that visual appearances, over and above all other criteria, are relied upon as evidence of gender. They record that: "One physician told us: 'We're not taking Puerto Ricans any more; they don't

look like transsexuals. They look like fags.” (1996: 111) In other words, the physician concerned is stating that the clinic s/he works in no longer offers treatment to male-born transsexual people that they do not believe will be able to assume a stereotypical feminine appearance. This emphasis on the visual aspects of gender is surprising in a medical context, as it implies that gender cannot be ascertained other than through the external presentation. This is also a concern because of the issue that if the diagnosis of transsexuality is made on the ability of the subject to assume a typical gender expression, then this has significant implications for people who are unable or unwilling to blend in with stereotypical female or male appearances. It follows that stereotypical visual manifestations of the genders are perpetuated and maintained by the medical profession.

In everyday life one of the primary ways in which gender is marked is through clothing. Joanne Entwistle claims that “dress is both an intimate experience of the body and a public presentation of it...Conventions of dress attempt to transform flesh into something recognisable and meaningful to a culture...” (2000: 7, 8). The associations that are made between clothing and gender, as Entwistle suggests, are culturally determined and historically specific. For instance, there is a widely-held belief that the colour blue signifies masculinity whilst pink is affiliated with femininity. However, “in the early years of the twentieth century, before World War I, boys wore pink (a ‘stronger, more decided colour’ according to the promotional literature of the time) while girls wore blue (understood to be ‘delicate’ and ‘dainty’).” (Garber, 1992:1)

The fact that medical professionals who control whether or not individuals are suitable for hormone treatment and surgery continue to rely on external visual aspects of gender, and in particular on clothing as a gender signifier, is illustrated by Karen’s experiences attending the Charing Cross Gender Identity Clinic in London. On her pre-surgery visits to the psychiatrist Karen felt it was necessary to present a stereotypically feminine appearance. She believed that if she did not appear sufficiently feminine, she would be unlikely to be granted genital surgery. These visits have been almost the only times she has ever worn a dress or skirt.

One of the female-to-male participants, Gerry, indicated that Karen is not alone in her awareness of the stereotypical gender requirements of psychiatrists and the performance that results. Gerry commented that he had observed other female-to-male people going to the toilets to change their clothes and said of the psychiatrists: *"They're not treating transvestites, yet they ask people to behave like them."* (Gerry, 15.07.06)

It could be argued that the psychiatrists concerned are also making a direct link between clothing and genitalia. In other words, they are assuming that the cultural markers of gender and biological sex need to be in accord with one another. Kessler and McKenna assert that: "Gender attribution is for the most part, genital attribution." (1978: 153) Gender confirmation surgery in "male-to-female transsexualism endorses a formula for gender constitution in which social woman is equated with genital woman." (Bolin, 1993: 460) Following this formula, the medical profession views "a sustained desire for surgery" as an essential criteria of a transsexual identity (Bolin, 1993: 455). This serves to support and sustain the dichotomy of the sexes.

Sex Beyond the Binaries

Gilbert Herdt suggests that Darwinian theories of evolution, and in particular the concept that sexual behaviour serves reproduction, provide the foundation for the belief in the two sexes system (Herdt, 1993: 24, 421). In *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* Thomas Laquer argues that: "Two sexes are not the necessary, natural consequence of corporeal difference." (1990: 243) Furthermore, Henrietta Moore cites Michael Foucault's argument that:

...bodies have no 'sex' outside discourses in which they are designated as sexed. Consequently the construction of fixed binary sexes, with fixed categorical differences, is the effect of a specific discourse. What is more, if binary sex is an

effect of discourse, then it cannot be recognised as invariant or natural. (1994: 12,13)

I would suggest that the theoretical perspective that 'sex' is a concept that is applied to the body, argued above by Herdt, Laquer, and Moore, is supported by anatomical evidence in the form of intersex people. As I have discussed, 'intersex' is a term given to a variety of manifestations of anatomical sex that are at odds with the polarised norms of female and male.

Intersex conditions can result in a person being born with: typical male anatomy but without a penis (Aphallia); small testes at birth in a male and the development of breasts in puberty (Klinefelter Syndrome); gonads containing both ovarian and testicular tissue (Ovo-testes, previously called 'true hermaphroditism'); a female body with testes, no uterus, fallopian tubes or cervix, and a short vagina, resulting in infertility (Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome); ambiguous genitalia, in other words the clitoris is large or the penis is small and as such, they appear similar. (Partial Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome); "a continuum of sex phenotype", ranging from a male with no testes to a female with an enlarged clitoris (Progestin Induced Virilisation); undeveloped sex characteristics in a female (Turner Syndrome); and males with no gonads (Swyer Syndrome).⁹ (<http://www.isna.org/faq>, n.p.) It should be noted that genital 'normality' is determined by measurement and that atypically-sized genitalia can also lead to a diagnosis of intersex. A clitoris is considered too large if it is longer than one centimetre, whilst a penis is deemed too small if the length when stretched is less than 2.5 centimetres. Consequently "infants with a stretched penile length less than 2.5 centimetres are usually given a female sex assignment." (Meyers-Seifer and Charest, 1992: 337)

⁹ For further details of these and other intersex conditions refer to the Intersex Society of North America, <http://www.isna.org/faq>.

The Intersex Society of North America¹⁰ estimates that one in 1,500 to 2,000 babies are born with atypical genitalia and that there are other intersex variations that become apparent later in life. Anne Fausto-Sterling's research on the medical literature from 1955 to 1998 indicates that the number of people born with bodies that differ from the typical female or male anatomy is approximately one in 100 births and the number of people undergoing surgery to 'normalise' the genitals is estimated at one in 500 to one in 1,000 births (<http://www.isna.org/faq>, n.p.).

Physician's opinions as to what constitutes 'intersex' are inconsistent. Despite this fact, since the 1950s, surgery has been routinely performed on babies to 'normalise' ambiguous genitalia. Such surgery is frequently carried out without informed consent (<http://www.isna.org/faq/concealment>, n.p.). Alice Dreger asserts that "intersexuals...are often not told the whole truth about their anatomical conditions." (1998: n.p.)¹¹ Amongst other evidence, she cites the following in support of her claim: in 1988 a report published by the Hastings Centre for Bioethics argued that it was justifiable to withhold information from a sixteen-year-old girl with Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (AIS) and her parents, if the physician believed they would be unable to cope with the knowledge. In 1994 the *British Medical Journal* published a statement by an AIS woman, claiming that neither her nor her family had been informed of her condition. Following this, in 1995, a medical student was awarded a prize by the Canadian Medical Association for a paper supporting physicians' deception of AIS patients (Dreger, 1998, n.p.).

Dreger argues that it "is not at all clear if all or even most of the intersex surgeries done today involve what would legally and ethically constitute informed

10 The society was founded by Cheryl Chase, who was herself born intersex. The society campaigns for surgeries without consent to be stopped and for the stigma of intersex to be removed.

11 In 2001 I photographed two intersex people who both identified themselves as transsexual. They were changing the gender they had been given in early childhood. One of these people only discovered he was intersex during the course of his transition to a male.

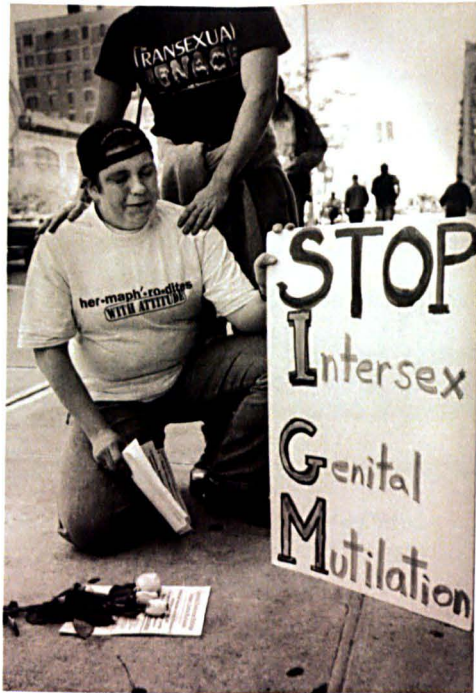


Figure 7.

'Demonstrators at Columbia-Presbyterian babies' hospital', New York, 1997.

Photograph by Mariette Pathy Allen.

Gelatin silver print, 20" x 16". Owned by the photographer.

consent." (1998, n.p.) There is evidence that some medical practitioners continue to withhold medical records from patients and from parents and guardians in the case of babies and children. (<http://www.isna.org/faq/concealment>, n.p.) The Intersex Society claims that:

Intersex is a socially constructed category that reflects real biological variation...nature presents us with sex anatomy spectrums...nature doesn't decide where the category of 'male' ends and the category of 'intersex' begins, or where the category of 'female' begins. Humans decide. (http://www.isna.org/faq/what_is_intersex, n.p.)

I would suggest that the natural configurations of sex beyond the polarisations of female and male that intersex 'conditions' give rise to afford a challenge that extends to the gender dichotomy. The belief in the two-sexes/two-genders system involves an underlying assumption that gender follows biology. The case studies in

this thesis demonstrate that this is not necessarily the case. For instance, Michael was born female, but his experiences illustrate that his gender was not in accord with his body. From a young age Michael identified with males and grew up believing that he was essentially male. Similarly, Karen was born male but identified as a female whilst Robert and Kitty self-identify beyond the binary categories.

The considerable number of instances of intersex conditions demonstrates that biological sex is also not contained within the female/male boundaries. The binary sexes provide the foundation for the concept of two genders. Thus, it follows that if sex is not contained within the binaries, this has significant implications with regard to gender.

Historical Examples of Gender Beyond the Binaries

However, gender beyond the two-sexes/two-genders system is not a new concept. Whilst the terminology currently in use is a relatively recent development in line with recognition of the condition there are many historical instances of gender beyond the binary system. I shall now outline some examples of historical atypical genders and cultural concepts of non-dichotomous gender in order to demonstrate this point.

In pre-historic and classical times, the Great Mother goddess, “an intersexual (hermaphroditic) deity in whom the sexes had not yet been split” was worshipped throughout Europe as well as in the Middle East, Western Asia, and Northern Africa (Plutarch quoted in Feinberg, 1996: 40). Mesopotamian temple records from the middle of the third millennium BC show that the goddess had male-to-female transsexual priestesses. Transsexual priestesses have also been documented in many Mediterranean, Near Eastern, and Middle Eastern societies, and evidence of their existence can be found in Assyrian, Akkadian, and Babylonian records (Feinberg, 1996: 40).

Ancient Greek and early Roman myths contain diverse forms of gender which indicate a cultural recognition of possibilities beyond the fixed binary gender system. For instance, Zeus was able to transform into different genders, the god Hermaphroditus was both female and male, and Tiresias changed from



Figure 8.

'Hermaphrodite statue', Greece.
Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.
Published in Zolla, 1981, *The
Androgyne: Fusion of the Sexes*,
London: Thames and Hudson.

being male to female and then to male again (Herdt, 1993:13). Each of these instances configure around notions of supernatural power. There are also records of transgender instances in everyday Roman life. The first century AD poet Manilius describes aspects of this when he writes:

These [persons] will ever be giving thought to their
bedizement and becoming appearance: to curl the hair and
lay it in waving ripple...to polish the shaggy limbs...Yea!
and to hate the very sight of [themselves as] a man, and long
for arms without growth of hair, woman's robes they wear...
[their] steps broken to an effeminate gait... (Manilius quoted
in Green, 1966: 175)



Figure 9.

'A vessel depicting the God/dess of love',
The Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of
Anthropology, University of California at
Berkeley. Published in Feinberg, 1996,
*Transgender Warriors: Making History from
Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman*, Boston:
Beacon Press.

The Roman emperor, Heliogabalus, is "reported to...have taken up the tasks of a wife following the marriage...[he] is said to have offered half the Roman empire to the physician who could equip him with female genitalia." (Green, 1966: 176) Whist in Byzantine society, for almost a thousand years, eunuchs "acquired the main attributes of a distinctive, socially constructed gender." (Ringrose, 1993: 109)

With the expansion of pre-Christian beliefs, transgender expressions were forbidden. In the Judaic Bible, between 1450 - 1410 BC, Moses wrote:

The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man,
neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so
are abomination unto the Lord thy God. Deuteronomy 22:5

He that is wounded in the stones, or hath his privy member cut
off, shall not enter the congregation of the Lord. Deuteronomy
23:1



Figure 10.

'The Assyrian King Ashurbanipal, in women's clothes, shown spinning with his wives', Hulton Deutsch Collection Limited. Published in Feinberg, 1996, *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman*, Boston: Beacon Press.

Despite the dominance of Christian beliefs in the Western world, there is evidence of male cross-dressing in medieval and Renaissance times as well as documentation of medieval transgender female-born saints and records pertaining to cases of "women living as men" during the Dutch Restoration period (1550 - 1839) and men living as women in Europe (Whittle, 2000: 33, 35; Feinberg, 1996: 68; Cromwell, 1999: 63).¹²

Transgender Identities in Late Twentieth Century Western Society

It is out of this history that gender-variant people emerge as specific transgender identities in late twentieth century Western society. Stephen Whittle claims:

The transgendered community is a concept of the 1990s. Prior to the late twentieth century there is no evidence in Western culture of what might be called a transsexual or transvestite consciousness. (2000: 43)

¹² Further details of transgender historical records can be found in Green (1966), Feinberg (1996), and Cromwell (1999).

Whittle does not suggest here that transgender people did not exist prior to the late twentieth century. Rather, his statement indicates that transgender has been defined as an 'identity' only recently. Michel Foucault argues that "objects of discourse" appear owing to a specific set of external relationships at a particular point in time (2002: 49, 50). Foucault asserts:

These relations are established between institutions, economic and social processes, behavioural patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, modes of characterisation; and these relations are not present in the object...They do not define its internal constitution, but what enables it to appear, to juxtapose itself with other objects, to situate itself in relation to them, to define its difference, its irreducibility, and even perhaps its heterogeneity, in short, to be placed in a field of exteriority." (2002: 49, 50)

Foucault claims that the external circumstances do not "define" the "internal constitution" of the object. In other words, the characteristics of transgender identities exist independently of the relationships that conspire to bring such identities into view. Building on this premise, the next section examines the circumstances that have facilitated the emergence of transgender people as a distinct grouping and the development of what is now termed the transgender movement.

A key factor in the development of this process is the wide range of cultural movements that became grouped under the term 'postmodernism'. There is a vast literature on postmodernism.¹³ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss postmodernism in depth or to provide a survey of the literature as my concern is

¹³ Further discussion on issues of postmodernism can be found in the following texts:

Featherstone (1988), McRobbie (1994), Eagleton (1996) (2000), Appignanesi, Garrat, Sardar and Curry (1999).

with how postmodernism was instrumental in enabling issues of gender to become a legitimate focus for political concern, and it is this that I shall briefly outline.

Terry Eagleton argues that 'identity politics' arose from postmodernism, as it expanded the political remit beyond "classical class politics" and previous concerns of starvation and poverty to include issues of gender, sexuality, and race (1996: vii, 24). Eagleton defines the concerns at the core of postmodern politics when he writes:

Postmodernism believes that politically speaking we should celebrate difference, plurality, the pied and dappled nature of our cultures... (1996: 32)

For the postmodernist...whole ways of life are to be celebrated when they are those of dissident or minority groups, but to be castigated when they are those of majorities. Postmodern 'identity politics' thus include lesbianism but not nationalism... (2000: 14)

Postmodernism is...among other things the ideology of a specific historical epoch in the West, when reviled and humiliated groups are beginning to recover something of their history and selfhood. (1996: 121)

Following Eagleton's argument, the American civil rights movement, which came to prominence in the 1950s and 1960s, the gay rights movement of the late 1960s, and second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s, are connected through their questioning of authorities.¹⁴

¹⁴ The following literature provides a background to the history of the American civil rights movement, the gay rights movement, and second-wave feminism: Weiss and Schiller, (1988), Payne (1995), Baxandall and Gordon (2001), Marcus (2002).

Moreover, issues of race, sexuality, and gender are linked through a focus on the body. The interconnected relationship between identity and the body is a postmodern phenomenon. Eagleton claims: "The postmodern subject, unlike its Cartesian ancestor, is one whose body is integral to its identity." (1996:69) However, whilst issues of race, gender, and sexuality are united in postmodernism through a correlation between identity and the body, the specific role of the body in each of these realms is significant. Of particular concern in relation to my argument is the difference between sexuality and gender.

Transgender people have been a part of the gay rights movement from its inception, which many date as beginning with the riots at the Stonewall Inn in 1969. The Stonewall Inn was a gay bar in Greenwich Village, New York City. The riots, which lasted three days, began when hundreds of people who had been in the bar fought back against police harassment. As an outcome of the riots, gay men, lesbian women, and transgender people began to form a powerful political movement and as a result, "society's view of homosexuality evolved from being a shameful personal problem that no one would talk about, to becoming a controversial issue." (Grier, 1988: 6)

An earlier riot involving transgender people took place in San Francisco in 1966. This incident had been largely overlooked until the trans activist and historian Susan Stryker came across documentation of the event and, together with Victor Silverman, produced the documentary film *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria*, which features people who were involved in the riots. I first saw a 'rough cut' of the film at the *Reflecting Genders* conference, Manchester, 2004 and then saw the finished version at the *Body Modification Mark II* conference in 2005.

Screaming Queens is important as it brings to the fore the fact that transgender people were excluded from mainstream society and harassed by the authorities before the Stonewall riots, and that this also took place in other cities. The incident at Compton's Cafeteria was influential in changing the local situation in the San Francisco Bay area with regard to how transgender people

were treated, but was ignored at national and international levels. The Stonewall riots, on the other hand, were used to promote gay rights issues and it is because of this that they received media attention.

In his essay *Do Transsexuals Dream of Gay Rights? Getting Real about Transgender Inclusion in the Gay Rights Movement*, Shannon Minter suggests that the affiliation between the gay rights movement and transgender people is problematic. Minter is the Legal Director of the United States National Centre for Lesbian Rights and self-identifies as a transsexual man. Minter asserts that the reasons for the alliance are two-fold. He argues:

...many transgender people, myself included, consider the gay community to be their only viable social and political home. In part, this is because a sizeable percentage of transgender people also identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. More fundamentally, it is because homophobia and transphobia are tightly intertwined, and because anti-gay bias so often takes the form of violence and discrimination against those who are seen as transgressing gender norms. Gender non-conforming people have consistently been among the most visible and vulnerable members of gay communities... (2000: 590)

The first part of Minter's statement above highlights the issue of transgender sexuality. While questions of sexuality have been extensively studied, for instance in the work of Stanton (1992), Butler (1993), Bell and Valentine (1995), Nye (1999), Kimmel and Plante (2004), Levay and Valente (2005) and indeed resonate through parts of the thesis, they are not the focus. In not discussing sexuality in detail I am responding to the priorities of the participants for whom sexuality was not the key issue. Rather, as it will become clear through the case studies, their major concerns are in regard to the visual presentation of their personal sense of gender.



Figure 11.

'Brandon Teena should have been here', Gay Pride Parade, New York, 1995. Photograph by Mariette Pathy Allen. Gelatin-silver print, 16" x 20". Owned by the photographer.

The second part of Minter's argument brings to the fore one of the key differences between sexuality and gender with regard to interactions in the public domain. A person's sexuality, in other words their choice of sexual partner, is not necessarily a characteristic that can be discerned from appearances, whereas gender involves a dialogue of projection and attribution. Thus the politics of visibility come to the fore. Owing to the visibility of cross-gender expressions transgender people are particularly at risk of oppression. Minter suggests that it is because of this vulnerability that transgender people were "the most likely to fight back at Stonewall." (2000: 590) He argues that after the Stonewall riots the mainstream gay rights movement adopted an "explicitly non-transgender, or gender-normative, model of gay identity" as a political strategy in order to be visibly aligned with "middle-class gender norms". This led to gender-variant people becoming isolated within the mainstream gay movement, dissension between factions, and eventually to the emergence of the transgender movement (Minter, 2000: 594, 595).

Furthermore, identities shift as society changes and their coming into view is historically specific. The gay rights movement has been instrumental in enabling the eventual development of the transgender movement. 'Queer'

identities are becoming increasingly specific as they fragment into smaller sub-sections.

A second factor contributing to the development of the transgender movement is the labelling of transsexuality as a medical condition. This changed former, widely-held perceptions of transsexual people as 'sexual deviants' to people with a condition that could be 'treated' and 'cured'. This provided a certain level of social recognition and paved the way for political visibility. Minter argues that this is of paramount importance. He claims that:

...the recognition of transsexualism as a medical phenomenon in the 1950s and the relatively widespread access to hormones and sex-reassignment surgeries in the 1960s and 70s were necessary, if not sufficient, conditions for transgender people to emerge as a self-conscious social and political group... [This] paved the way for a politicised transgender movement. (2000: 596)

An additional highly significant factor has been the coming together of transgender people through sub-cultural networks. This process began in the 1960s with the work of Virginia Prince (Bullough, 2000, n.p.; Whittle, 2000: 43). Prince, who self-identifies as transgendered, organised support groups and publications and through these established a "socialisation process for transgender people" (Bullough, 2000: n.p.). Following Prince's work, a large network of self-help groups and support systems developed.

In the past ten to fifteen years the burgeoning of the Internet has had a dramatic effect on the numbers of transgender people who are in contact with others and radically enhanced the availability of information. The Internet is important to almost all the transsexual people I have known and worked with. It provides contact with other transgender people through chat rooms, support groups, and newsletters, and is a valuable source of information on political



Figure 12.

'Virginia Prince, Ariadne Kane, and Maxine Miller', 1981.

Photograph by Mariette Pathy Allen. Gelatin-silver print, 11" x 14".

Owned by the photographer.

issues, surgery and other resources. In this way, a 'virtual' community has also been created. Karen's experiences provide an example of the effect of the Internet. For Karen, acquiring her first computer was instrumental in being able to self-identify as a transsexual person. This occurred through gaining access to information posted on the Internet and conversations with other transgender people in chat rooms. Similarly Adrien, a male-to-female transsexual person, and Michael both used the Internet to research different options for surgery. The Internet has shifted the power balance, to a certain extent, away from the medical profession in that it allows transsexual people to access information and to communicate with each other.

The increasing political visibility of transgender people has enabled important legal changes for transsexual people, the most recent of these being the passing of the Gender Recognition Act in the UK Parliament in 2004. This Act allows transsexual people in the UK to be issued with a new birth certificate in their gender identification and to legally marry in this gender. The trans activist Stephen Whittle was instrumental in bringing the Act to Parliament and in getting it passed. In 2005, after 26 years, he was finally able to marry his long-term partner Sarah Rutherford. I was very honoured that, on seeing photographs

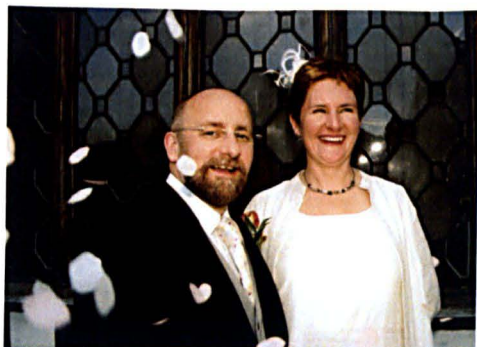


Figure 13.

'The wedding of Stephen Whittle and Sarah Rutherford', 2005. C-type print, 12" x 18". Exhibited in 'Getting Wed', a Whittle/Davidmann collaboration, *Transfabulous International Arts Festival*, London, 2006.

produced in this study and reproduced in this thesis, Stephen Whittle asked me to be the official wedding photographer.

Prior to the passing of the UK Gender Recognition Act, the 1993 approval of The International Bill of Gender Rights¹⁵ in the USA was significant in that it recognised gender as a distinct entity from biological sex. Under the heading 'The Right to Define Gender Identity', the Bill states:

All human beings carry within themselves an ever-unfolding idea of who they are and what they are capable of achieving. The individual's sense of self is not determined by chromosomal sex, genitalia, assigned birth sex, or initial gender role. Thus, the individual's identity and capabilities cannot be circumscribed by what society deems to be masculine or feminine behaviour. It is fundamental that individuals have the right to define, and to redefine as their lives unfold, their own gender identities, without regard to chromosomal sex, genitalia, assigned birth sex, or initial gender role...and further, no individual shall be denied Human or Civil Rights by virtue of a self-defined gender identity... (Feinberg, 1996: 172)

¹⁵ Approved by the Second International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy, Inc., Houston, Texas, USA, August 26 - 29, 1993.

In this section I have outlined the emergence of the transgender movement in the late twentieth/ early twenty-first century Western society together with the movement's most significant achievements to date. Considerable changes have been made with regard to recognising transsexual people, as the statement above indicates, however, they continue to struggle to gain acceptance in society. I will now look at some of the most important issues facing the transsexual community at this particular point in time.

Visibility, 'Passing', and the Maintenance of Norms

Whilst the medical profession has been instrumental in bringing transsexual people to the attention of society, the medical treatment of transsexuality constitutes a substantial concern. I quoted earlier from physicians attending to the care of transsexual people and discussed how Karen felt the need to wear stereotypical female clothing in order to be granted surgery. Whittle suggests that "there is an ongoing discussion as to whether the medical profession should take a diagnostic or merely enabling role for those people who actively seek reassignment treatment." (2000: 208) Cromwell argues that there is a decline in the authority of medical and psychological practitioners and cites the increase in networking amongst transgender people as one of the key factors influencing this decline (1999: 138). The Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association is "a professional organisation devoted to the understanding and treatment of gender identity disorders." (<http://www.hbigda.org>, n.p.) It publishes the *Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorders* establishing guidelines which are adhered to by the majority of professionals involved in the psychiatric, medical, and surgical treatment of transsexual people in the Western world. Important progress is also being made in that a number of Association members are transsexual people and in 2003 the trans activist, Jamison Green, was elected to the Board of Directors (Green, 2004: 196).

Despite the fact that important changes have been made to recognise transsexual people legally and that they now have a 'voice' in the debates

surrounding treatment and legal matters, in everyday life difficulties continue to abound. Sandy Stone, herself a transsexual woman, argues that transsexual people are “programmed to disappear” and claims that: “The highest purpose of the transsexual is to erase him/herself, to fade into the ‘normal’ population as soon as possible.” She draws a comparison between the transsexual person’s ‘passing’ as a biological female or male and “the person of colour whose skin is light enough to pass as white, or to the closet gay or lesbian.” (1991: 295, 299) Stone asserts that transsexual people need to follow the lead of the lesbian, gay, and black activists in aiming for solidarity and emphasises that:

To deconstruct the necessity for passing implies that transsexuals must take responsibility for all of their history, to begin to rearticulate their lives not as a series of erasures... but as a political action begun by reappropriating difference and reclaiming the power of the refigured and reinscribed body. (1991: 299)

Stone’s argument is seconded by Green who additionally suggests that even if transsexual people wish to ‘disappear’ instances of unsuccessful surgery or hormone treatment can still lead to oppression (2004: 185). Green asserts that transsexual people have the right to claim their identities as women or men who are also transsexual people, to express their gender, and to change their bodies. Furthermore, he argues that “our different bodies are just as normal for us as anyone else’s is for them.” (2004: 185)

Green is highly aware of the difficulties that can be encountered by being recognized as a transsexual person in a society that does not acknowledge gender diversity. His appearance when clothed is indistinguishable from that of a biological male. Green asserts that he suspects that if he looked atypically gendered he might not receive the credit that he does for his non-transsexual related achievements (2004: 182). For many transsexual people ‘passing’ involves using highly visualised,

visualising, and visible means to become invisible. This key theme recurs in all the case studies. It will be developed in chapter three by exploring Karen's fears of being identified as a transsexual person in public spaces. Through Michael's experiences (chapter four) it will be established that it is possible to become 'invisible' in the social sphere. Chapter five will explore Kitty's experiences of not being able to blend in with typical gender presentations and the issue will be further examined through Robert's experiences as a person with an atypical gender identification (chapter six). The transsexual author Leslie Feinberg describes possible outcomes of living as a transsexual person when he asserts:

...those of us who cross the cultural boundaries of sex and gender are paying a terrible price. We face discrimination and physical violence. We are denied the right to live and work with dignity and respect. It takes so much courage to live our lives that sometimes just leaving our homes in the morning and facing the world as who we really are is in itself an act of resistance. (1996: xi)

Thus despite the political progress that has been made, transsexual people continue to run the risk of leading an unsatisfactory life in Western society owing to the nature of their gender. In order to gain recognition transsexual people need to become more visible in society and this is not a simple matter. Green highlights the complexity of the issue when he argues that:

Visibility remains a conflicted aspect of transsexual lives. How do we manage visibility? If we are visible then we risk being mistreated; if we are invisible, no one will understand what our social or medical needs are. If we are visible, we risk being judged inferior or unreal, inauthentic; if we are invisible, we risk being discovered and cast out... (2004: 180)

The issue of visibility becomes further complicated in relation to gender beyond the binary categories. This will be explored further through Robert's experiences. The transsexual writer and performer, Kate Bornstein, asserts that initially she believed that the binary gender system was the only possibility. As a result of this she felt she was "a mistake: something that needed to be fixed and then placed neatly into one of the categories." Bornstein argues that this is how most transsexual people feel (1994: 65). Stephen Whittle expresses a different understanding of the relationship between transsexual people and the gender system. He believes transsexual people are generally aware that they do not belong in the dichotomous system, but use it in different ways in order to function in society. He explains:

Gender exists as itself, that is, as an idea, an invention, a means of oppression and a means of expression. Many in the community would see themselves as existing outside of gender, of being oppressed by it but using its icons and signifiers to say who they are. (1996: 212)

Whittle suggests that many transsexual people decide not to declare their transsexual status in society "because of their outsiderness, their otherness they are seeking a form of sanctuary in the gender-roles they adopt." (1996: 212) However, assuming a male or female gender can create significant problems if one does not identify with either binary category. In the semi-autobiographical novel *Stone Butch Blues* Leslie Feinberg characterises this experience. In the novel Feinberg's protagonist Jess describes his experiences of 'passing'. Jess claims:

At first everything was fun. The world stopped feeling like a gauntlet I had to run through. But very quickly I discovered that passing didn't just mean slipping below the surface, it

meant being buried alive. I was still me on the inside...But I was no longer me on the outside. (1993:173)

Three years later, in *Transgender Warriors* (1996), Feinberg clarifies why, for him, transitioning from one gender to the other was not the solution. Furthermore, his account highlights the difficulties that are posed by the complexities of language, discussed earlier, with regard to gender identifications beyond the binary female/male system. Feinberg argues:

ARE YOU A GUY OR A GIRL?

I've heard the question all my life. The answer is not so simple, since there are no pronouns in the English language as complex as I am, and I do not want to simplify myself in order to neatly fit one or the other...We have a history filled with militant hero/ines. Yet therein lies the rub! How can I tell you about their battles when the words woman and man, feminine and masculine, are almost the only words that exist in the English language to describe all the vicissitudes of bodies and styles of expression? (1996: ix)

The issue of complexity that Feinberg raises here is equally applicable in other ways to transsexual people's experiences when they identify within the gender dichotomy. In a society that deems gender to automatically follow the biological sex assumed from birth, it is highly problematic for people to negotiate a change of gender role. Moreover, the bodily transformations that take place, in particular as a result of hormone treatment, are beyond the realms of that which take place in everyday life. It is common for transsexual people to move geographically before starting the transitional process. They may also relocate again once they have transitioned to the new gender role. There are obvious practical reasons for this, such as removing oneself from the family home and

thus from the disapproval of the immediate family,¹⁶ or enabling the person to re-emerge in a different social space in the new gender visualisation and in this way avoid being identified as a transsexual person. The period of transition, particularly in instances where the person moves geographically, allows a marked re-entry into society in a new form and can be viewed as a liminal space, that is, one that exists outside the boundaries of everyday life. Victor Turner describes the potential for transformation inherent in liminal spaces when he asserts:

Liminality can perhaps be described as a fructile chaos, a fertile nothingness, a storehouse of possibilities, not by any means a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structure, a gestation process, a fetation of modes appropriate to and anticipating postliminal existence. It is what goes on in nature in the fertilised egg, in the chrysalis, and even more richly and complexly in their cultural homologues. (1990: 12)

Michael brings the issue of liminality to the fore when he asserts that having completed his transition to a male he is no longer transsexual. In this view transsexuality itself is seen as a temporary state enabling the person to move from a female role in society to that of a male, or vice versa. The concept of transgender and liminality will also be explored later in this chapter through the Samoan *fa'afafine*.

The transitional or liminal space fulfils an important role for transsexual people in a society that upholds the belief that gender follows biology. In other words, transsexual people are caught in the web of socially constructed and maintained norms. The assumption that there are two genders and that these

16 A recurring theme in the accounts of the participants is the emotional pain that transsexual people experience as a result of difficulties with their families. Whilst it is not always the case that they are rejected outright, it is common for there to be varying problems, particularly around the time that the transformation takes place between external gender appearances.

are aligned with the polarities of biological sex, as I have suggested, is taken as a given in the Western world and is believed to be a fact of life. This premise constitutes the basis for the “natural attitude “ towards gender suggested by Harold Garfinkel (1967). Building on Garfinkel’s theory, Kessler and McKenna summarised widely-held assumptions regarding gender as follows:

1. There are two and only two genders...
 2. Gender exists as a biological ‘fact’ independently of anyone’s ideas about gender.
 3. A person’s gender never changes.
 4. Genitals are the essentially defining feature of gender.
- (1978:113, 114)

In a more recent study (Kessler and McKenna: 2000) they argue that there is now a greater sense that gender is complex. However, they conclude:

Twenty-five years of our and others’ theorising about gender has in many ways unsettled the meaning of gender, but it has done no damage to the gender dichotomy...genitals are the essential defining feature of what it means to be a gender... just because more people acknowledge that gender features can be mixed together or that a person can move more easily between categories, this has not led to an expansion of or transcendence of the gender categories. There are still two and only two genders. (2000: n.p.)

Richard Ekins and Dave King argue that violations of the two-sexes/two-genders system constitute a potential threat to the maintenance of norms (1996: 75). In these instances societies:

...develop a conceptual machinery to account for such deviations and to maintain the realities thus challenged. This requires a body of knowledge that includes a theory of deviance, a diagnostic apparatus, and a conceptual system for the 'cure of souls'. (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 104)

In contemporary industrial societies, the institution of medicine has assumed or been given the task of maintaining this aspect of our reality... (Ekins and King, 1996: 75)

Whilst transsexual people may embody an inherent threat to the gender dichotomy Dwight Billings and Thomas Urban argue that: "By substituting medical terminology for political discourse, the medical profession has indirectly tamed and transformed a potential wildcat strike at the gender factory." (1996: 114) Furthermore, the medical perspective has become "the culturally major lens" through which gender beyond the binaries is viewed (Ekins and King, 1996: 75).

Transsexual People in the Media

The medical perspective is upheld and perpetuated by the mass media. The last ten years have seen an increase in the media presence of transsexual people. Whilst, on the one hand this can be viewed as progress, since it has led to wider visibility of transgender people in society, on the other hand, I suggest that the way in which transsexual people are depicted is unsatisfactory. In the media transsexual people are consistently portrayed as transitioning from one gender polarity to the other. No other possibilities are presented. Moreover, the majority of media coverage not only perpetuates the gender dichotomy, but also represents transsexual people in a derogatory way. There are extensive records of the media coverage of transsexual people.¹⁷

¹⁷ For further details of transsexual people in the media refer to *Press for Change*, <http://www.pfc.org.uk>, Ekins and King (1996) and Whittle (1998).

For instance, in 1998 a transsexual woman, Dana International, won the European Song Contest for Israel. Shlomo Ben Izri, a member of the religious Shas Party and a deputy minister, asserted that International was “an abomination” (<http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/special/1998>, n.p.). In January of the same year, a transsexual character, Hayley Patterson, first appeared in The UK soap opera *Coronation Street*. Whilst Patterson is depicted sympathetically, the character is played by a non-transsexual actress. Three years later, in 2001, the British press covered the transition of a public school teacher with the following headlines:

‘I’ll be Miss, says Charterhouse master: public school teacher announces transition’ (*Daily Telegraph*, 10.01.01 cited on <http://www.pfc.org.uk>, n.p.)

‘Public school physics master will return to classroom as a miss’ (*The Independent*, 10.01.01 cited on <http://www.pfc.org.uk>, n.p.)

‘Believe it or not, this woman was once a man: profile of Susan Marshall’ (*Daily Mail*, 13.01.01 cited on <http://www.pfc.org.uk>, n.p.)

The headlines above emphasise the gender polarities by using binary terms: Miss and Master, woman and man.

Another high profile example occurred when in August 2004 Nadia Almada, a transsexual woman, won the UK’s Channel 4 reality television show *Big Brother* 5. The audience was informed of her transition to a female at the beginning of the series and they were consistently reminded that she was a transsexual person, although the other contestants were supposedly unaware of this fact. A major part of Nadia’s participation in the show appeared to reside in whether the contestants would realise that she was a transsexual person or whether she would ‘pass’ as

a woman. A second reality television show was produced in 2004 by Brighter Pictures, a subsidiary of Endemol UK, who also produce *Big Brother*. This was called *There's Something About Miriam*. In the programme six men selected the woman they found most attractive from a line up. They then proceeded to compete for her attention. At the end of the series the men discovered that Miriam was a transsexual person who had male genitalia. The men hired a law firm in their attempt to stop the programme from being aired claiming conspiracy to commit sexual assault. One contestant asserted: "We all feel mentally raped." The contestants were awarded undisclosed sums in settlement of their claim and the programme was broadcast in the UK on Sky television (<http://www.mirror.co.uk>; <http://www.realitytvworld.com/news/lawsuit>, n.p.). In the same year *The Evening Standard*, a London newspaper, published an article with the heading: 'Surgeon was wrong when he let me have nightmare sex change' (Hunter, 2004). The article related the story of Charles Kane who underwent genital surgery in 1993 and later transitioned back to a male. This issue was further pursued in a television documentary titled *Return to Gender*, exploring the accounts of four people who also transitioned from one gender role and appearance to the other and then back again. It aired in the UK on channel 5 in February 2006.¹⁸

The media not only sensationalises isolated incidents such as those summarised above of people transitioning twice between gender roles and appearances, but following the model advanced by the medical profession, which strips transsexual people of their humanity and individuality, the media rarely depicts transsexual people as individuals with characteristics beyond their transsexual status. *Coronation Street*'s Hayley Patterson is a welcome exception to this rule.

¹⁸ The psychiatrist, Russell Reid, at the centre of the Charles Kane case, has helped numerous transsexual people including Karen and Michael. His name is mentioned time and time again by the people I have interviewed as the person who was instrumental in enabling them to start their transitional process. The fact that Reid has been a key figure in facilitating vital treatment for so many people in the UK was not brought to light in either of the above media presentations on this issue.

A further example of the de-humanisation of transsexual people through transposing a stereotypical 'transsexual' template on to the person is provided by an experience I had in 2005. Janine, one of the people I had previously photographed and interviewed contacted me as she had been selected to appear in a documentary titled *Sex Change* for Discovery Networks Europe, to be broadcast on the Discovery Health channel. Janine wanted to be filmed having a photo-shoot with me and I agreed to this. During the photo-session I felt that Janine and I were manipulated by the filmmaker to discuss particular issues. Consequently, I refused to sign a release for sections that included the use of my voice. In the edited programme for broadcast I found it difficult to recognise Janine as the person I had previously interviewed and photographed. Her portrayal was nothing more than superficial. The nuances of her character and the harrowing experiences Janine had undergone during her transition to a female had been completely overlooked. The outcome was that Janine's representation was consistent with the stereotypical transsexual model.

The Gender Debate

Underpinning all the examples outlined in the previous section is the notion that one gender role is exchanged for another. The concept that transsexual surgery "reinforces social conformity by encouraging the individual to become an agreeable participant in a role-defined society, substituting one sex role stereotype for the other" was suggested by Janice Raymond in 1979 (Raymond, 1994: xvii). Despite the fact that Raymond's work, *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*, was originally published in the 1980s, it remains a seminal text owing in part to the theoretical perspectives that have developed out of it. Dave King asserts that: "Raymond...has more fully than any other writer argued that transsexualism is not an individual condition, a personal problem for which changing sex is merely a neutral, technical method of treatment, but instead is a social and political phenomenon." (1996: 77)

Raymond's theoretical position develops from a political feminist perspective. The 'transsexual empire', Raymond claims, is "ultimately a medical empire, based on a patriarchal medical model" (1994: 119). The medical solution becomes "a 'social tranquilliser' reinforcing sexism and its foundation of sex-role conformity." (1994: xvii)

In this argument Raymond asserts that transsexual people are "deviant or potentially deviant" individuals who are controlled by the medico-psychiatric professions (1994: 119, 183). In her work she denies transsexual people any form of agency. Rather than using the pronoun 'she' for a male-to-female transsexual person, Raymond uses the pronoun 'he' as she wishes "to reinforce the fact that the majority of transsexuals are men." (1994: 14.) The female-to-male transsexual person, Raymond asserts, is "merely a token who provides the 'illusion of the inclusion' of women into the transsexual context." (1994: 140) As a consequence of this belief, Raymond's argument centres on male-to-female transsexual people and marginalises female-born transsexual people to near invisibility.

Raymond claims that the transsexual person "becomes a synthetic product" (1994: 165). She asserts that transsexual people are "surgical hermaphrodites" who undergo "superficial, artificial, and socially and surgically constructed change." (1994: 3, 165) Furthermore, Raymond argues that: "All transsexuals rape women's bodies by reducing the real female form to an artifact, appropriating this body for themselves." (1994: 104)

What Raymond fails to take into account here is that all women and men imitate the accepted model thus transforming their physical reality into a cultural artifact on a daily basis. Everyday visual presentations are not natural or neutral facts of life that emerge from an essentially gendered self. Such ideas have been core to the debates on the construction of gender stereotyping in society in general and in particular with regard to the media. Discussion on the relationship between the visual culture and gender stereotyping can be found in, for instance, the work of Mulvey (1988), Bhabha, (1994), Hall (1997), Woodward (1997), Gauntlet (2002), Carter and Steiner (2004). Whilst stressing the ambiguous and

discursive nature of the stereotype they all argue in their different ways that the visual stereotype emerges from deeply embedded cultural patterns and processes of cultural objectification. Thus individual presentations of the self are developed in relation to culturally-created and socially-sustained visual models and are performative expressions.

Developing the concept of performativity in the social domain Erving Goffman argues that all social interaction involves both a performance and a reading of the performance (1990: 32). Robert Ezra Park, quoted in Goffman, describes how this performative aspect of reality functions on an individual level and stresses the central role of the self-image in the process. Park suggests:

It is probably no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask. It is rather a recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role... and in so far as this mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves – the role we are striving to live up to – this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be. In the end, our conception of our role becomes second nature and an integral part of our personality. We come into the world as individuals, achieve character, and become persons. (Park quoted in Goffman, 1990: 30)

Park's argument highlights the fact that the performance of the self is a social fact of life. The feminist philosopher Judith Butler, whose work has been so influential in the field, develops this theme further and claims that concerning gender the performative accomplishment de-stabilises the notion of a fixed gender identity. Butler asserts:

Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an

identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylised repetition of acts... This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of gender as a constituted social temporality... a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. (1990: 179)

Earlier in the chapter I defined the term 'passing', which is used by transgendered people to describe projecting a gender that is at odds with an individual's anatomical, biological or chromosomal sex. 'Passing' implies an act of secrecy and dishonesty, of playing a part that one has no right to play. However, developing Butler's hypothesis that gender expressions do not derive from an essential gender identity and Goffman and Park's arguments that all social exchange is performative, it follows that in social interaction non-transgender people are also 'passing'. This view is supported by Bornstein when she suggests that the term could more appropriately be applied to "appearing in the gender of one's choice. Everyone is passing; some have an easier job of it than others." (1994: 127)

Building on the concept of gender as an imitative performance, 'passing' procedures provide an opportunity to examine the relationship between gender and the social construction of the gender categories. Harold Garfinkel, in his ethnomethodological¹⁹ study of Agnes, a young transsexual woman, argues that Agnes's practices of observing and performing, reveal the rules by which gender is projected and attributed in society. Garfinkel claims:

¹⁹ The American sociologist Harold Garfinkel developed the term 'ethnomethodology' in the 1960s. "Social life, and the apparently stable phenomena and relationships in which it exists, are seen by ethnomethodologists as a constant achievement through the use of language." (Marshall, 1994: 203)

Agnes was self-consciously equipped to teach normals how normals make sexuality²⁰ happen in commonplace settings as an obvious, familiar, recognisable, natural, and serious matter of fact. Her speciality consisted of treating the 'natural facts of life' of socially recognised, socially managed sexuality as a managed production...so as unavoidably in concert with others to be making these facts of life visible and reportable – accountable - for all practical purposes...Agnes' methodological practices are our sources of authority for the finding...that normally sexed persons are cultural events in societies. (1967: 180, 181)

Garfinkel's insight into the direct correlation between transsexual gender projections and non-transsexual presentations contributes another facet in my opposition to Raymond's notion of the 'plastic' transsexual. Raymond's argument centres on the isolated superficial physical changes that transsexual people undergo and does not take into account the self-image that is a fundamental aspect of transsexual transformations. The interactive relationship between the self-image and the social sphere is a dynamic force that drives the need for change. Mark Rees, a female-to-male transsexual person, demonstrates this relationship when he asserts: "Psychologically, I did not 'become a man'. I became myself." (1996: 35) Rees's comment expresses the complex relationship that exists between the inner self-image and the outer social category with the self-image in the dominant position. The significance of the interaction between the surface reality and the self-image can be further illustrated by the account of Adrien, a male-to-female transsexual person I have known and photographed since 2002. Adrien claims:

20 Garfinkel's use of the term 'sexuality' here does not refer to sexual desire. His use of the word is interchangeable with 'gender'.

The whole transsexual process is an extremely superficial one at one level. It's got nothing to do with who you are...and it's got nothing to do with your attitudes, it's got nothing to do with what you want to achieve in life, and it's got nothing to do with your sexual preference...It has everything to do with who you look at in the mirror every morning and who you would like to be looking at in the mirror every morning. And to that degree it is sublimely superficial. But, if anyone stops to think about why they're happy with what they look at in the mirror in the morning...it should become fairly apparent fairly quickly that [this] actually goes to the core of everything you are. And if you don't identify with the image that you reflect in the mirror it's extremely difficult to live with what you are looking at. And so the superficial becomes the most deep-rooted thing in your life. (Adrien, 10.02.02)

Adrien's description highlights the central role of the visual realm in the dynamic relationship between the inner and outer worlds. I would suggest, and aim to demonstrate through the following case studies, that in transsexual experiences responses to the surrounding visual world become heightened in a crucial manner which extends the practices which form the basis of gender performance as it is usually conceptualised, because of the person's need to self-consciously position themselves, at a profound level, in a different gender role within the cultural domain. Moreover, Adrien emphasises the importance of being able to "*identify*" with the image that one sees in the mirror. Adrien's statement resonates with Jacques Lacan's famous mirror stage theory in identity formation. Lacan argues that having an image of oneself is part of human reality and constitutes an ontological structure of the human world (1977:2). Elizabeth Grosz defines the significance of images and the process of identification in her analysis of Lacan's theoretical position. Grosz suggests:

Lacan displaces the ego as the central and most secure component of the individual, unsettling the presumptions of a fixed, unified, or natural identity, and the subject's capacity to know itself and the world. The certainty the subject brings with it in its claims to knowledge is not...a guaranteed or secure foundation for knowledge. It is a function of the *investment* the ego has in maintaining certain images which please it. (1990: 48. Emphasis in the original.)

A powerful identification with visual images is established in the mirror stage theory. The driving force of the encounter forms the basis for all future identifications. Lacan asserts:

We have only to understand the mirror stage *as an identification*, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image – whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term *imago*. (1977: 2)

The mirror stage describes a child's recognition of an external, reflected image of its body in a mirror or in the eyes of its mother. Lacan argues that this stage takes place between the ages of six to eighteen months. The child identifies with this image, whilst at the same time having an awareness that it is viewing itself from the position of another. The awareness that it is seeing its own representation results in the realisation that there is a separation between itself and the outer world. This stage, Lacan proposes, is the beginning of innumerable identifications with external images. Just as the child is fascinated by its own reflection, images or others in the exterior world will continue to captivate the person and become incorporated into the self-image. This issue will

be demonstrated repeatedly by the participants' accounts and the photographs in the case studies that follow.

This fundamental relationship between the inner self and the outer world, which is mediated through images, constitutes a highly influential factor in the development of both transsexual and non-transsexual identities. As I mentioned earlier, Janice Raymond denies the inner reality of the transsexual person. Whilst she recognises 'the transsexual' as a socially constructed identity, she focuses on the superficial, and by doing so, she fails to see the similarities between transsexual and non-transsexual realities.

The concept of the transsexual as a socially constructed identity has been further developed by Billings and Urban. They argue that transsexuality "only exists in and through medical practice" (1996: 99). Thus they suggest that transsexualism is not a matter of psychology. Rather it is "a relational process sustained in medical practice and marketed in public testimony" (1996: 99). Billings and Urban assert:

Human experiences such as sexual fulfilment and gender-role comfort were thus transformed into luxury commodities available at high prices from US physicians; victims of aberrant gender-role conditioning and other sexual deviants were induced to seek gratification in a commodified world of 'artificial vaginas' and fleshy man-made penises. (1996: 107)

Billings and Urban draw attention to the context of medical provision in a capitalist society and assert that transsexual people are "victims of aberrant gender-role conditioning and...sexual deviants", whilst Raymond claims that patriarchy has created transsexuality. Raymond, Billings and Urban, along with the medical perspective, all ignore the experiences of transsexual people.

Whilst there are clearly issues that affect the emergence of a category of people at a specific point in time, the people that constitute the category of 'the transsexual' are being denied. Viviane Namaste asserts that the "narrow focus" of transsexuality being viewed through a medical perspective "distorts the complexity of transsexual lives and bodies...[and] distorts the complexity of the social world as it is lived and experienced by transsexual and transgendered people." (2000: 35) Namaste suggests that if transsexuality is a social phenomenon and only exists through medical practice, then "transsexuals as individuals, should not exist." (2000: 34) She claims that underlying the socio-medical perspective is the premise that "if scholars can explain what causes transsexuality, then it can also be prevented." (2000: 35)

Namaste's argument highlights the fact that pathologising 'the transsexual' implies that transsexuality can be 'cured' or "prevented". In other words, transsexuality is believed to be 'abnormal' and if the causes of the condition can be identified there will be no further need for this 'abnormality' to exist. However, the parameters of that which is constituted as normal or abnormal are continually shifting. The dichotomy of normal/abnormal is as much a socially constructed system as the female/male binary gender categories. I discussed earlier in this chapter the natural occurrence of atypical genitalia that are manifested in intersex people. It is society's drive to uphold the norm that underpins the genital surgery that is carried out on intersex babies. That which is deemed 'normal' in society corresponds with that which is typical of the majority at a particular point in time but this does not constitute sufficient grounds for deviations from the average to be viewed as 'other' or problematic.

Seeing 'Wrong' Bodies or 'Different' Bodies

Jason Cromwell develops the argument outlined above when he asserts that transsexual discourses, arising from the medical and psychological perspectives, are a moral discourse, which are based on the assumption that "transbehaviours of

any kind are abnormal.” Cromwell claims that this is reflected in widely used terms, such as ‘the wrong body’²¹ (1999: 19).

The notion of being ‘trapped in the wrong body’ has come to symbolise the transsexual condition. Sandy Stone argues that it defines the condition (1991: 297). Cromwell suggests that it is through this concept that: “Biological determinists thus join transsexual discourses and medico-psychological practitioners in attempting to eradicate gender diversity.” (1999: 38) In *The Empire Strikes Back*, Stone’s response to Raymond’s *The Transsexual Empire*, Stone claims that “under the binary phallogentric founding myth by which Western bodies and subjects are authorised, only one body per gendered subject is ‘right’. All other bodies are wrong.” (Stone, 1991:297)

The notion that a body can be deemed ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, however, does not go far enough to explain the concerns that transsexual people express about specific parts of the body. The case studies that follow will demonstrate that there are significant differences in individual transsexual people’s perceptions of their bodies. Whilst the ‘cure’ for the transsexual condition is widely viewed as changing a male body for a female one, or vice versa, transsexual people’s accounts indicate that the ways in which they experience their bodies are intrinsically more complex.

An important aspect of the relationship between the individual and their body that has been previously ignored in research into transsexuality is that sight of the body constitutes a critical interface between the person’s inner and outer worlds. My research shows that prior to undergoing physical changes measures are consistently undertaken in order to be able to ‘not see’ and consequently to not acknowledge parts of the body that do not match the self-image. This theme represents a persistent strand in my study. It will be explored through Karen’s experiences in chapter three and will be referred to in all the case studies.

²¹ The use of the term ‘the wrong body’ has a history that goes back to before the emergence of transsexuality. In the late 1890s, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs described homosexuality by using the phrase “anima muliebris viruli corpore inclusa [a feminine soul confined by a masculine body]” (Ulrichs 1898, cited in Kennedy, 1981: 106).

Cromwell suggests that the social meanings and symbolic nature of, for instance, cultural parts of the body are the cause of transsexual people's difficulties with specific anatomical elements. Thus transsexual surgery has developed as an outcome of the symbolic realm. With regard to this Cromwell argues against the use of the term 'gender dysphoria'. He explains:

The majority of FTMs do not have gender dysphoria; it is the rare FTM or transman who does not know from an early age what his gender identity is. What many experience, however, is body-part dysphoria, which focuses on elements, such as breasts and menstruation that are quintessentially female...If breasts were defined as male, transmen and FTMs would not be dysphoric about them or have them removed. (1999: 105)

The use of language in relation to transsexuality is critical, not only with regard to articulating transsexual people's experiences, it is also, as I asserted earlier in this chapter, highly political. Cromwell claims that transsexual people are defining their bodies and identities as 'different' rather than 'wrong' and that this constitutes a "strategic discourse" that is "a subversion of the dominant paradigm and its discourses" (1999: 134, 135). Transsexual people "are, in a real sense, untying their tongues...By articulating their experiences and identities, by affirming their bodies as their own and as viable...transpeople...disallow themselves 'to be distorted', 'consigned to silence', or 'prejudicially interpreted'." (1999: 25,136)

The notion that the transsexual body can be defined as 'different' rather than 'wrong' is an important conception in the context of my argument. With regard to the significance of the body, Judith Butler claims that theorising about sex and gender must encompass the materiality of the body. She asserts that discussion about the body as existing prior to socialisation or discourses on sex, as matter, is impossible as the body itself, is permeated with these discourses (1993: 28, 29).

Anne Fausto-Sterling's reading of *Bodies That Matter* establishes that a dialogue exists between the outer social reality, the inner self, and the body, and suggests that the body can be viewed as "a system that simultaneously produces and is produced by social meanings." (2000: 23) Butler cites the example of viewing the transsexual body to show how the categories of female and male are central in our thinking. She asserts that we 'see' through the categories. Butler argues:

...even seeing the body may not answer the question: for what are the categories through which one sees? The moment in which one's staid and usual cultural perceptions fail, when one cannot with surety read the body that one sees, is precisely the moment when one is no longer sure whether the body encountered is that of a man or a woman. The vacillation between the categories itself constitutes the experience of the body in question. When such categories come into question, the reality of gender is also put into crisis... (1990: xxii)

Following the work of Judith Butler, my research builds on the notion of the body as a contested site. In other words, the inquiry begins with the premise that the body is constituted in and through culture and thus is imbued with countless meanings. The research develops, through practice, the dynamics of 'seeing' the atypical body and explores the potential for photographic practice as employed in this study, to challenge pre-conceptions, bring to the fore the limits of the binaries, and highlight the extent to which belief in the gender system forms a lens through which the world is viewed.

Four Cross-Cultural Instances of Gender Diversity

In order to position my argument concerning the social construction of transgender, I am going to look briefly at cross-cultural instances of atypical gender manifestations. Alison Shaw argues that "changes of sex and transformations of



Figure 14.

'Osch-Tisch', ca. 1876. Photograph by John H Fouch, Fort Keogh, Montana Territory. Collection Dr James Brust. This is the earliest recorded photograph of a *berdache*.

gender occur in a wide range of social contexts and have probably taken place in all known human societies.” (2005:1) It is beyond the scope of this study to adequately discuss all the cross-cultural gender variations that have been recorded.²² However, in order to demonstrate a range of concepts, I will briefly outline four examples of different socially sanctioned gender configurations: the Samoan *fa'afafine*, the *hijra* of India, the Balkan *sworn virgin*, and the Native North American *berdache*.

The term '*berdache*' is widely used to describe early Native North American people projecting gender roles beyond the female/male binary categories. The term can be construed as having pejorative implications. Its origins lie in the Indo-European word '*wela*', which means 'to strike' or 'to wound', from which developed the Old Iranian word '*varta*', meaning 'seized' or 'prisoner'. In Persia '*varta*' referred to a young slave or captive. How the word entered European languages is not certain, however, by the Renaissance it had evolved in Spanish

²² Further examples of cross-cultural gender/sex configurations can be found in the following texts: Kessler and McKenna (1978), Herdt (1993), Bornstein (1994), Feinberg (1996), Cromwell (1999), Ardener and Shaw (2005).

into 'bardaje' or 'bardaxe', in Italian into 'bardascia' and 'bardasso', in French into 'berdache', and in English into 'bardash'. The word's meaning at this time related to a younger male in a homosexual relationship with an older man. Over time the meaning of the word changed and it became used as a more general term to identify a male homosexual. By the mid-nineteenth century it was no longer used in Europe. In North America 'berdache' persisted as a descriptive term for Native North American people who were perceived by the Westerners who encountered them to be living in gender roles beyond the binary categories (Roscoe, 1998: 7, 8). The terms *fa'afafine*, *hijra* and *sworn virgin* are rather different in that they developed within the cultural communities to which the people in question belong.

The *Berdache*

The most extensively documented of these examples is the *berdache*. The term *berdache* is used specifically with regard to Native North American societies, however, similar "berdache-like" people are known to exist in Alaska, Siberia, Australia, South Asia, Sudan and in the Amazon region (Kessler and McKenna, 1978: 25). There are recorded accounts of male *berdaches* in nearly 150 Native American societies. In nearly half of these groups female *berdaches* were also reported (Roscoe, 1993: 330). These accounts reveal that there were differences between societies with regard to how individuals came to be identified as *berdaches*, variations in attire, as well as in sexual practices. In some instances male *berdaches* took on female roles, but did not cross-dress. In others, they dressed differently from men or women. Female *berdaches* often wore male clothing, but only when they were hunting or involved in warfare (Roscoe, 1993: 335). Some *berdaches* were homosexual, whilst others appear to have been heterosexual or bisexual (Roscoe, 1993: 335). Kessler and McKenna argue that the *berdache* 'became' the other gender, rather than 'assuming' an opposite gender role and that this description more accurately defines how they were viewed from within their own societies (1978: 41).



Figure 15.

Charlie the weaver', ca. 1895. Photograph by A. C. Vroman. Seaver Centre for Western History Research, Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, negative V-714. This picture shows Charlie, a Navajo *berdache*, (on the right) wearing clothing that is distinct from those worn by women or men.

Berdaches were respected members of society and were often afforded a high status in their communities. In 1935 the anthropologist Willard Hill recorded comments made by Navajo elders that refer to the *nádlé*, a Navajo term for the *berdaches*:

If there were no *nádlé* the country would change. They are responsible for all the wealth in the country. If there were no more left, the horses, sheep, and Navaho would all go. They are leaders like President Roosevelt.

You must respect a *nádlé*. They are, somehow, sacred and holy. (Hill quoted in Roscoe, 1993: 355)

Kessler and McKenna assert that the term *berdache* is a noun and constitutes a distinct category. This implies a status beyond the female/male dichotomy (1978: 27). Building on this argument, Will Roscoe proposes that *berdache* roles constitute third and fourth genders (1993: 330). In his fieldwork research on Navajo categories of sex and gender, Wesley Thomas identified four categories

of sex: female/woman, male/man, female/man, male/woman and forty-nine different gender identifications between the female/male polarities (Feinberg, 1996: 27). Likewise, Waldemar Bogoras lived amongst the Chukchi of Siberia for eighteen years, from 1890 - 1908, and describes nine gender categories used by the Chukchi Indians (Whittle, 2000: 29).

These accounts suggest that *berdache* and *berdache*-like societies may have had varying gender/sex configurations. From the critical mass of accounts provided by Westerners, it is evident that those reporting on *berdaches* experienced considerable difficulties in defining and describing the non-Western gender identifications due to inadequate terminology in dominant Western concepts of gender. In Western cultures it is taken as a given that gender automatically follows biology. However, in some Native North American societies, specifically the Pueblo and Plains Indians, gender was not determined by sex. In others, anatomical sex was believed to be fluid and was not viewed as dichotomous (Roscoe, 1993: 353, 372). Navajo beliefs provide a counterpart to Western notions. Roscoe describes these beliefs, stating:

All beings, including natural phenomena, were believed to have both an inner and outer form. Sometimes these forms were of different genders. Speech, for example, which is female, is the outer form of Thought, which is male. Nor are inner and outer forms necessarily fixed; an inner form may have many different outer forms. Thus, we find the term *nadleehe* literally translates as 'one who changes continuously', suggesting that *berdaches* were seen not as crossing genders or entering a distinct category but as fluctuating between outer and inner dimensions of male and female forms - a third *process* rather than a third category. (1993: 356)

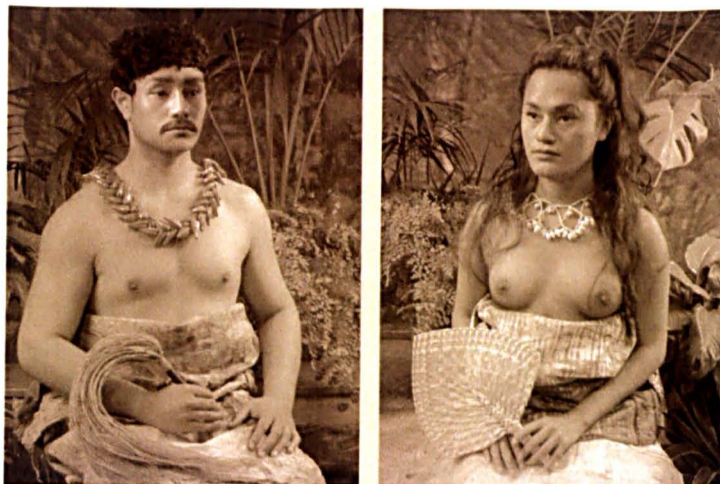


Figure 16.
 'A man and a woman of Samoa', 2004 – 2005. Photographs by Shigeyuki Kihara. C-type prints, 32" x 24". Owned by the artist. Exhibited in *Somatechnics*, Macquarie University Gallery, Sydney, Australia, 2005.

In other North American societies there were different ways of determining gender. For instance, the Mohave Indians used dreaming as a way of establishing gender identity. It was believed that all dreams took place in the womb of the mother-to-be. However, dreams that occurred later, in situations where children chose work activities aligned with the other gender, were understood as not having become apparent up until that point in time (Roscoe, 1993: 365).

Gender Liminality in Samoa

Gender beyond the binary categories is also "conspicuously prevalent" throughout the islands of Polynesia (Besnier, 1993: 285). Different words to describe atypical gender identities are used in the various Polynesian languages. The contemporary Hawaiian and Tahitian *māhū* and the Samoan *fa'afafine*, which translates as, 'in the fashion of a woman', are the best-known terms (Besnier, 1993: 286).²³ The *mahu* and *fa'afafine* are born male and assume a female gender role. In 2005, I exhibited a series of photographs from my doctoral study in *Somatechnics*, Macquarie University Gallery, Sydney, alongside Shigeyuki Kihara, (1975 -) a Samoan self-identified *fa'afafine*. Her work, which involves performance and photography, centres on her identity as a *fa'afafine* and her cultural roots. The

²³ In contemporary Tonga, the category is called *fakaleiti* or *fakafefine* while Tuvaluans normally use the Gilbertese *pinapinaaine* (Besnier, 1993: 286).

images in Figure 16 are tinted and posed in a way that is reminiscent of Samoan colonial photographs taken by Westerners during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.²⁴ In this work Kihara poses for both pictures, although in the image on the left she has superimposed her own head onto a photograph of a Samoan man. (The picture on the right portrays her body as it is in daily life with breasts that have developed as a result of hormone treatment and/or surgical implants.) Through her work Kihara ‘becomes’ both the woman and the man. This, I suggest, is indicative of the fact that she perceives herself as being able to inhabit both female and male genders and thus she is not restricted to either body or either category.

Jeanette Mageo argues that the *fa’afafine* are a “third gender intercalated between the other two” (1992: 443). Mageo asserts that because: “Samoan society is communal in orientation; people tend to conceive of themselves and to be conceived by others in terms of social role... rather than personal qualities.” (1992: 450, 451) Thus it follows in Samoa that if not enough girls are born in a family a boy may be brought up as a girl. Most boys who become *fa’afafines*, however, do so of their own choice (Mageo, 1992: 450).

In Samoa several contributing factors are in evidence that give rise to the possibility of the *fa’afafine*. In particular, the boundaries between the categories of female and male are different to those in the West. Mageo notes that Samoans distinguish less between females and males, particularly in childhood, and suggests that the gender of boys is unstable because there is a lack of task differentiation between the genders up to the age of ten. Outside school children also wear clothing that appears to be similar (1992: 451). It is also significant that Samoa has a discourse of humour and it is conventional for young boys to parody and make fun of femininity. The *fa’afafine* extends the practice of mocking femininity whilst acquiring “accompanying paraphernalia” (1992: 451).

²⁴ A wonderful collection of Samoan colonial photographs can be viewed in the catalogue *Picturing Paradise: Colonial Photography of Samoa, 1875 to 1925* published to accompany an exhibition of the same title.

Samoans make a critical distinction between girls and women. The *fa'afafine* is caught between the different roles of these two categories of females. She imitates girls and also has sexual relationships with men but seldom lives with men. In other words, she does not become a woman. Thus the *fa'afafine* is "caught in a liminal state" between the two roles of 'girl' and 'woman' (Mageo, 1992: 453).

Niko Besnier argues that the concept of liminality can also be applied to the *fa'afafine*'s position in relation to the categories of female and male. Besnier uses the terms 'gender liminality' and 'gender-liminal-person'. She asserts that these are more neutral terms than, for instance, 'transsexual' or 'transvestite'. Besnier suggests that the Western words currently in use refer to only one isolated aspect of gender variance, which is inappropriate in the Polynesian context (1993: 287).

It is acceptable for individuals to identify themselves as a *fa'afafine* for a specific period of time in their lives. In other words, becoming a *fa'afafine* does not necessarily constitute a permanent change of gender and Besnier claims that individuals frequently return to their original gender identity (1993: 310, 311). This indicates a concept of gender as a fluid entity.

There has been a marked increase in numbers of *fa'afafine* in Samoa. This, Mageo argues, is because *fa'afafines* have taken on an important function because of Samoan cultural change. Mageo asserts that whilst societies "do not instigate the taking of roles...social change encourages certain persons to take novel roles, and so societies capitalise on these penchants in order to deal with social change." (1992: 455, 456).

The *fa'afafine*'s role in this context is two-fold. First, the *fa'afafine* enables young biological females to assume "idealised roles" in society. This is significant as the place of young women "within it has been compromised in recent decades" (1992: 443). Mageo suggests:

...the *fa'afafine* effects a joke about a social role - that of the Samoan sister - by inverting it. She does so by simultaneously marking herself as a sister and exhibiting the carnal dimensions

of womanhood. The inversion serves to remind sisters of how they are *not* supposed to behave. (1992: 454)

Secondly, there has also been an increased propensity towards violence during public gatherings in Samoa and in these instances the *fa'afafine* play an important part. Because of their position in society as a person that generates humour they are able to diffuse potentially violent situations (Mageo, 1992: 443).

The *Hijra*

Similar to the *fa'afafine*, the *hijra* of India are acknowledged members of contemporary Indian society. *Hijras* can be found in major cities throughout India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. However, in contrast to the *fa'afafine*, the *hijra* undergo a permanent change in gender status and unlike the *berdaches*, male *hijras* sometimes go through emasculation ceremonies (removal of the male genitalia). Whilst it is more common for *hijras* to be male, women who do not menstruate may also become *hijras*.

Serena Nanda asserts that *hijras* are born *hijra* (1993: 381). An initial similarity may be drawn between the *hijra* and current widely-held perceptions of the Western transsexual person, with regard to the belief that one is born transgendered, rather than choosing one's gender status, and also because male *hijras* undergo genital surgery. Despite these similarities there are significant differences between the two cultural groups. Firstly, in the Western view, a transsexual person transitions from one gender to the other, whereas it would appear that there is gender-mixing amongst the *hijra* (1993: 377). Nanda argues:

The cultural notions of *hijras* as 'intersexed' and 'eunuchs' emphasise that they are neither male nor female, man nor woman. At a more esoteric level, the *hijras* are also man plus woman, or erotic and sacred female men. *Hijras* are devotees of Bachuchara Mata, one of the many versions of the Mother



Figure 17.
 'Salima, a *hijra*'. Unattributed photograph.
 Published in Nanda, 1993, 'Hijras: An
 Alternative Sex and Gender Role in India',
*Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual
 Dimorphism in Culture and History*, New
 York: Zone Books.

Goddess worshiped throughout India. It is by virtue of their sexual impotence (with women) that men are called on by Bachuchara Mata to dress and act like women and to undergo emasculation. (1993: 373)

Secondly, as the quote above indicates, there are different belief systems in India with regard to the relationship between sex and gender. These form an important context for the removal of the male genitalia. Hinduism, in particular, accommodates and presents a positive view of alternatives to the female/male dichotomy. Multiple genders and sexes are recognised as possible configurations (Nanda, 1993: 393). The acceptance of these does not cancel out the sex/gender polarities. Rather, it is the case that more gender configurations are accepted alongside those that are acknowledged in the West. Nanda explains:

In Hinduism, the complementary opposition of male and female, man and woman, represents the most important sex

and gender roles in society but by no means the only ones. The interchange of male and female qualities, transformations of sex and gender and alternative sex and gender roles, both among deities and humans, are meaningful and positive themes in Hindu mythology, ritual and art. (1993: 375)

The *hijras*' traditional legitimacy began to decline with British rule in India. Laws were passed in some states making emasculation illegal and these laws were later incorporated into the laws of independent India. Nonetheless, *hijras* continue to be castrated (Nanda, 1993: 414). However, following Western influences there have been changes in how the *hijra* are widely viewed. Charlotte Suthrell claims: "Those who offer respect or regard the *hijras* as in any way beneficial are growing fewer, whilst the number who treat them with contempt increase. It seems much more common for them to be viewed negatively." (2004: 78, 79)



Figure 18.
'Mikas Milicev Karadzic', a sworn virgin,
1929. Photograph by Branimir Gusic.
Published in Grémaux, 1993, 'Woman
Becomes Man in the Balkans', *Third Sex*,
*Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in
Culture and History*, New York: Zone Books.

Sworn Virgins

A further cross-cultural example of the separation of gender from biological sex can be found in the *sworn virgins* recorded in the Western Balkans (Albania, Kosova, Bosnia, Montenegro and Macedonia) since the first half of the 1800s (Grémaux, 1993: 241).

The respective roles of men and women in Balkan societies are clearly delineated. Rural life in the twentieth century in Kosova and Albania configured around clans or tribes, with arguments and blood feuds over land. Roland Littlewood and Antonia Young claim that “the most influential of the codifications of the customary law is the medieval *Kanun*.” (2005: 76) According to the *Kanun*, women cannot be the target of a blood feud, are unable to inherit, have to comply with arranged marriages, and after marriage become the property of their husband (Littlewood and Young, 2005: 75, 76, 77).

Yet, *sworn virgins* are women who act as social males, rather than as females. They wear male clothing, assume male body language and gestures, drink and smoke with men, carry out work undertaken by men, and are able to become the heads of households, inherit, and take part in feuds. Unlike the *hijras* and *berdaches*, *sworn virgins* do not have a religious role in their societies and in this sense they are more closely aligned with the *fa’afafine*. They are described as “man-like-woman” (*muskobanji*) in the Serbian language (Littlewood and Young, 2005: 74). In 1893 Ivan Zovko used the term *muskobaracas*, which he translated as “mannish woman” (Grémaux, 1993: 273). Zovko reports:

They fight like males and are crazy about doing everything in the way males do. Unfortunately, our Lord has created them as women! They dress themselves like males, talk like males; in brief, do everything like males. Several *muskobaracas* are even claimed to have fallen in love with other girls and married them, but are said to have treated them roughly, as if God hadn’t created them for that purpose. They hate every

woman's adornment as the devil hates the baptised soul.
(Zovko quoted in Grémaux, 1993: 273, 274)

René Grémaux records 120 cases of *sworn virgins* between 1985 - 1988 and identifies two distinct types. One is raised by the family as a boy and the other is brought up as a girl and "reconstructs herself as a social man" (1993: 244). Littlewood and Young assert that there are three ways in which girls generally become *sworn virgins*. In order to avoid an arranged marriage a girl can swear to maintain her virginity, a father who has no son to inherit his property can declare a daughter to be a man, and a family can elect a girl to become a *sworn virgin* and take on a male role if they have lost one or more male members of the family (2005: 78).

In the last decade of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century women continue to take on male roles in Albania, although they do not necessarily adopt the term *sworn virgin*. In 2001 Littlewood and Young interviewed three *sworn virgins* who had assumed male roles for different reasons. One of the women, Xhema, had made the decision for personal reasons whilst the other two women, Lule and Pashke, were influenced by family issues. All three women interacted socially as males, displayed male body language, wore male clothing, and denied having sexual relationships (Littlewood and Young, 2005: 78 - 82).

Sworn virgins are consistently represented as 'women who have become men' and as such they do not challenge the gender dichotomy. Rather, they exchange one gender role for the other, thus supporting the binary system (Littlewood and Young, 2005: 82).

* * * *

The four models of gender diversity presented here are significantly different. As mentioned above, *sworn virgins* uphold the gender dichotomy, whilst *berdaches*, *hijras*, and *fa'afafine* constitute distinct gender categories beyond female and

male. The *fa'afafine* occupies a liminal state that is between female and male and also between girl and woman. *Fa'afafine*'s may return to their original gender, thus indicating the possibility of gender as a fluid entity (Besnier, 1993: 311), whereas *hijras*, *sworn virgins*, and *berdaches* 'become' a new gender. *Sworn virgins*, *hijras*, *fa'afafines*, and *berdaches* all fulfil a specific function in their societies, although these are different in nature. The roles upheld by *berdaches* and *hijras* are sacred, *fa'afafines* fulfil a role that enables girls to become idealised, whilst the roles taken on by *sworn virgins* equate to that of males. The records indicate that *berdache* roles constitute any number of genders from three to forty-nine (Feinberg, 1996: 27; Roscoe, 1993: 330, 356, 372; Whittle, 2000: 29) and in India multiple genders and sexes are recognised (Nanda, 1993: 393). In other words, in these four examples biological sex and gender are neither automatically nor consistently synonymous.

These few examples give some indication of the range of different sex/gender configurations that are known and experienced across various cultures. They suggest that gender and sex are not necessarily binary forms, but are more complex biological and social categories.

The 'Third' Gender Concept

The term 'third gender' has frequently been suggested as a category to describe cross-cultural instances of gender beyond the binaries (Mageo, 1992: 443; Herdt, 1993: 22; Cromwell, 1999: 98). However, placing the different forms of gender described above into one category would appear to be inappropriate. Such a move would ignore the variations in atypical gender identities and maintain the supremacy of the gender dichotomy by labelling those that do not belong to the binaries as 'other'. Furthermore, it would re-enforce the boundaries between the categories and underline their existence as discrete entities. A more satisfactory use of the 'third' can be found in published writing by transgender people, where it describes a third space, "a space outside of gender" (Whittle, 1996: 211), as opposed to a third category. "The 'third' is that which questions binary thinking

and introduces crisis...The 'third' is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility." (Garber, 1992: 11) This notion allows for many different genders to be taken into account. Cromwell (1999: 159n4) suggests that the term 'gender diversity' would be more suitable whilst Halberstam (1998: 20) argues for 'multiple gender options'. These alternatives are consistent with the view of the transsexual writer and performer, Kate Bornstein. Bornstein asserts: "Every transsexual I know went through a gender transformation for different reasons, and there are as many truthful experiences of gender as there are people who think they have gender." (1994: 8) Bornstein argues for gender fluidity and for "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." (1994: 54) A parallel can be drawn between the gender definitions suggested by Cromwell, Halberstam, and Bornstein and the cross-cultural examples described earlier. Building on these arguments I would suggest that these definitions offer a more accurate description of the 'reality' of gender.

Summary

In this chapter I have outlined my theoretical position. The chapter has described the emergence of the transsexual identity in a Western medical sphere and provided examples of historical and cross-cultural instances of transgendered people. Key theoretical perspectives on transsexuality, the political issues of visibility and 'passing', intersex conditions, and the development of the transgender movement have been examined. The central role of the visual realm in concerns of gender has constituted a cohering theme that has manifested itself in the discussions of medical, social, and political issues, and in the outline of the development and visualisation of the self-image.

CHAPTER TWO

IMAGES, PRACTICES, AND METHODS

This chapter will examine how the key concepts outlined in chapter one have been addressed by photographers to date, for they form a context for my practice. Issues of visibility and representation, the performance of the self in everyday life and in photographic portraiture, and the relationship between the subject, the photograph, and the photographer will be discussed. This chapter will also define and establish my methodology together with the ethical concerns of the research and will conclude with an overview of the thesis.

Trans Photography

As I have demonstrated, gender and self-image are intrinsically connected to the visual domain. Photography has a specific representational potential to produce images that appear to duplicate this realm. This facilitates a powerful relationship between perception of the visual world and the experience of viewing photographs.

The social expectations of photography are that it provides “a window on the world” (Burgin, 1982: 2), in other words that the photograph reproduces reality. Barthes describes photographs as being “a certificate of presence” (1993: 87). This he explains is because of the power of photographs to authenticate “the existence of a certain being” (1993: 107). Barthes argues:

Photography's referent is not the same as the referent of other systems of representation. I call 'photographic referent' not the *optionally* real thing to which an image or sign refers but the *necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph...in photography I can never deny that *the thing has been there...* it has been absolutely, irrefutably present...The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here... (1993: 76, 77, 80. Emphasis in the original.)

People who have been unable to identify with their body have specific issues with 'seeing' the body and as a consequence have undergone extreme physical changes. In these instances, the photograph, then, provides a form of 'proof' of the new physical reality. Moreover, the photograph offers a form of evidence that the person 'is' who they believed themselves to be all along. This is because the photograph also "blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory." (Barthes, 1993: 91)

The indexical trace (the photograph can be understood as a trace that is left behind by the referent) allows a subject to regard the image of themselves, in their new form, from an external position which is aligned with that from which they view representations of other people. Thus the photograph contributes towards enabling the person to establish a new place in the world by inserting their own 'certified' image alongside those of others. These factors make photography a particularly appropriate medium through which to explore the relationship between gender, self-image, and the external environment in transgender experiences.

Photography's capacity to record and highlight political issues is also important with regard to transgender experiences. Since 1995 the photographer, Mariette Pathy Allen (Active), has documented the transgender political movement and her pictures of protests, vigils, and marches (Figures 7 and 11) constitute

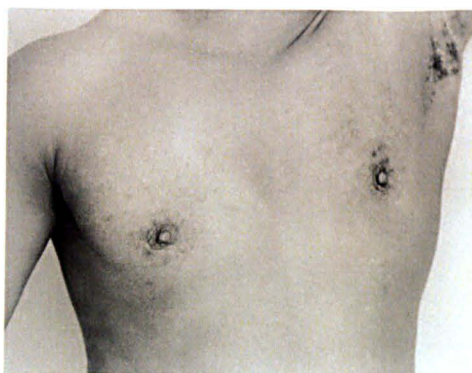


Figure 19.

'Our bodies, chest: subject 2', 1996. Photograph by Loren Cameron. Gelatin-silver print, 30" x 40". Owned by the photographer.

an important record of the increasing political awareness in the community.²⁵ Then, in 1996 the photographer Loren Cameron (1959 -) published the first photographs taken by a transsexual man exploring his identity. Central to this work is Cameron's need to be 'seen' and his use of the medium as a vehicle for self-visibility. Cameron asserts that:

What was initially a crude documentation of my own personal journey gradually evolved into an impassioned mission. Impulsively, I began to photograph other transsexuals that I know, feeling compelled to make images of their emotional and physical triumphs. I was fuelled by my need to be validated and wanted, in turn, to validate them. I wanted the world to see us, I mean, really see us...For the longest time transsexuals and especially transsexual men (female-to-males) have been virtually invisible to the dominant culture. Marginalised even within the gay and lesbian subculture, transsexuals have occupied no real space of our own. (1996: 11,12)

Cameron's work provides important information for the female-to-male transsexual community on surgical procedures and presents a positive view of

²⁵ A review of Pathy Allen's work, written by myself, was published in the *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 9 (1), 2006.



Figure 20.

'God's will', 1995. Photograph by Loren Cameron.

Gelatin-silver print, 40" x 30". Owned by the photographer.

living as a transman. His text and image works together to depict role models, showing that female-to-male people can become integrated into mainstream society, undertake employment, gain acceptance by biological males, and have their bodies approved by female and male sexual partners. When photographed clothed his subjects are identified by name. However, images that show the body isolate specific parts and the pictures are not defined or described by the subjects' names. Rather, they are identified by the surgical procedures the individuals have undergone in a way that is reminiscent of the medical documentation of transsexual changes shown earlier in Figure 6. In other words, a separation between the person and the body is created.

The exception to this portrayal of the transsexual body is Cameron's autobiographical work, which includes clothed and naked self-portraits. The latter of these depict the female-to-male transman as strong and in control of his own body. These pictures can be construed as a 'theatre of the physical' as it is the body itself that is used to assert that the transman is powerful. In *God's Will* (Figure 20) Cameron photographs himself in a body building pose that displays his well-defined musculature. He looks directly at the camera with confidence, presenting a challenge to the viewer. This is a potent male image depicting the transman as a force to be reckoned with. The conflicting signs of sex and gender in both the body and Cameron's presentation contribute an additional dynamism to the picture. Cameron exhibits his masculinity without the necessity of having been born a biological male.

The need for visibility that gave rise to Cameron's photography also underpins the photographer Catherine Opie's (1961 -) series titled *Portraits* (1993 - 1996). Opie asserts that she wanted to depict the sub-cultural community to which she belonged because of the inadequate representation that the community was being given. She explains: "I probably wouldn't have done the work if I hadn't felt that I didn't like the way my community was being represented in the world." (2000: 44) The community to which she refers is the Los Angeles SM leather community and *Portraits* includes pictures of lesbian women, gay men, transvestites, drag queens, and transsexual people. It has been described as "an anthropological study of every imaginable variant of gender possibility and sexual preference." (Bush, 2000: 42)

In *Portraits* Opie's subjects are photographed against coloured backgrounds that frame the person in the picture. Opie argues that it was important to take the subjects out of their environments in order to avoid connotations of documentary photography. Her use of colour is a device to "isolate them, because the art is really what they're doing with their bodies." (2000: 44)

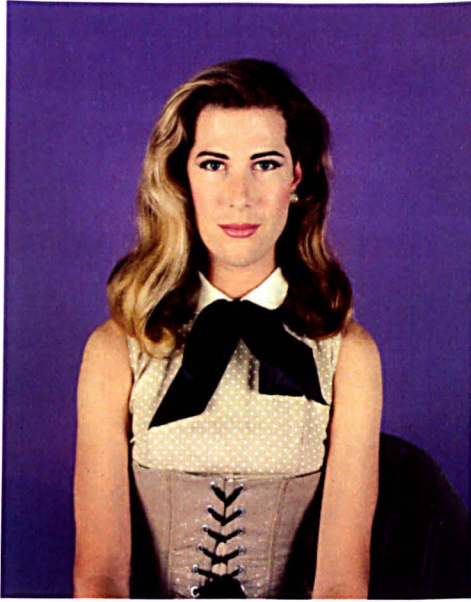


Figure 21.

'Justin Bond', 1993. Photograph by Catherine Opie. Chromogenic print, 20" x 16". Exhibited in *Catherine Opie*, The Photographers Gallery, London, 2000.

The iconic presentation of the subjects in Opie's *Portraits* bears a similarity to that of Cameron's self-portrait and also occurs in much of the photography by Del LaGrace Volcano (1957 -) (Figure 27) whose work constitutes an inquiry into the performance of identities, both of gender and sexual orientation.

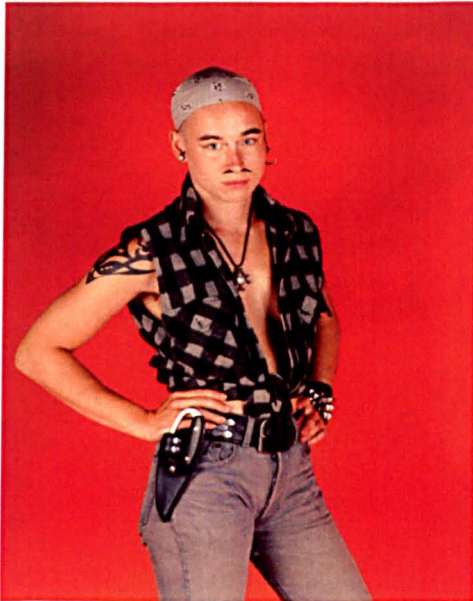


Figure 22.

'Idexa', 1993. Photograph by Catherine Opie. Chromogenic print, 20" x 16". Exhibited in *Catherine Opie*, The Photographers Gallery, London, 2000.



Figure 23.

'Self-portrait', ca.1928. Photograph by Claude Cahun. Gelatin-silver print, 11 ¹³/₁₆" x 9 ³/₈". Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes.

LaGrace Volcano's work builds on the notion of gender play previously explored by Claude Cahun (1894 – 1954) (Figure 23), Andy Warhol (1928 – 1987) (Figure 24), and Robert Mapplethorpe (1946 – 1989) (Figures 25 and 26). The performance of the self is also emphasised in Opie's and Cameron's pictures.

In relation to my argument a parallel may be drawn between these two concepts of performativity - the performance of the self in everyday life and the presentation for the camera. Peggy Phelan claims: "All portrait photography is fundamentally performative" (1993: 35) and cites Richard Avedon's account of portraiture. Avedon (1923 - 2004) asserts:



Figure 24.

'Self-portrait in drag' 1986. Photograph by Andy Warhol. Polaroid photograph, 3 ³/₄" x 2 ¹³/₁₆". Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

I can understand being troubled by this idea...because it seems to imply some kind of artifice that conceals the truth about the sitter. But that's not it at all.

The point is that you can't get at the thing itself, the real nature of the sitter, by stripping away at the surface. The surface is all you've got...All that you can do is to manipulate that surface – gesture, costume, expression... (1989: 17)

Avedon's claim highlights the photographer's role in constructing the portrait. As Susan Sontag suggests: "...nobody takes the same picture of the same thing...photographs are evidence not only of what's there but of what an individual sees, not just a record but an evaluation of the world." (1977:88) In other words, the photographer's subjectivity impacts on the picture that is produced. This is an issue to which I will return later in this section. Avedon argues that portrait photographers learned about acting by studying painters' self-portraits, and names Rembrandt in particular (1989:16). Similarly, Roland Barthes has described

photography as being "a kind of primitive theatre" (1980: 32). In *Camera Lucida* Barthes describes different aspects of performing the self that take place when he is photographed:

In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art. In other words a strange action: I do not stop imitating myself... I invariably suffer a sensation of inauthenticity, sometimes of imposture. (1980: 13)

Phelan argues that this performative aspect of photography develops out of an uncertainty of what we look like. As a consequence we imagine what others see when they look at us and attempt to perform those images, whilst basing these ideas "on what we think we see when we look at people we believe we resemble" (1993: 36). This process of identification, as I have discussed, is central to Lacan's mirror stage theory and, as Goffman suggests, permeates everyday presentations of the self (1990:32). Thus the performance of the self that is at the centre of photographic portraiture parallels the performativity of the presentation of the self in everyday life and when photographed is mediated through the role of the photographer.

Jay Prosser uses the term 'ph/autographer' when describing LaGrace Volcano's practice and argues that for LaGrace Volcano photographing others has been a process of self-exploration (2000: 11). In *The Drag King Book* LaGrace Volcano describes the process of 'ph/autography' when he asserts:

I spent my adolescence destroying all the photographs of myself I could find. I simply could not believe the evidence before my eyes. That wasn't me! I kept looking but I couldn't see. Where was I? I've been taking photographs



Figure 25.
'Self-portrait', 1980. Photograph by Robert Mapplethorpe.
Gelatin-silver print, 20" x 16". Solomon R. Guggenheim
Museum, New York.



Figure 26.
'Self-portrait', 1980. Photograph by Robert Mapplethorpe.
Gelatin-silver print, 20" x 16". Solomon R. Guggenheim
Museum, New York.

for over twenty years and never thought of myself as a self-portraitist. Yet if I take a closer look I have to admit that I've been photographing myself surreptitiously almost without knowing it from the beginning. I've imagined the image and become the *imago*. (1999: 27)

Whilst Cahun, Mapplethorpe, and Warhol are exploring their personal gender identities through photography, LaGrace Volcano, Cameron, and Opie are additionally self-consciously documenting a sub-cultural phenomenon and providing representation for a marginalised community. In all of this work, with the exception of Cameron's, it is the subjects' shared identities that are explored and displayed. The lived experiences of the individuals do not form a part of the photography. Dector suggests that: "Opie has employed portraiture as a way to indicate kinship" (2000: 52) and Bush asserts that "despite the complex signage that these artful semioticians of gender deploy on the surface of their bodies, despite their availability to Opie's camera, they don't reveal themselves." (2000: 42)



Figure 27.

'Gianni and Hans', London, 1996. Photograph by Del LaGrace Volcano. Published in Halberstam and LaGrace Volcano, 1999, *The Drag King Book*, London: Serpents Tail.

With regard to another series of Opie's pictures, *Domestic*, in which Opie portrays lesbian families, Ferguson raises the issue of "the ongoing debate about the responsibility of photographers, especially from marginalised groups, to make 'positive images'" (2000: 49). Ferguson here articulates a concern that bears a similarity to the cultural essentialism that took place in the 1980s. During this period the drive to "challenge negative stereotypes and to replace them with positive, even celebratory counter-images" led to a belief that only people from a specific cultural background could photograph others of the same background, and in particular that only black people could photograph other black people (Hall, 2001: 15). This reduced the identity of the artist to one dimension whereby what the person was actually trying to articulate became lost through the filter of emphasis residing in the colour of the skin. Margaret Dubbin, in her writing on collections of photographs of Native American tribal people, terms this "the spurious canon of the 'of-and-by'." Dubbin argues that "although well-meaning and arguably even ethnographically appropriate, the canon of the 'of-and-by' ultimately fails as an aesthetic strategy for the display and interpretation of photographs." (1999:71)

The notion that it is necessary to produce positive images of transgender people appears to be a key factor influencing the ways in which the subjects are portrayed in these bodies of work, and it is this that results in the identity of the person being depicted, but not the experiences of the individual. Opie, and Prosser in his writing about LaGrace Volcano's pictures, have tried to distance the work in question from the photography of Diane Arbus (1923 - 1971), which they view as presenting negative images of the people in the pictures. Arbus's work predates that of Opie and LaGrace Volcano and is historically important in that it shifted the boundaries of what was considered acceptable with regard to subject matter. Opie argues:

I try to present people with an extreme amount of dignity. I mean, they're always going to be stared at, but I try to make

the portraits stare back. That's what the relationship's all about. I mean, it's not like Diane Arbus or anything like that. Some of the portraits look very sad, I think, they have this distant gaze, but they are never pathetic. (2000:45)

Whilst Prosser asserts:

While LaGrace Volcano shares similar territory with fellow photographer Diane Arbus – namely in the subject of marginal sexual and gender communities – in approach, LaGrace Volcano and Arbus could not be more different. LaGrace Volcano unfailingly avoids the kind of objectification that characterises an Arbus portrait. In Arbus everyone is a freak *a priori*... (2000: 10)

I would suggest that these arguments fail to take into account a critical aspect of Arbus's photography. Arbus appears to be compelled to use photography to gain access to other people's experiences, and in particular, she is drawn to people whose experiences of life are very different from her own. Yet, at the same time her personal drive to make the pictures, and the relationship between Arbus and the subjects she photographs, indicates a similar 'ph/autography' to that of LaGrace Volcano. The Lacanian process of identification with images, when applied to Arbus's work, provides a very different reading to that offered by Opie and Prosser.

Arbus's pictures do not necessarily project a positive view of humanity, however, she did not only photograph "marginal sexual and gender communities" (Prosser, 2000:10). Her work includes the wealthy, the privileged, and members of so-called 'normal' society, all of whom are photographed so as to render them in some way strange. Drawing on my own involvement with photography, I contend that Arbus's work constitutes a personal statement that is indicative of



Figure 28.

'Lady at a masked ball with two roses on her dress', N.Y.C., 1967.

Photograph by Diane Arbus. Gelatin-silver print, 16" x 20". Carole Christensen Lieff Gallery, Santa Barbara, California.

her emotional being and discordant relationship with the world. Photographing other people provided Arbus with a way of articulating her own experiences.

Arbus's private involvement with her photography can be demonstrated by looking at imagery recurring in her work, for instance her preoccupation with masks. Figure 29 shows a contact print from 1957, Figure 28, a picture from 1967, and Figure 30 a print from *Untitled*, Arbus's last series of photographs taken in 1970 - 71. In these images, children, a woman at a ball, and residents from a mental institution at Halloween are all shown wearing masks. This theme features consistently throughout Arbus's career and indicates a concern that goes beyond the person behind the mask or their identity. I would suggest that it is the fact that the person is wearing a mask that is at the centre of Arbus's preoccupation and it is this that drives her to photograph these images. The mask also appears in other less obvious forms in her photography. For instance, the



Figure 29.
 ‘Two masked children in Times Square’. From contact sheet 327, 1957, by Diane Arbus. Print by Neil Selkirk. The Estate of Diane Arbus.

woman’s face in *Puerto Rican woman with a beauty mark* from 1965 (Figure 31) bears a similarity to the masks in Figure 29. The hair and headscarf transform the face into a shape that echoes that of the masks worn by the children. The eyes and mouth are exaggerated through the woman’s use of make-up and in contrast to their darkness her skin appears almost too smooth and pale to be real skin.

Whilst Opie and LaGrace Volcano’s work centres on the notion of the performance of gender and sexual identities, Arbus’s photography highlights the presentation of the self and the fact that, as Kate Bornstein argues “everyone is passing” (1994:127). As I discussed earlier, Park suggests that “the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask” (Park quoted in Goffman, 1990: 30). At times, rather than showing the achievement of successfully ‘passing’, Arbus’s pictures reveal the failure to do so.

The argument outlined above, as I suggested, originates from insights into my own practice. In my work specific imagery has resurfaced time and again during my artistic career, (Figures 33 and 34), which I recognise as stemming from the identification process outlined in Lacan’s ‘mirror stage’. Figure 32 shows an early pastel drawing of a life model from my art college days. At the time,



Figure 30.
 'Untitled (4)', 1970 – 71. Photograph by Diane Arbus. Print by Neil Selkirk. Gelatin-silver print, 16" x 20". National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.



Figure 31.
 'Puerto Rican woman with a beauty mark', N.Y.C., 1965. Photograph by Diane Arbus. Gelatin-silver print, 20" x 16". The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

everyone who saw the drawing assumed it was a self-portrait because the image looked remarkably like myself and did not look at all like the model. Shortly after this drawing I began to produce pictures of myself as the clown. Figure 33 is a photograph of the drag queen Millie Mopp, taken in 1999 at our first meeting, which was such a powerful encounter that it spawned the shift in my artwork to the use of photography. On meeting Millie I was captivated by the fact that when I looked at her I felt that I was looking at an image of myself. I knew that there were considerable differences in our appearances, but nonetheless it was as if I was looking at a distorted, exaggerated version of myself. I now feel that many of the photographs I have taken since then, for instance Figure 34 of Ruby Venezuela, can be construed as being associated with the other two images in that I am drawn to photograph images with which I identify. At the time of taking the photographs in Figures 33 and 34 I was unaware of any connection with the previous imagery.

Following this, I suggest that Arbus's pictures are also the result of Lacanian image identification playing out through the process of photography. However, the recognition that takes place here is not with an idealised version of the self, rather, it is with a darker aspect.

Arbus acknowledges this process of identification herself when she asserts: "There are always two things that happen. One is recognition and the other is that it's totally peculiar. But there's some sense in which I always identify with them." (1972:1) In a letter to her friends Alex Eliot and Jane Winslow, Arbus wrote:

It's like going around in a mirrorless world asking everyone you meet to describe you and everyone says endlessly, 'you have a face even as I do and your eyes are bluer and big,' and even, 'my smile when I look at you is you,' but you don't believe it and then one day you bump smack into a stone wall and no one hears you say, 'ouch', and your whole problem is solved. (2003: 101)



Figure 32.
'Clown', pastel drawing, 30" x 20",
1976. Private collection.

Figure 33.
'Millie Mopp at the *Man as Muse* private
view', London, 1999. C-type print, 12" x 10".





Figure 34.
 'Ruby Venezuela', London, 2000. C-type print, 30" x 20". Exhibited in *Orlando's Butterflies*, Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, Lower Gallery, 2000.

Psychologically or emotionally-charged responses to images can also form a part of the editing stage of the picture-making process. Arbus's selection of images demonstrates how this can affect the portrayal of the person in the photograph. Figure 35 is of two pictures from a sheet of contact prints from 1962 of a young boy with a toy hand grenade. Negative number 10 (on the left) is the picture that Arbus selected to print. In this picture the child is shown to be tense and his clothing awry. The other contact projects a very different view of the boy. He is more relaxed and he appears to be friendly and unthreatening as he poses for the picture. Arbus's choice of image has an almost menacing quality.

The photographer, Lisette Model (1901 – 1983), Arbus's teacher and mentor, argues that: "[p]hotographs that demand admiration have a power to disturb...The best photographs are often subversive, unreasonable, delirious". Model asserts that the relationship between the photographer and the subject "can be a confrontation, a conversation, an occasion fraught with emotion, but some sort of visceral exchange is necessary to make the photograph valid." (Model quoted in Bosworth, 1985: 134, 130)



Figure 35.

'Child with a toy hand grenade in Central Park', N.Y.C., 1962.

From contact sheet 1341, by Diane Arbus. The Estate of Diane Arbus.

Arbus's personal investment in the making of her pictures challenges "the presumed objectivity of the 'documentary', the presumption that the author could be detached from the subject." (Phillips, 2003: 63) Avedon extends this concept to photographic portraiture in general when he argues:

A portrait photographer depends upon another person to complete his picture. The subject imagined, which in a sense is me, must be discovered in someone else willing to take part in a fiction he cannot possibly know about. My concerns are not his. We have separate ambitions for the image. His need to plead his case probably goes as deep as my need to plead mine, but the control is with me. (1985: Foreword, n.p.)

Avedon's claim highlights the issue of the subject's agency in relation to the picture that is created. Opie asserts that the people in her photographs are "completely manipulated" by her and has said that although the reaction to her pictures is usually positive some of the people depicted "can't live with the

portraits I do of them” (2000: 45). Whilst Arbus wrote that “...photographing is really the business of stealing” (2003: 147).

A contrasting relationship between the photographer and the subject is to be found in Nan Goldin’s (1953 -) work. Goldin’s photography includes pictures of her close friends, several of whom are transgendered. She describes her friends as being like a family to her (1996: 27). Her photography presents an intimate view that Marvin Heiferman describes as “the diary of the life that Nan Goldin likes to say she lets people read” (1996: 278). Goldin’s work is driven by the need to share the other’s experience and, in particular, a person’s relationship with themselves (Sartorius, 1996: 449). Goldin explains: “It’s about trying to feel what another person is feeling. There’s a glass wall between people, and I want to break it...the emotional need comes first, and then the pictures.” (1996: 448) Despite Goldin’s closeness to the people she photographs, the subjects of her images have not always been happy for their pictures to be shown because of the way in which they are portrayed (Goldin, 1996:101, 140, 451).

What comes to the fore through all of these texts is that there is a considerable difference between the photographer’s drive to produce the image



Figure 36.

‘Misty and Jimmy Paulette in a taxi’, N.Y.C., 1991. Photograph by Nan Goldin. Cibachrome print, 30” x 40”. Collection of Gerry and David Pincus.

and the subject's involvement in the process. How the subject would like to be pictured and the photographer's perspective constitute two different points of view. This can be the case, for instance as with Goldin, even when the people in the pictures are intimately involved with the person taking the picture and despite the fact that the photographer may be concerned with feeling "what another person is feeling" (Goldin, 1996: 448). As Avedon asserts, the control is ultimately in the photographer's hands. This issue is significant in the context of my project and has influenced the design of my methodology, which will be discussed in the next section.

Summary

I have reviewed here the most important photographic work relevant to my study. The photographers discussed have all, in their different ways, explored the issues that have concerned me. The question of visibility and representation is central to the pictures of Cameron, Opie, and La Grace Volcano. Their work highlights the parallel that can be drawn between photographic portraiture and the performance of the self in everyday life. Using Arbus's work as an example I have sought to demonstrate that the photographer's personal investment in the pictures s/he produces is significant. I have also endeavoured to illustrate that the relationship between the photographer, the image that is produced, and the subject of the photograph is complex.

Methodology

My methodology builds on the issues described above and takes into consideration the premise that personal accounts and agency are essential to generating knowledge about social groups, particularly where there is a sense of misrepresentation or where the subjects are invisible in society. Accordingly, I set out to design a methodology that would facilitate the participants' involvement in the research process and in the making of their own pictures. I wanted to use a process of mediation to present the subjects' perceptions, rather than my

own, and to develop methods for creating portraits from their points of view. In other words, my aim has been to work with the subjects to produce images that were meaningful to them. Thus the participants' involvement in the research process was essential to the measure of success that the study would achieve. In order to encourage their engagement, I developed a form of photo-elicitation, adapted from the methodology that has evolved in visual anthropology and visual sociology.

Modern approaches to photo-elicitation empower subjects by promoting their active involvement in the research process. During the course of the research this method enabled a dynamic interaction between the participants and myself to develop that allowed our respective voices to come out and constituted a two-way process, rather than a more conventional one-way flow of information from the subject to the researcher. This type of research in this kind of community has not been previously undertaken.

The researcher, John Collier, first named photo-elicitation in 1957 (Harper, 2002: 14). Photo-elicitation uses photographs in interviews in order to trigger responses. Pictures can be made by the researcher, the participant, or they may be from archives or personal collections (Harper, 2002:19). Edwards suggests that: "Photographs are active in the dialogue..." (2003: 87) and asserts that they have:

...enormous potential...for opening alternative histories
and giving different forms of expression to telling histories.
Photography can do this precisely because it invites also a
subjective, internalised response, even a purely emotional
response, that references different experiences and opens a
space for their articulation. (2003: 97)

A further use of photographs to tell personal histories was developed by the photographer Jo Spence and her co-counselling colleague, Rosy Martin. The process is termed 'photo therapy' and combines photography and techniques

from psychodrama, re-framing, and co-counselling. Photo-therapy centres on using the performative space that photography facilitates to play out roles relating to one's own history. It aims to "unlock" past histories and to transform these through the use of pictures that are made in the present. Spence and Martin assert that they have "demonstrated to ourselves that there is no single self but many fragmented selves, each vying for conscious expression" (Spence, 1988: 173). Whilst photo-therapy aims to reveal personal insights photo-elicitation seeks to encourage responses from another person in a research context.

Douglas Harper, founding editor of the journal *Visual Sociology*, suggests that there is a biological foundation for the difference between people's responses to images and words and that this may be why photographs used in interviews give rise to a particular form of response. Harper asserts:

...the parts of the brain that process visual information are evolutionarily older than the parts that process verbal information. Thus images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words...These may be some of the reasons the photo elicitation interview seems like not simply an interview process that elicits more information, but rather one that evokes a different kind of information. (2002: 13)

Harper claims that the information that results is owing to the fact that photo-elicitation "mines deeper shafts into a different part of human consciousness than do words-alone interviews." (2002: 23) This potential underpins the practice-led basis of this study.

My intention was that photo-elicitation would enable participants' responses to photographs we would produce, images of others, and photographs from their past, to inform the development of subsequent pictures. Furthermore, my aim was that each interview/photography session would build on the previous outcomes. In this way the research would become a continuously advancing

process of collaboration between the participants and myself with photography at the centre.

The research was reflexive for both the participants and researcher. Participants were asked to develop ideas for how they would like to be photographed and they were also asked at times to take their own pictures thus controlling the process of making images of themselves. Such instances altered my role as photographer and enabled the participant to become both the observing 'subject' and the observed 'object' in the photograph.

Figure 37 is an outcome from one of these sessions. It illustrates how the process of the participants taking their own photographs worked in practical terms. It is a picture of Michael taken when he was half way through his phalloplasty surgeries. When I asked Michael to photograph himself he immediately assumed body building poses. I set up a camera with a zoom lens half way between Michael on one side of the room and a large mirror on the other. In order for Michael to place himself within the frame, I momentarily stood in the position in which he now appears in the picture. This allowed Michael (using a zoom

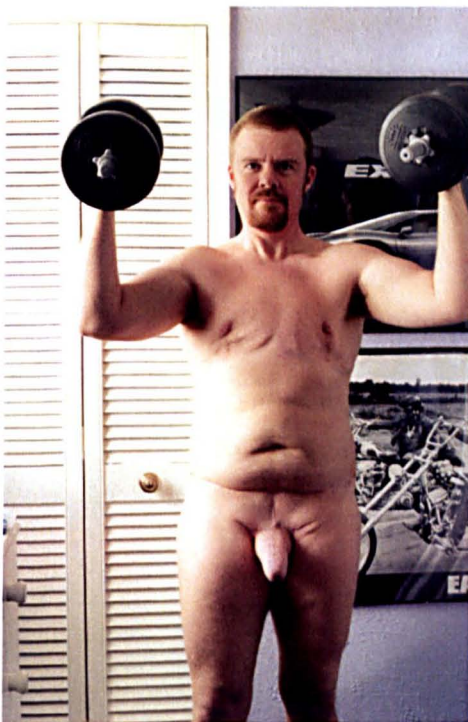


Figure 37.
Michael auto-portrait, half way through the
phalloplasty surgeries, 24.05.03. C-type print,
12" x 10".

lens) to adjust the amount of the surrounding environment that would be seen in relation to the scale of the figure. A cable release, operating the camera's shutter, was then positioned underneath Michael's right foot. In this way Michael could pose whilst looking at his reflection in the mirror and press down on the cable release whenever he wanted to take a picture. This method enabled pictures to be made without the photographer interfering in the process. These photo-sessions provided much useful information and insightful results.

In interviews participants' responses to photographs from prior sessions were documented. Audio-visual recordings were also made of several photo-sessions. In these instances the camcorder was set up in one place and was left to run. I would change tapes when necessary. The recordings transformed the relationship between myself (photographer) as 'subject' and the participant as observing 'object' into a further configuration whereby both the participant and the photographer become the object. Thus the interactions between the participants and myself could be observed from a different viewpoint and I was able to examine the process that took place in making the photographs.²⁶

Despite the information gained by participants taking their own portraits, some subjects expressed feeling uncomfortable with this procedure. I would suggest that this may stem from a desire to produce photographs that would enable the subject to see their own image from an external position. In this case my role as photographer/observer would be construed as an essential part of the process. For people who are uncertain as to whether they will be accepted by others on the basis of their visual presentation, my role in constructing a picture of their self-projection constitutes an important perspective. The exterior viewpoint is aligned both with the standpoint of others and the position that is held in relation to the self-image. Involving subjects in the process of making

26 In photo-sessions documented in this way participants appeared to forget that the sessions were being recorded. However, in interviews with the camcorder placed directly in front of where we were seated there was a tendency for people to become more inhibited than in the sessions where the interview was recorded with a small dictaphone.



Figure 38.

Video still: photo-shoot with Robert, 14.03.04.

Digital inkjet print, 8" x 10".

photographs and reviewing pictures revealed that there was a significant need for photographs to affirm the self-image. As I outlined earlier, the interaction that takes place between the internal self-image and the external world is highly dynamic, with the visual world constituting an interface between the two.

Practice and Theory, Theory and Practice

The methodology overall is based on an integrated relationship, whereby practice and theory mutually inform one another. It combines photographic practice, recorded interviews, and theoretical analysis. I originally intended that the three elements would follow the same path with each of the participants throughout the study. This strategy, however, had to be adjusted as the research progressed and the participants' individual experiences brought different issues to the fore.

The primary factor influencing this continual shift was that participants were asked to suggest ideas for pictures that they would like to have taken. These provided significant insights into the participants' self-perceptions and important areas for further exploration. For instance, the early research undertaken with Kitty suggested that the photographic sessions formed an arena whereby the

development and externalisation of the self-image might be observed. This issue will be elaborated on later in this section and will be explored more fully in chapter five. On the other hand, the photographs led by Robert, discussed in chapter six, developed out of his awareness of the gender polarities as socially constructed categories and transgender politics, introducing the possibility that pictures of the atypical body might present a challenge to the gender dichotomy. In order to explore these concerns, the research needed to advance along lines that were determined by the central issues and how they became manifested through the participants' experiences. The concerns that individuals brought to the fore were then examined in the work undertaken with all participants.

Additionally, the theoretical perspectives defined earlier informed questions asked of participants and photographs were made exploring the outcomes. In turn, insights gained from participants' accounts were used to interrogate the theoretical positions. The practical work was reviewed in relation to a range of theoretical models and further theory was explored as an outcome of issues raised by the participants. Later photographic sessions built on earlier developments. The relationship between the photographs, interviews and the secondary research is thus intrinsically interconnected.

An example of the interplay between practice, theory, and the participants' accounts is provided by my inquiry into the performance of gender. In the early stages of the study I read the feminist philosopher Judith Butler's texts on the performativity of gender, outlined in the previous chapter. At this time, engaging with the 'nature or nurture' argument, I believed gender emerged from a single source and that it was a cultural construct. Butler's theory develops this concept further. She suggests that there is no essential gender. Rather, gender "ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylised repetition of acts." (1990: 179)

I then asked questions of the participants in line with Butler's theoretical position that gender is a socially mediated performance that exists independently of an internal essence. As I shall demonstrate in my discussion of Karen in the following chapter, this brought to the fore the procedures by which participants negotiated their gender presentations, along with the period of transition from one gender role to the other. The transition period clearly emerged as a time of conscious awareness and appropriation of gender signs.

On an initial reading of the participants' responses, it could be construed that the processes involved in changing gender roles support the theoretical position that gender is no more than a performative act. However, on analysing the participants' accounts, it became evident that they experience some form of essential gender. This internal factor is mediated through the external environment in which there are only two recognised genders with distinct characteristics. Thus transitions from one gender role to the other may take place.

This exploration supports Butler's theory in that gender is "a performative accomplishment" (1990: 179), but the theory does not tell the full story. The participants' accounts indicate, as the case studies will demonstrate, that the reality of gender is more complex. Whilst gender can only be observed through external factors, the internal realm should not be excluded.

Photographs suggested by the participants were being produced at the same time as this theoretical inquiry. The first series of photographs taken with Robert, exploring the notion of gender as a performed social construct, were made at his request prior to my questions on the subject. Similarly, David, a female-to-male participant expressly asked that we take photographs in public spaces, rather than in his personal environment, as it is in the external space that his gender becomes activated. The photographs relating to the performativity of gender that were made with Robert will be discussed in chapter six, together with his perspective on this issue, and those that were taken with Karen as an outcome of my questions will be explored in chapter three.

The Participants

At the outset of the project I began taking photographs and conducting interviews with a range of transgender people. It soon became apparent that there were fundamental differences in the groups, the main distinction being between people for whom the body constitutes a significant focus and those whose changes are made primarily through clothing. Owing to these differences within groupings, I felt it was necessary to select one group from the range of transgender identities. I decided to concentrate on people who were making, or had made, physical changes, and thus the body would constitute a central theme in this study.

Underpinning the design of my methodology was an awareness of the participants as individual human beings and the need for this to be brought to the fore, rather than the larger, more scientific research focusing on the general category of transsexual people going through surgery. In order to generate detailed information, a core group of nine people were selected from twenty-three transsexual people I had previously photographed and a larger group of my acquaintance. From the group of nine, four people were then selected as case studies. All nine people participated over the four-year duration of the research, although more work was undertaken with the case study participants than the others.

My rationale for undertaking research with a small focus group, rather than working with a large number of informants in single sessions, was that the latter would have provided general information but would not have allowed for a close working relationship to develop. This relationship was an important factor in the research, as the details the participants disclosed were highly personal and a considerable level of trust was needed for the research to be fruitful.

The case studies were chosen to present four different gender identities. Two of the participants are female-to-male transsexual people and two are male-to-female. Whilst two subjects self-identify beyond the female/male dichotomy, two have now positioned themselves within the opposite category to their sex at birth. During the course of the research, one of the female-to-male and one of the

male-to-female participants were undergoing genital surgeries. I was particularly interested in observing emotional changes and shifts in personal perspectives that might occur in the period directly before and after genital surgery, as this constitutes a focal point for many transsexual people.

I originally made contact with the participants in a number of different ways. From 2000 onwards I took photographs in clubs known to be transgender meeting places. During these visits I met some of the people who later took part in this study. Karen, for instance, was entering an *Alternative Miss London* competition at the *Way Out* club when we first met. Then, in 2001, I began a photographic project into the physical changes that are brought about by taking hormones of the opposite sex in people changing gender roles. These include breast development, the redistribution of body fat, and the softening of hair and skin in male-born people taking female hormones. In female-born people taking testosterone changes also include the redistribution of body fat, as well as clitoral enlargement, the growth of facial and body hair, and the voice breaking. Whilst I knew people who were transitioning from a male to a female gender role, I did not know anyone who was changing the other way round. I felt it was important to explore both perspectives and in order to make contact with female-to-male people I sent out an email request to everyone I knew. This was forwarded to others and passed on through the transgender networks. As a result, I met Robert, Michael, and several other female-to-male people. At social occasions I was introduced to other people who later became participants. Kitty was an exception in that she contacted me as a result of seeing a photograph of mine from the 2001 project in the London *Time Out* magazine. The relevance of Kitty's response to the picture will be discussed in chapter five.

Ethics

From the start of the project I was aware of the importance of undertaking clear ethical parameters which would inform and mitigate both the research and especially its dissemination as this could have a highly negative impact on the

participants' lives. By taking part in this study the contributors risked exposure of their transsexual status in areas of their lives where it might not be known and disapproval from family members who have difficulty in coming to terms with the changes their offspring or siblings have made. As a result of photographs and interview extracts being exhibited and published the participants could face the kind of discrimination and oppression discussed in chapter one. This thesis raises important ethical issues on research methods that might be seen to have a broader context in scholarship.

Participants were informed of the study's aims and research methods at the outset. Participants were given the option to remain anonymous or to use pseudonyms and they were notified of their right to withdraw from the project at any time. Only people who were able to give informed consent have been included in the research.

From the beginning I gave the participants control over whether or not I could show their photographs and the power to refuse the use of interview extracts. I anticipated that I would only need to obtain permission once with regard to each picture or interview extract. During the project I changed my policy to accord with the concerns of the most cautious of the participants. Gerry, a female-to-male participant, did not want to give consent other than for specific outputs, as and when they occurred. I felt that Gerry's concern brought to the fore an important issue and immediately complied with his wishes. As a result, I was able to include Gerry's pictures and an interview extract in conference papers given in Sydney and New York, an exhibition in Sydney, and a seminar I presented at Oxford University. I was not able to use the photographs in a London exhibition, on a web site, or in a paper written for journal publication. Additionally, the interview extract that was featured was not the section I originally wanted to include.

I extended this way of requesting permission for each output to all participants. This aspect of the research leaves me feeling rather uneasy, both as a photographer and as a researcher. As a photographer, I have a specific attachment

to particular images and the work overall is extremely important to me. As a researcher, the uncertainty that this lends to the project makes me nervous, as I would rather know as I work that images and interview extracts can be used. As I intend to publish the outcomes from this study in book form and hope through dissemination to reach a wide audience, the repercussions of undertaking the research in this way will be revealed at a later stage. So far, I have had to make changes to the work I have wanted to use, but I have not been prevented from undertaking any of my output endeavours. As I have suggested, this raises important ethical issues that might be seen to have broader applications.

The Participant/Researcher Relationship

At the outset of the study I intended to keep a distance between the participants and myself, as I believed this would enable me to be more objective in reporting the research. As the study progressed, I found maintaining a distance became difficult. For instance, Karen was brought up by her grandparents, Peggy and Tom, and lives in their family home. When Peggy died in August 2003 I was invited to attend the funeral. In trying to maintain the distance that I felt was necessary as a researcher I decided not to attend and made my excuses. Soon after Peggy's death Tom asked if I could send him a photograph that I had taken several weeks earlier of the three of them. He later asked if I could match the size of one of the photographs of Peggy to another of her, taken in her youth, that he had framed on his dressing table. It became clear that my visits not only affected Karen, but also the family members who lived with her. Whilst I initially believed I could undertake the research and not have an impact on the participants or their families, I came to realise that this was not possible and, furthermore, that the researcher/participant relationship was a two-way experience/situation. This realisation is not original and the issue of the role of the researcher as part of the ethnography has been much debated in the field of anthropology.²⁷

²⁷ Essays on the impact of the anthropologist on the research and the way that it is reported can be found in, for example, Clifford and Marcus (1986).

Accepting the researcher/participant relationship enabled me to take into account the impact that my presence might be having on the lives of those involved in the project. Within a year Tom was diagnosed with cancer. In March 2006 he died. When Karen telephoned to ask if I would come to the funeral this time I said “yes” without hesitating.

At the time of writing this thesis I do not feel that the lack of distance described here has in any way been detrimental to the project. Conversely, I suggest that the opposite is true. Interacting with the participants from a more open and accessible position has enabled me to take part in their private lives and consequently has led me to appreciate more fully the richness therein.

Maintaining the relationships between the participants and myself has not always been easy. I believed that the photo-sessions needed to offer a space where the participants could express themselves without fear of judgement and I had to be open to anything that might occur. I became a confidant and a willing listener. Sometimes people would tell me things that they had never told anyone else and at times I was permitted to photograph private situations on the agreement that I would not show the pictures. The nature of the sessions led to my taking on an increasingly important role in the participants’ lives. Owing to this, more was required from me than just the interactions that took place during photo-sessions. At times I found this difficult, as the boundaries of research and my personal life blurred.

Sometimes I found the process of collaboration itself was problematic. Occasionally I was uncomfortable with issues that the participants wanted to explore through the platform that the photo-sessions provided. At times I had difficulty in suppressing my responses to participants’ suggestions for photographs and also in containing my reactions to pictures when they were printed. For instance, when I look at the naked photograph of Michael (Figure 39) I am concerned that the outcome of his phalloplasty surgeries does not look sufficiently close to a biologically formed penis and I am aware of the scars



Figure 39.

'Michael', 21.08.04. Taken on completion of the phalloplasty construction surgery. Digital lightjet print, 40" x 30". Exhibited in *Somatechnics*, Macquarie University Gallery, Sydney, Australia, 2005.

on Michael's body. In particular I am nervous about how these issues might be perceived by others. Michael's perspective is that the photographs show him in the way that for so long he has wanted to see himself and, to Michael, the scars are irrelevant. Thus my reservations about the pictures are not important in this context. To place my responses first would counteract Michael's perspective and in so doing would conceal his involvement in the research process, his experiences, and the journey he has had to take to get to where he is now. The scars and penis, both in the photographs and in his everyday life, are the traces of Michael's journey.

A further aspect of the collaborative nature of the study and the relationships that have developed between the participants and myself is that 'the relationship' has become visually represented as a specific concern in some of the photographs. This originally came about through visual aspects that came to the fore in the pictures, outlined below, together with an awareness that the relationships are, in a very real sense, a part of the work.

When the participants were photographing themselves, I was interested in the process of self-presentation for the camera. At the same time, I was aware that I was outside this process - that I was an observer. I began to photograph people



Figure 40.

Robert taking his own picture, 24.10. 03. C-type print, 8" x 10".

as they photographed themselves. In these pictures, for instance Figure 40, I am clearly positioned outside the encounter that takes place in the photograph, as this is between the subject and the camera they are using. My position (and subsequently that of the viewer) is emphasised spatially. I am clearly present in the making of the image, whilst outside the thrust of the action.

Following on from the ideas presented in these pictures, together with an awareness of the subject/object relationship, a series of photographs were produced as an offshoot from the main body of research (Figure 41). In this series Robert and I swap roles between the person who is observing and the one who is being observed. On viewing these pictures Robert commented that this is what we are doing in our work together. Robert is studying me at the same time as I am studying him.

This series also highlights what I perceive to be an imbalance of power between the participants being naked, whilst I am clothed. (This is the case in the majority of the photo-sessions.) The nakedness suggests a vulnerability in



Figure 41.

'Robert and I', 28.03.04. C-type prints, each photograph: 8" x 10".

comparison to the person who is clothed. This power imbalance reflects that of the object/subject relationship that permeates the sitter/photographer correlation. A more recent set of photographs (Figure 42) depicts Robert and myself naked in the same space. My aim in these pictures is to suggest that whilst the female-born, feminine-identified body may be widely construed to be more 'natural' than the hormonally and surgically altered body of the transman, they are in fact both constituted in and through culture. Thus my own body is no more 'natural' than Robert's. The environment in which we are photographed is intended to emphasise that nature is viewed through a cultural lens.



Figure 42.

'Nature and Culture: Robert and I', 19.02.06. C-type print, 8" x 10".

In order to facilitate transparency I will proceed by providing a background to my interest in transgender issues. In chapter one I described my uncle's situation. However, I did not learn of Ken's desire to become a female until a little over a year ago. My mother told me his story because of my work. The shame that my mother felt with regard to Ken's transsexuality is indicated by the fact that she asked me not to tell my brother or sister about it. I was very moved to hear Ken's story but also angry that within my own family there was such shame associated with being a transsexual person. Learning about my uncle strengthened the desire to use my research to contribute towards highlighting transsexual people's position in society and removing the stigma attached to transsexuality, but it was not the trigger for the work.

My initial interest in the area began much earlier and stems from my own experiences of gender. Whilst I was granted a female sex at birth I grew up insecure with regard to my gender. In my mind I always fell short of the stereotypical models of femininity that I longed to achieve. I felt that I was not feminine enough and (as gender follows biology) that if this was the case, then it must follow that I was to some extent male. In essence, I have spent my life uncomfortable with my body. From the age of nineteen or twenty onwards, originating in my personal experiences, my artwork has focused on issues of the body, gender, and sexuality.

Earlier in this chapter I described the dynamic encounter and the process of identification that took place when I met the drag queen, Millie Mopp, that led to my taking up photography. Following meeting Millie, I realised that I identified with the image she presented because of similarities on two counts. First, the image Millie displayed had been developed from sources that had influenced my own presentation (bleached blonde hair, kohl-winged eyes, red lipstick). Secondly, Millie's drag persona was a façade that was not intended to hide her maleness and consequently the superficially-constructed image was accentuated. Thus it was as if Millie's presentation revealed the process of creating a visual image to present to the world that I underwent on a daily basis.



Figure 43.
'Kitty and I', St James Park, 10.07.03.
C-type print, 5" x 7".

As I have mentioned, this encounter had a profound effect on me and I took up photography as a way of exploring the issue. I contacted Millie and through her I was introduced to other drag queens and cross-dressers. I then began to go to bars and clubs in London that are known to be transgender meeting places. At first the only camera I took with me was a compact automatic 'point-and-shoot' camera that I had bought some years earlier to take travelling. Eventually, I converted my studio to a photographic studio in order to work on a one-to-one basis with people.

In writing down my experiences I feel concerned that they may be seen by some as extreme, yet at the same time, I feel that there may also be similarities between my experiences of gender and those of other people. It is possible that through undertaking my artwork I have developed a heightened awareness of gender and how these issues play out in the visual realm. If I was not a visual artist the experiences may have been deemed unacceptable, have been self-censored, and consequently they might not be articulated.



Figure 44.

'Being a bride', date unknown.
Photograph from author's family
collection, re-printed as a digital
inkjet print, 7" x 5".

Whilst I am not transgender, during the course of this study I have become increasingly aware of many similarities between the experiences of the participants and my own. Kitty's account of her childhood and the course that her self-directed photography sessions have taken bring to mind one of the few photographs I am happy to show of myself. It is a childhood picture depicting my then favourite past time 'dressing up' and on this occasion I was "being a bride".

The photograph (Figure 44) presents an image within which I continue to see myself. (I do not mean by this that I continue to desire to be 'a bride'. The notion of 'the bride' in this context is an iconic stereotypical image of female beauty and it is easy to see why, as a child, I might have wanted to 'become' that image.) What I wonder is - in the photograph of myself 'being a bride' and in the pictures of Kitty draped to appear like a goddess (Figures 86 and 87) or reclining luxuriously on her sofa (Figure 46), are we not doing the same thing? Are we not both responding to images, appropriating them for ourselves, and externalising them? Is this not perhaps what the photographic sessions with Kitty are able to provide for her - not only a session similar to the play of childhood,



Figure 45.
'Olympia', 1863, by
Édouard Manet. Oil
on canvas,
51 $\frac{3}{8}$ '' x 74 $\frac{3}{4}$ '',
Musée d'Orsay,
Paris.



Figure 46.
'Kitty', 05.06.03.
Digital lightjet
print, 30'' x 40''.
Exhibited in
Somatechnics,
Macquarie
University Gallery,
Sydney, Australia,
2005.

but also a record of the absorption of the desired image of another into her own image, a record of the 'becoming' or 'being' that which she would like to be? Once again, Lacan's mirror stage theory surfaces in this study. Kitty's visualisation and appropriation of images from the broad visual environment, such as her self-reference to Manet's (1832 – 1883) *Olympia* (Figure 45), played out in the space provided by the photo-sessions can be construed as a practical manifestation of the mirror stage theory. The photo-sessions provide a space beyond the boundaries of everyday existence. This space functions like a key, unlocking the internal dialogue between the self-image and the external world that takes place through images.

In her performance of the self in Figure 46 Kitty ‘quotes’ from the visual sources that have influenced her self-image (Figure 45) and thus the photograph provides insight into the process of identifying with images of others. The subject sees the original image, recognises her/himself in the image, internalises it, incorporates it into the self-image, and subsequently externalises it through personal expression.

As I have discussed, the relationship between the subject, the photograph, and the photographer is complex and the photographer’s drive to produce images is a powerful force. After spending an intensive, extended period producing pictures that represent the participants’ points of view I needed on a personal level to produce work from my perspective. In one sense, I needed to put myself back in the picture. The series, titled *view point*, built on my experiences of working with the participants and developed out of the notions of ‘perspective’ and ‘position’ described earlier, together with the issue, discussed in chapter one, of the different ways in which transsexual people have been seen in society. My intention was to highlight the fact that the way in which transsexual people are perceived is just from one viewpoint and that this can not be construed as a definitive interpretation of reality.

Earlier in this section I also outlined my difficulties in showing pictures that I feel do not present the participants in the best possible light. With *view point* I also wanted to represent the subjects as ‘beautiful’. In other words, to present my perspective. Echoing the adornment of the body in *Being a Bride*, this series portrays the subjects surrounded by decorative elements, extending outwards from the body to the picture’s edge.

Exhibitions, Conference Papers, and Research Diaries

Figure 47 is of an exhibition of this work that was held at London College of Communication. To coincide with the opening night, an ‘in conversation’ event was held, hosted by Professor Janice Hart, Director of Research at the college.



Figure 47.
view point exhibition, London College of
 Communication, 2005. Digital lightjet prints,
 each photograph: 50" x 40".

This was open to research students and staff from all colleges of the University of the Arts London.

The exhibition gave me the opportunity to explore differences in scale and to see how this would affect the work. The photographs depicted in Figure 47 are over four feet high. On the opposite wall to these unframed images one small framed picture was hung, nine inches in height. The contrast between the scale of the photographs added an additional dimension to the work. The small picture demanded an intimacy in order to be viewed, whilst the three photographs together required distance.

The 'in conversation' event provided much useful feedback on the work and in particular gave me insight into how it was viewed by others. As an outcome of the event I tested framing small photographs of the images in Figure 47 to match the smaller picture. These were shown as part of the *FUTURE*QUEER* international conference hosted by University College Dublin in 2006, at which I also gave a paper.



Figure 48.

transfiguration exhibition, FUTURE*QUEER conference, University College Dublin, 2006. C-type prints, each photograph: 10" x 8".

Other photographs from the study were shown in *Somatechnics*, an exhibition organised to coincide with the *Body Modification Mark II* international conference, held at Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia, 2005 (Figure 49). It was here that I exhibited alongside the Samoan-born Shigeyuki Kihara, whose work I discussed earlier. I also presented a paper at the conference. The feedback on my work from this event was extremely valuable. Particularly significant was the highly positive response to the research from the trans activists Stephen Whittle and Susan Stryker, both of whom are leading figures in the transgender community. Stryker made an important comment on my research. She related that when she first met the photographer, Loren Cameron, whose work I have discussed, Cameron told her that he believed that being a transsexual person entitled him to photograph other transsexual people. What Cameron articulates here is an echo of the cultural essentialism that took place in the 1980s which was outlined earlier. After seeing my photographs and hearing my paper Stryker said that she felt that it was not a necessary requirement for the photographer to actually be transsexual as I was listening to what people had to say. I mentioned



Figure 49.

Somatechnics exhibition, Macquarie University Gallery, Sydney, Australia, 2005. Digital lightjet prints, each photograph: 30" x 40".

earlier that as an outcome of my presentations, Whittle asked me to be the official photographer at his wedding. We have since collaborated on a work, titled *Getting Wed*, which was exhibited as part of the *Transfabulous International Festival of the Arts*, London, 2006.

Figure 49 shows the layout of the photographs as they were exhibited in *Somatechnics*. Extracts from interviews with the people depicted were presented alongside the pictures. This allowed for the subjects of the photographs to have more of a 'voice' than would have been the case in a pictures-only exhibition. These photographs and interview extracts also formed the basis for a paper that was presented at the *InterSexions: Queer Visual Culture at the Crossroads* conference, held in New York City in 2004.

Another aspect of the research process that contributed to the development of the study was the use of research diaries. These were kept throughout the period of the inquiry in order to document the study's progress. Records were kept of the photographic practice, interview sessions, and informal interactions with subjects,



Michael P. Lewis 24 May 2003

The day spent with Michael is interesting. The house is full of star trek imagery - posters, plastic toys, motorcycle posters. X files imagery, photographs from the courts + his past together with Star Wars, police badges, American civil war memorabilia + the occasional grime collector. Stuffed toy animals also. On the living room mantelpiece are 2 poster characters he has done of 2 star trek characters and a smaller one of his favourite court judge. Michael works as a court clerk and loves his job - at the Lower Crown Court (+ sometimes more). He is very proud of the poster drawings. There is a photograph of himself when young with his 2 younger sisters. I ask which is her and instantly realise - one of the 3 has short hair and is in pyjama clothes - he is in the photograph. There are other photographs around the house of him pre-transitioning - as time he had hated this name + says the A word instead of the name. It's interesting to see these photographs - he looks comparatively tall and thin in the photographs with other girls - a "mushy" short dark hair and a squarish face. I would have thought

Figure 50.

Research diary pages, 24.05.03.

20.3.04

In smoke I have to spit out this up even tho' it means things will get out of sync + I need to back-track!

Firstly - the naked + the clothed. I think I started with Robert talking about how he could walk down the street + everyone assumes he's male + it's not till he takes his clothes off that you would know he's trans. Michael for me - with Robert - trans, except the bukles + outdoor photos + even the clothed photographs are not as interesting as the naked. Clothing in a way covers up the person - it does that actually - but it does it in another way too - it hides the person - its like a facade a form of mask that is put on. We select our clothing for its connotations + associations + take on those aspects. Naked we are more vulnerable + also more strange. The naked images we see around us in society are always perfect + our own bodies don't match these ideals/images. We all look imperfect + strange.

The fact that bodies are so hidden - so unacceptable somehow - also makes them all the more interesting - except in private.



I'm not sure that this is actually a much of a difference between the clothed + naked - I was expecting more contrast between the ways of presenting + seeing oneself - standing etc.

Figure 51.

Research diary pages, 20.03.04.

including telephone conversations, social events, and email communications. These diaries document the relationship between the participants and myself and provide my personal experiences of the process, as well as recording the more formal aspects of the work. The diaries have enabled me to make connections between issues that recurred and have allowed me to trace the development of specific concerns. Using diaries additionally facilitated a process whereby through the recording process I became aware of issues that might otherwise have gone unnoticed or have been forgotten. Figures 50 and 51 are examples of research dairy pages.

Overview of Thesis

Having reviewed the theoretical and practice base of the thesis I shall briefly outline the structure of the argument to follow. The core material is presented in four case studies and each of these forms a chapter. The case studies were chosen because they each, in their different ways, demonstrate key aspects of transsexual experiences. Whilst none of these experiences or themes is mutually exclusive, my focus on specific aspects enables me to test and develop theoretical constructs around transgender and visibility through the lived experiences of transgender people.

The first of these themes is 'seeing' the body and 'being seen' by others. These two areas of concern and exploration came to the surface through the practice together with the fact that critical strategies are employed by transsexual people in order to 'not see' the body. The issues of 'passing', the performance of gender, and 'the wrong body' will be explored through Karen's account and examined in the context of these areas of concern.

The second key theme, the relationship between photographs of the body and the self-image, will be examined in chapter four based on Michael's experiences. Michael's early childhood experiences will bring to the fore the question of the separation of gender from biology and the problems that can develop as a result of this.

Photographs produced in collaboration with Kitty form the basis for chapter five. The pictures demonstrate the key process of identifying with images of others and the impact this has on the visualisation of the self. Kitty's account establishes that gender is not necessarily contained within the binary categories, that the genitals are not always the defining feature of gender identities, and that surgery is not a necessary outcome of transsexuality.

Chapter six explores the fourth key theme through Robert's experiences: the dysfunctional dialogue that exists between non-binary identified people and the social sphere. The work presented in this chapter brings to the surface the issue that photographs of the atypically gendered body may have the potential to question pre-conceptions of gender and the body, contest the boundaries of the binaries, and present a challenge to the gender system.

I shall be pulling the various strands together in chapter seven to discuss the implications of transsexual self-visualisation and suggest ways in which thinking on the relationship between transsexuality and visibility/visibility might be extended.

CHAPTER THREE

KAREN















This case study of Karen's experiences will demonstrate the way in which the visual realm constitutes a highly dynamic interface between the transsexual person's inner and outer worlds. Two areas of concern and exploration that will be examined are 'seeing' the body and 'being seen' by others. The fact that critical strategies, centring on 'not seeing' the body, are employed by transsexual people in order to enable them to live with a body at odds with their self-image will also be discussed.

The issues of 'passing', the performance of gender, and the concept of 'the wrong body', established earlier, will be explored through Karen's personal experiences. Karen's perspective on the relationship between sex, gender, and the genitalia, which constitutes a theme running through the case studies, will also be addressed.

I first met Karen in September 2000 when she entered the *Alternative Miss London* beauty competition at the *Way Out* club. Karen was twenty-two years old and had started hormone treatment seventeen months earlier. I was one of the judges and was taking photographs before the contest started. When we first talked I did not realise Karen was entering the competition. She was dressed in clothes that were more casual than those of the other contestants and I mistook her for a helper behind the scenes. When Karen talked she came across as being very sensitive, shy, and younger than her twenty-two years. Karen's manner and



Figure 59.
Karen auto-portrait, 08.04.03. C-
type print, 12" x 10".

the fact that, even in the context of the setting, I had mistaken her for a biological female led me to invite Karen to my studio.

Karen's grandfather brought her to the studio and waited whilst we talked and I took photographs. I learned from Karen that her grandparents, Tom and Peggy, who both died during the research period, raised her. Peggy told me that Karen's mother had wanted a girl. As a baby, Karen was taken into care, as her mother was unable to look after her. Peggy and Tom fought to adopt Karen and eventually succeeded. She continues to live in their family home with her father and one of her uncles. Figure 59 is a self-portrait taken by Karen in her bedroom. The picture shows Karen smiling shyly and looking nervously into the camera lens as she takes the picture.

Karen has said that she knew from age ten that there was something different about her, although at the time she had not come across the term 'transsexual' and could not identify what it was that was different. Karen said: *"I had all these feelings when I was a kid and I just couldn't work them out."* (Karen, 31.10.00) She can remember an incident at school when she read out an

essay she had written. This had been recorded and was being played back to the class. Karen recalls that one of the girls queried whose voice it was that they were listening to and asked: "*Who's that girl?*" Karen did not own up to the fact that it was her speaking on the tape. She relates: "*At the time it feels embarrassing but deep inside...it made me feel good.*" (Karen, 10.05.03)

Karen remembers that she disliked football but as a boy she felt unable to join in with the girls' activities. Because of her feelings of being different from the girls and boys around her she isolated herself from the other children, suffered from depression, and was referred to a child psychiatrist. However, she was unable to articulate the cause of the problem. She said:

It's like you want to tell someone...anyone - but you feel like you can't because you just feel...they're going to think I'm nuts. I tried once - but I just couldn't. I just locked up and I just couldn't do it. And then I tried to put it out of my mind but you can't...it eats away at you...it was lonely...you try to fit in but in the end you just can't do it. (Karen, 08.04.03)

At age fourteen, through sex education, Karen clarified that she identified more with girls than boys. During this period in her life she was taking exams at school and at the same time trying to cope with feelings about her gender and body that she could not understand. She recalls:

Everything feels so wrong...It's just the worst time. Your body's changing but it's not changing how you want it to... And that just tears you up...It feels like you've got two lots of pressures because you've got the exams - and that's pressure enough... (Karen, 08.04.03)



Figure 60.
Karen and Raz's
monkey, 08.04.03.
C-type print,
10" x 12".

As a result of how confused, isolated, and depressed she felt Karen did not do well at school. It was not until she was given her first computer that Karen succeeded in acquiring a context for the difficulties that she was experiencing. She searched the Internet and found sites relating to transsexualism, gaining support in chat rooms through conversing with people who expressed similar feelings. Despite the fact that Karen was then able to identify the root of her problems and she did not feel so alone, she still tried to get by without having to make any changes. In particular, she was concerned that her grandparents would not understand.

However, by the age of twenty Karen began to suffer from depression again. At that time she had a small group of male friends who were important to her. The depression caused Karen to withdraw further into herself and she realised that she was in danger of losing her friends if she did not resolve the problem. This spurred her on to seek professional help and she contacted her doctor who referred her to the psychiatrist, Russell Reid. (Reid was briefly mentioned in chapter one in connection with the Charles Kane case.) Karen has said that Reid identifying her as a transsexual person made her feel validated (Karen, 08.04. 03).

When Karen told her grandparents that her problems stemmed from the fact that she believed that she was essentially female, she was surprised to find



Figure 61.
Karen and Raz,
21.04.06. C-type
print, 4" x 6".

that her grandfather was completely accepting of the fact. Tom explained that he had had a female friend who identified as a male. He told Karen that his friend had been unable to change her body, as this had been some years earlier and hormones and surgery were not widely available. Karen's grandmother, Peggy, found it more difficult to accept, although she eventually came to terms with the situation. During the time that I knew Peggy and Tom they were both highly supportive of Karen. Peggy visited her every day when she was in hospital undergoing gender confirmation surgery and nursed her attentively over the following weeks of recovery.

Karen's father also accepted her transsexuality, which Karen believes is because he *"used to be a hippie"* (Karen, 08.04.03). It was her father who eventually told her closest friend, Raz, as she was extremely nervous of doing so and was afraid he might abandon her. Karen and Raz have maintained their close friendship and continue to see each other almost every day. Some of Karen's other friends were unable to accept her transition to a female and she lost these friendships. Karen relates: *"A lot of people can be bothered about it...I don't think people understand how debilitating it can be...it's beyond your control... You haven't had a choice in it."* (Karen, 31.10.00; 04.01.05)

Figure 61 shows Karen and Raz together in Karen's bedroom. In the photograph Karen leans into Raz and is supported by him. They are depicted



Figure 62.

Karen after gender confirmation surgery, 03.08.04.

C-type print, 10" x 12".

with their hand gestures mirroring each other, thus emphasising their connection. In Figure 61 Karen appears relaxed and at ease in front of the camera. However, after a photography session in April 2003 I wrote in my Research diary that I was concerned about how the photographs with Karen might turn out, as she had a tendency to be self-conscious and reserved in front of the camera. She also finds it difficult to articulate her experiences.

Karen was due to have her gender confirmation surgery during the research period and I wanted to see what might come out of this period in her transition to a female. In relation to transsexual experiences considerable emphasis is placed on genital surgery and thus I felt it was important to work with some of the participants before, during, and after the surgery in order to observe the changes that might occur. In light of this, together with the fact that I was interested to learn more about Karen's experiences, responses, and perspective, as she had

shown that she is very sensitive to her surroundings, I decided to continue the work with Karen, even if it meant that in some of the photographs she might appear rather awkward or 'wooden'.

Figure 62 is a photograph of Karen taken after her operation that illustrates this issue. Karen was very apprehensive about being photographed naked and the picture portrays her discomfort. Her visible hand appears to be so tense that it is almost gripping the bedspread, whilst her knees are pulled together and the toes of one foot are shown curling over the other in a gesture of embarrassment. Although cushions support Karen's back the angle of her body is taut.

Karen has said she believes that the genitals are the defining feature of whether a person is female or male. Having genitalia that she could not identify with felt, to Karen, "*like a mental barrier*" as well as a physical one (Karen, 08.04.03). She was extremely nervous about the surgery. However, having attempted to live in the gender into which she had been born and having endured a body with which she could not identify, Karen believed that genital surgery was the only option open to her in order to be able to lead a satisfactory life. After the operation, when she talked about it she compared the intensity of physical pain she had endured with the emotional pain she had experienced before the operation. Figure 63 shows Karen sixteen days after her surgery. When I first arrived at Karen's house we sat downstairs but she was in pain and asked if I minded if we continued to talk whilst she lay down. The picture shows her pale, drawn and weak after the surgery. When we had finished taking pictures Karen said:

But you do sometimes look down there and you think of the pain that you went through after the operation - all the dilating and the stitches and everything else that could possibly be hurting...and at one point after the operation I thought 'I wish I hadn't' 'cos all the pain was just far too much...but once the pain starts to go...then you think 'I'm glad I've done it'. It was worth the pain and uncomfortableness 'cos when



Figure 63.

Karen sixteen days after gender confirmation surgery, 10.05.03. C-type print, 12" x 10".

you look back further you realise you were always in some sort of pain and uncomfortableness before the operation. Now it's done hopefully the pain will go. (Karen, 10.05.03)

The emotional pain Karen refers to here was triggered by catching sight of her body before the surgery. She was unable to identify with her own image to the extent that she described seeing her reflection in the mirror as “*like looking at someone else.*” (Karen, 04.01.05) Karen explains:

You don't feel like a boy even though you've got the body of one, and you feel like a girl but you don't have the body of one, so you're trapped. It's like you're nothing...In the back of your mind it just screams at you. And you know that you want to be the opposite sex but your body's saying the other thing and so you just get torn in half. (Karen, 08.04.03)

A pattern that emerged in my study is that 'seeing' the body when it is at odds with the self-image constitutes a highly traumatic experience for the person concerned. In order to be able to live with this situation, transsexual people develop strategies that enable the person to carry out everyday tasks, such as bathing and changing clothes, without having to see the body and in particular the specific parts of the body that create the distress. Karen describes the strategies she employed when she said:

I avoided looking down, and pretty much looked straight ahead...in the bath you conveniently place the sponge over the bits you don't want to see, or have a very bubbly bubble bath... getting dressed - either you close your eyes or you just get on with it, and often a bit of both...going to the toilet wasn't that difficult...most of the time I'd sit down anyway.
(Karen, 04.01.05)

What is shown here is that the strategies that enable the person to live without seeing the body when it is at odds with the mental picture of the self are significant. So long as Karen did not see her body, and specifically her genitalia, she did not have to endure the distress of acknowledging her male status - her self-image as a female remained unchallenged. This is consistent with the accounts of the other participants in my study. Similar to Karen, Anna, Michael and Robert all highlighted the difficulty of taking baths because it forced a situation where the person had to 'see' their body. Michael said: *"I hated my body so much that I very rarely had baths or showers...because I couldn't handle the sight of what I looked like underneath [clothes]."* (Michael, 24.05.03) In order to avoid seeing his body Robert removed all the mirrors from his room when he was twelve years old. He explains: *"...I didn't have any mirrors so I didn't have to see it. And as soon as I didn't have the mirrors I didn't have a problem."* (Robert, 14.03.04)



Figure 64.

Karen, sixteen days before gender confirmation surgery, 08.04.03. C-type print, 12" x 10".

Thus I would suggest that the relationship between the self-image and the body, with the visual world constituting a dynamic interface between the two, is specifically heightened in the context of transsexual people because of the concerns of 'seeing' the body and 'being seen' by others.

The fact that the body is central to this issue, rather than the overall image that the person projects, is brought to the fore by the difference between the way in which Karen responds, before surgery, to clothed representations of herself in comparison to those when she is naked. When clothed, Karen was able to project an image aligned with the way she saw herself in her mind. In an interview sixteen days before genital surgery she said: "*Clothed...you just feel like yourself.*" (Karen, 08.04.03)

Through wearing female clothing Karen not only covers her body but she also overlays the cultural signs of gender on the body. Entwistle asserts: "Clothing is one of the most immediate and effective examples of the way in which bodies are gendered, made 'feminine' or 'masculine'." (2000: 7) Thus Karen's clothing hides a body that she does not identify with and renders it 'invisible', whilst at the

same time enabling her to extend her gender identity beyond the boundaries of her body. Building on Quentin Bell's concept of clothing as "a natural extension of the man" (1947: 19) Entwistle argues that it is as though the fabric were indeed a natural extension of the body, or even of the soul." (2000: 9)

The picture in Figure 64 was taken on the same day that Karen made the comment above. The photograph supports Karen's assertion that clothed images of herself depict a feminine appearance. In the photograph Karen's body language, in particular the twist of her left shoulder and the way in which her legs are crossed, contribute to the overall femininity of the image.

However, prior to having surgery, when Karen looked in the mirror when she was naked she said it felt as if she was "*borrowing someone else's body*" (Karen, 10.05.03). The reflection she saw in the mirror did not match her self-image and thus she could not accept the body she saw as her own. This sense of alienation from one's own body demonstrates the primary importance of the self-image over the physical reality.

In trying to articulate the dissociation from her own image that she experienced, Karen used the term "*the wrong body*" (Karen, 08.04.03; 04.01.05). Having had gender confirmation surgery she feels as if her body has always been in its present state, indicating a desire to cancel out her earlier painful experiences. Figure 65 depicts Karen after the operation. Karen describes the change in how she felt towards seeing her body after surgery when she said:

You have to put yourself in the position of imagining yourself as you are but you have no genitalia as a female and you look down and you know that's not right. So, the operation really does change your entire perspective on things because once it's gone you feel like it's the most natural thing in the world, like it's always been that way, it was just that you've never seen it until now....It was all your imagination the



Figure 65.

Karen after gender confirmation surgery
03.08.04. C-type print, 12" x 10".

other way...the rest was just an illusion, your imagination.

(Karen, 10.05.03)

Karen has indicated that she is aware that her belief that the genitalia are the defining feature in the two-sexes/two-genders equation constitutes a widely-held view. This came to the fore through an incident that occurred during Karen's time in hospital when she was having gender confirmation surgery.

Karen and I had agreed that I would take photographs in the hospital directly before and after her surgery. However, Karen had been placed in a women's surgical ward²⁸ with seven women of different ages and she was uncomfortable with the idea of being photographed, as she felt that it would draw attention to her. Karen was afraid of being asked more questions than necessary, as she did not want the women on the ward to know why she was in hospital. When the

28 Despite the fact that Charing Cross hospital has the largest UK Gender Identity Clinic it would appear that there are no specific wards for transsexual people going through surgery. I have visited three male-to-female transsexual people having gender confirmation surgery at the hospital. Adrien was placed in the same ward as Karen whilst Anna was in another mixed surgical women's ward.

other patients asked what was wrong with her Karen replied by saying it was “*something to do with my stomach, down there.*” (Karen, 23.04. 03) She felt that if the women knew she was a pre-operative transsexual person they would view her as a male and would not be happy with her being in the same ward. The other patients clearly ‘read’ Karen as female. Despite this, Karen felt that knowledge of her genitalia would override this reading. Karen’s point of view, and the view she believed the women in the ward would also have, was that she could not be female whilst she possessed male genitalia.

Beyond this incident, Karen has shown that she is intensely aware of how she is perceived by others. Whilst she is not comfortable wearing dresses, Karen relates that prior to gender confirmation surgery, on visits to the psychiatrist at the Charing Cross Hospital Gender Identity Clinic she wore either skirts or dresses. She felt that this was necessary in order to fulfil the psychiatrist’s criteria of a male-to-female transsexual person. Karen said:

With psychiatrists it’s harsh because they’re stereotypic. You have to wear a dress or a skirt...that’d be the only time I’d ever wear a skirt or a dress...because I’d be...looking around and I’d be going: ‘How many women nowadays wear skirts or dresses?’ Hardly any. So...as soon as I’d get to the hospital I’d change, see the psychiatrist, make him think I’d come in a skirt, run back off to the toilet when I’m done, change, and go off home. ‘Cos I’m a lot more confident in wearing jeans than I would be wearing a skirt...you have to feel comfortable and you don’t want to be walking around like Alice in Wonderland... I think if you dress looking like that especially in this day and age you stand out more...I just went with what was fashionable and jeans are always fashionable. (Karen, 03.08.04)

And...after the operation...I go to the psychiatrists in jeans now... After all what can they do to me now? They can't stitch it back on. (Karen, 04.01.05)

Karen indicates that she believed that if she did not display a stereotypically feminine appearance she would not be recommended for surgery. This is in keeping with the accounts of others that took part in my study. Gerry said:

They insisted that men wear suits and ties, even though at that time I was at Sixth Form College where everyone wore sweatshirts and jeans...Loads of people would go into the toilets and change into a look they thought the psychiatrists would want to see and it's obviously not how they were normally. They're not treating transvestites yet they ask people to behave like them. (Gerry, 15.07.06)

These perceptions support the claims outlined in chapter one that visual appearances, over and above other criteria, are relied upon as evidence of gender and that stereotypical manifestations of gender are perpetuated and maintained by the medical profession.

Furthermore, Karen's decision to wear overtly feminine clothing on her visits to the psychiatrist brings to the fore the performance of gender, also discussed in chapter one, and emphasises the role of the view of others in relation to the performative act. In other words, whilst the performance of gender may be a self-conscious act, it is undertaken in order to be 'seen' by others as the person sees themselves. In this way, social expectations of gender impact on the individual and gender is communicated through a common language constituted by the projection of gender signs.



Figure 66.
Karen wearing Raz's present,
15.03.05. C-type print, 6" x 4".

Figure 66 shows Karen on one of the three occasions, since we first met in 2000, that I have seen her wearing a dress. Here, she was wearing the dress specifically to be photographed, as it was a gift from Raz. The picture shows how ill at ease Karen feels through the stiffness of her pose. Her shoulders are tensed, one of her toes is seen rubbing against another in a gesture similar to that depicted in Figure 62 and her hands are held together in a way that appears awkward.

The other two occasions on which I have seen Karen wearing a dress have been as follows. First, Karen wore a dress at our initial meeting when she was entering a beauty competition that had particular dress categories, and secondly, she brought a dress with her when she came to my studio for a photographic session. This, I would suggest, brings to the surface that Karen is aware that being photographed involves a performance by the sitter and eventually an audience.

The importance of 'being seen' by others, and the part that this has played in her transition from a male to a female, is emphasised by Karen. She relates:

When you're going through it you have an image of how you want people to see you and how you want to look, and basically how you want people to relate to you. You want to be accepted as female, because that's why you go through all the hours of seeing psychiatrists, the real life test, the operation, and recovery time. You want people to see you as female. (Karen, 04.01.05)

The desire that Karen expresses here, to be seen by others as she sees herself, is consistent with the results of my work with other transsexual people and further aspects of the issue will be explored in the case studies that follow. This pattern represents what I believe to be a highly important, inadequately recognised, factor in transsexual subjects' transformations and presentations of gender.

As I have suggested, in order to be perceived by others as belonging to a desired gender it is necessary to fulfil socially recognised expectations of gender expression. Body language (messages that are given out by the body through posture, gesture, movement, and facial expressions) is a major signifier of gender. Body language is culturally learned behaviour.²⁹ From a young age children are taught appropriate ways of behaviour for their gender. Every person, albeit many without conscious awareness, is performing his or her gender, within culturally established models, for the benefit of others. As Butler asserts: "gender is...a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief." (Butler, 1990: 179)

In order to be perceived in the desired gender, male-to-female transsexual people undergo a period of self-consciously learning gender behaviours. Karen has described learning to walk in a feminine manner, experimenting with make-up, and undergoing speech therapy in order to project what she believes is an

²⁹ For details of studies in kinesics (non-verbal means of communication) see, for example Hecht, De Vito, and Guerrero, (1999).

appropriate gender image (Karen, 3.08.04). Karen laughs when she talks about her first attempts at using make-up. She said:

When I first started I thought I'd better go out and buy some make-up. That was a mistake in itself...[I bought] pretty much all the wrong things...In the end...I spent time with a cross-dresser...He ended up by...helping me get make-up. So, I bought little things like blusher and a bit of lipstick. And that was about it because he said I didn't really need much.
(Karen, 03.08.04)

Karen found other aspects of changing her gender presentation equally difficult. In order to be able to successfully project a female gender Karen had to first of all 'see' gender and be able to distinguish the different ways in which femininity and masculinity are performed. When she talks about how she learned to alter her way of walking Karen shows that she is highly observant of how gender is communicated. Karen is readily able to identify the differences between how women and men walk, for example. She explains:

Guys'll walk with their shoulders...women won't, the women'll walk with their arms. And men won't really move their hips much, whereas women will...One day I just ended up by sitting in Mitcham town centre and just watching everyone and just learning the differences. It's very subtle, but they are there. (Karen, 03.08.04)

The incident Karen refers to above took place before she tried to change her own way of walking. Karen said: *"I didn't really practice till I started, but I had an advantage 'cos I'd already seen the differences."* (Karen, 03.08.04) Karen's comment highlights the importance of 'seeing' gender with regard to the

process of changing one's gender presentation. She remembers that it took her a few months to be able to walk in a more feminine manner. She recalls:

While I was learning I was really self-conscious, horribly. It really looked like I was concentrating...especially when people are staring at you...I was practising...at home walking up and down the stairs and walking along...so I didn't have to be self-conscious as much outside. (Karen, 03.08.04)

Karen's description of learning to walk as a female emphasises her nervousness in public spaces. She is anxious about 'being seen' by others and how they will 'read' her gender. Because only two sexes and two genders are permissible in Western society it follows that Karen may believe that if she is read as a female it confirms the sense she has of her own gender, whereas to be 'read' as a transsexual person would signify an essential maleness. If more gender options were available the kind of difficulties encountered in public spaces that Karen articulates would be less likely to occur.

Karen is also conscious of how her voice comes across and continues to feel that at times she has to make an effort for her voice to reach a feminine pitch. She explains that speech therapy improved her vocal pitch and said: "My voice wasn't too deep but I can't find where my voice used to be." (Karen, 31.10.00) However, the changes have not been satisfactory enough for Karen to be completely comfortable with how others might interpret her voice. When Karen was discussing a trip she made to America it became evident that she is acutely aware of this. She relates:

I was in America and I didn't feel like I was putting any effort into it. But as soon as I got back it felt like I had to put effort into it...I think it's because America is a different country... Because I knew they'd be listening to my accent more than

the pitch of my voice so I was just more relaxed. And because I was more relaxed I sounded better. So, in a country where there's an accent and you've got the unique accent you don't have to concentrate as much on your voice because you have your accent to make up for it. (Karen, 03.08.04)

Whilst Karen's descriptions of experimenting with make-up, changing her way of walking, and altering the pitch of her voice could be construed to indicate a falseness in trying to appear like a female, I would dispute this position. Karen's 'learning how to present as a female' does not mean that she is any more "artificial" (Raymond, 1994: 3) than the biologically born female. Rather, as I have argued, it is the case that as a transsexual person she has to learn the processes involved in projecting a female gender with a conscious awareness at a later stage in life.

Karen also cites the importance of specific images in developing her gender presentation. At our first meeting, in the 'Talent' section of the *Alternative Miss London* competition Karen lip-synched to the singer Gwen Stefani's *Just a Girl*. Karen has said that she identifies with Stefani, whose poster she displays in

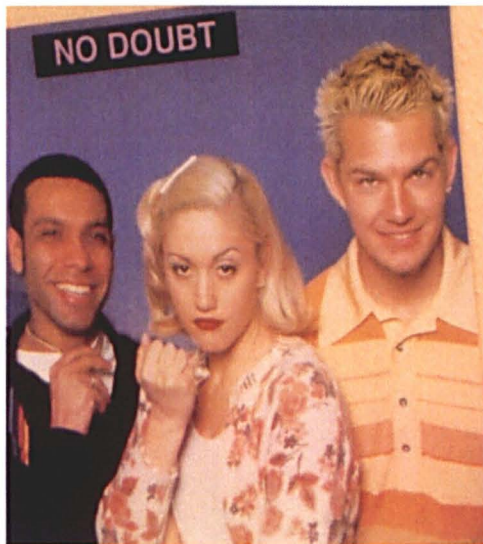


Figure 67.

Karen's poster of Gwen Stefani (centre), 10.05.03. C-type print, 6" x 4".

her room, and that furthermore, she used the way the singer looks as a model on which to base her own appearance. Karen said:

When I first started coming out I can remember I was looking at people to see if I could get some similarity, and there was two people who did stand out the most, and there's a picture of one person on the door...I used to really like her. And now there are some bits that are the same. And I try and use her a bit as a model sometimes which helps. (Karen, 08.04.03)

The second person Karen refers to above is the fictional character Lara Croft. Karen used to play the computer game *Tomb Raider* featuring Croft, although she no longer plays it since she began to develop her own characters in the *City of Heroes* and *City of Villains* computer games. Karen's characters are all female and bear a similarity to Croft in their combination of exaggerated female attributes (large breasts, small waist, ample hips, large eyes and mouth) and extraordinary fighting ability. Figure 68 of Red Cross, a character Karen



Figure 68.

Red Cross, *City of Heroes*. Picture from Karen's collection. Digital inkjet print, 10" x 8".



Figure 69.

Lady Gwenevire, *City of Heroes*. Picture from Karen's collection. Digital inkjet print, 8" x 10".

created that rescues and resuscitates wounded players, and Figure 69 of Lady Gwenevire, illustrate this.

In her essay 'Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or Cyberbimbo?' Helen Kennedy asserts that Croft's position as the main character in *Tomb Raider* constitutes a move away from the typical supporting role for females in computer games. Kennedy argues:

Her occupation of a traditionally masculine world, her rejection of particular patriarchal values and the norms of femininity and the physical spaces that she traverses are all in direct contradiction of the typical location of femininity within the private or domestic space...Lara's presence within, and familiarity with, a particularly masculine space is in and of itself transgressive. By being there she disturbs the natural symbolism of masculine culture. (Kennedy, 2002: n.p.)

This perspective on Croft is significant in relation to Karen's transgender status and the fact that she describes herself as a "tomboy" (Karen, 11.04.04). In other words, Karen sees herself as a female with masculine traits. Moreover, Karen relates that Croft and Stefani both display a combination of feminine and masculine characteristics. This, Karen claims, allows her to acknowledge her own masculinity and femininity. She explains:

Gwen Stefani, she can sort of be both butch and feminine at the same time. I suppose it's the same thing with Lara Croft really. I think just because they can be both, so I suppose that lets me be both. (Karen, 03.08.04)

It is possible that Karen's recognition of her own masculinity and femininity is connected with the changing role of females in society and a wider recognition of the fact that males can be feminine and females can be masculine. When Karen talks about this issue she again makes reference to 'seeing' gender and the impact this has on her awareness of gender similarities and differences. Karen asserts:

There's such a fine line nowadays...you see girls being a bit masculine and you see boys being a bit feminine. There's those people who are androgynous and just stay in the middle...and you've got girls who play computer games and war games... and you see guys that go clothes shopping and go completely nuts about it...I think it's more just all down the middle. (Karen, 10.05.03)

However, it is also possible that Karen's awareness of her innate femininity and masculinity indicates that if there were more gender options available beyond the female/male polarities that she might identify outside the gender dichotomy.



Figure 70.
Karen's motorbike, 10. 04.04.
C-type print, 12" x 10".

After all, it is extremely difficult to express what one feels when language is limited and polarised, as it is with regard to gender.

Figure 70 shows Karen in a rather different light from the other pictures in the case study, which portray her as shy, self-conscious, and sensitive. Here Karen is depicted as assertive, in control, and empowered by her motorcycle. A parallel can be drawn between the power that is conferred by the motorcycle and the armour and weapons of Karen's cyber characters. Karen's demeanour here is in keeping with the perception she has of herself as a tomboy.

In the context of Karen's cyber characters it is also of interest that Karen self-identifies as a lesbian. Kennedy asserts: "The encapsulation of both butch (her guns/athletic prowess) and femme (exaggerated breast size, tiny waist, large eyes, large mouth) modes of representation makes Lara open to potentially queer identification and desire." (2002, n.p.) Stefani's presentation, whilst being less exaggerated than Croft's, is also a highly sexualised version of femininity. Pictures of her show a curvaceous body, platinum blonde hair, and accentuated lips and eyes. My research with other lesbian male-to-female transsexual people



Figure 71.
Karen's bedroom wall, 21.04.06.
C-type print, 6" x 4".

would suggest that the female images with which they identify constitute images of desire on two counts. First, the person wishes to 'become' the image. Secondly, the image is desired sexually. One can conjecture that a sexual response to the images in question may also play a part in the identification process for Karen.

It could also be argued that this issue is extended to Karen's bedroom wall. Figure 71 is a picture of a small framed photograph that I took of Karen's grandmother hung close to a 'pin-up' calendar in Karen's bedroom. When I took the picture in Figure 71 I did not want to embarrass Karen and consequently I did not ask about the calendar. It is possible that it may belong to Raz, as he owns the computer in the photograph. (He keeps the computer in Karen's room, as they spend a lot of time together playing computer games.) However, even if the calendar does belong to Raz I would still argue that it is significant that Karen has agreed to display the calendar on her wall.

As I have suggested, Karen described her body before feminisation as "*the wrong body*" (Karen, 08.04.03). It would appear that Karen's interest in computer games may connect with her fundamental need to embody a female form and her

insecurities with regard to being seen in public spaces. In *TombRaider* the player 'becomes' Lara Croft, just as Karen now 'becomes' Red Cross, Lady Gwenevire, and Shock-Bot. Zoe Sofia argues that the computer "functions as a projection of certain parts of the mind...producing the uncanny effect of the computer as a second self." Sofia suggests that: "The phantasmic mobility of virtual bodies not only satisfies our infantile desires for omnipotence and omnipresence, but can provide hallucinatory satisfaction to those whose real body's mobility is impaired in some way." (1999: 58, 61) Developing this argument, I suggest it is significant, in particular before starting hormone treatment and having genital surgery, that Karen's computer game identities enabled her to embody a virtual female form whilst also allowing her to play out a fantasy life as a female. Thus the computer game affords a virtual body that equates to the body that is desired in life and provides a substitute reality for living in a world where to be transgendered is not an acceptable status.

The virtual world also becomes a form of extended vision, a hypervision, beyond the realm of everyday life. The virtual reality provides Karen with a form of invisibility in her interactions with others. In cyber space she is able to control the image she projects without having to be concerned about 'being seen' by others and the insecurity this spawns.

Karen has said that she plays computer games "*because it's an escape.*" (Karen, 10.06.06) Following genital surgery Karen continues to be unconfident interacting in the public domain. Thus her cyber identities persist in providing compensation for the difficulties she encounters in the real world. On screen Karen does not have to confront the stares and questioning glances of others.

The fact that Karen lacks confidence is an important issue for her, and one that she has discussed at length. Karen draws attention to the fact that Stefani has a confident manner and she says that she would like to be confident herself (Karen, 08.04.03). When Karen talks about going out into public spaces the issue of appearing confident, as opposed to self-conscious, is a recurring theme. Underlying Karen's lack of confidence is the fear of 'being seen'. Karen said:

"If I have a bad day and I don't feel confident then I think they're going to read me in the wrong way." (Karen, 03.08.04) She has cited several incidents when she has been aware that people were, to her mind, 'reading' her as a transsexual person, rather than as a female (Karen, 10.05.03, 03.08.04), in other words, when she was not 'passing'. As a result of this, Karen is frequently self-conscious in public and fears further similar reactions. Karen relates:

Sometimes...I know I'm going to be noticed so I'll go this way around where no-one can see me...I'm not sure if others are like it, but I know that's how I am, really just scared to be noticed and scared of people pointing and looking, which has happened once or twice. (Karen, 10. 05 03)

Before having gender confirmation surgery Karen felt that the operation would give her *"a new life"* (Karen, 03.08.04). She saw it as *"a milestone"* and said: *"I can get on with my life after it's all done...Hopefully I'll be able to get a job because I've put everything on hold since I was twenty..."* (Karen, 08.04.03). Karen has not yet succeeded in finding employment, although she has made several job applications and started training on two different occasions. At one point Karen bought a motorcycle (depicted in Figure 70) and began learning to ride it in order to train as a motorcycle dispatch rider. On another occasion, she travelled to America for a job interview in a law firm. The job turned out to be unsuitable, as it was paid on commission. I discussed earlier that Karen has lost friends because of changing her gender role and appearance and also how nervous she is of being read as a transsexual person in public spaces. As Karen said: *"There are a lot out there that just don't understand."* (Karen, 31.10.00) One can conjecture that Karen's failure at finding employment is due to her fear of how others in the workplace, and in society in general, will respond to her.

Karen also said that she wanted to have a *"love life"* after the operation (Karen, 08.04.03). Karen has only had one intimate relationship and this was

before she started her transition to a female. Karen found it impossible to maintain the relationship because of how she felt about her body. Karen said that “...it didn’t really last all that long because of all these feelings and I just had to stop really.” (Karen, 08.04.03) Although Karen has made several excursions to a London lesbian bar, *The Candy Bar*, she has not yet met anyone. One evening I went with Karen to keep her company. As we were leaving the bar Karen identified one of the women as transgendered. It was evident from her response that she was both surprised and pleased to encounter another transgender person in that particular setting. From this reaction it would appear that even in ‘queer’ spaces Karen is still apprehensive of the fact that others might not consider transsexuality acceptable.

As I have discussed, Karen feels that her body now reflects how she has always seen herself in her mind. After taking the photograph in Figure 72 I asked Karen how she felt about her body apart from this. She responded by saying: “*Shy...very.*” (Karen, 03.08.04) She said that she would like breast implants and that she would also like to put on weight. She would prefer to be “*plump [rather] than tall and thin.*” (Karen, 08.04.03)



Figure 72.

‘Karen’ 03.08.05. Digital lightjet print, 40” x 30”. Exhibited in *Somatechnics*, Macquarie University Gallery, Sydney, Australia, 2005.

Figure 72 shows Karen literally 'cornered' in her room. The photograph reflects her fragility in relation to the external world. She stands awkwardly and avoids looking into the camera lens. Although Karen has managed to change her body to become female, she still appears vulnerable.

The photography sessions provided a space beyond the boundaries of everyday life, a 'virtual' photo-space where Karen performed the signs of femininity that she had acquired and projected her self-image. Within the photo-space every aspect of the visual language of gender was heightened. For Karen, a key aspect of the images that resulted from the photographic encounter was that the pictures should affirm her self-image as a female. From the first time I took photographs of Karen she made it clear that she did not want to be photographed naked prior to gender confirmation surgery, whereas she was happy to be photographed clothed. As I discussed earlier, clothed representations of Karen before surgery supported her self-image as a female, since she was able to portray a feminine appearance, whilst naked photographs would have shown a physical reality she was trying to 'not see' and thus to avoid acknowledging. Additionally, after surgery pictures of her pre-surgery body would have been a lasting reminder of her past physicality which, as I have suggested, Karen is keen to forget.

Photography is a particularly powerful medium in this context because photographs are believed to represent the 'real'. Thus, it is hardly surprising that Karen places considerable importance on being portrayed as a female in photographs. In light of the significance of 'seeing' the body and 'being seen' by others, it also follows that pictures should comply with the principle of 'not seeing' the pre-transformation body. The issue that is articulated here by Karen, that photographs should reflect the self-image, is representative of a strand that emerged in the study. Participants' accounts place considerable emphasis on this requirement, as each of the case studies will demonstrate.

This chapter demonstrates the impact of the visual sphere on transsexual people's experiences, introduces the concept of the photo-space, and outlines the

significance of photography in transsexual self-representation. Through Karen's account we learn that the visual domain functions as a dynamic interface between the person's inner and outer worlds. Exploring the issues of the performance of gender and 'passing' through Karen's perspective establishes the negotiation process that takes place between the person's inner sense of gender and society and the considerable influence that is exerted by the exterior social realm.

CHAPTER FOUR

MICHAEL



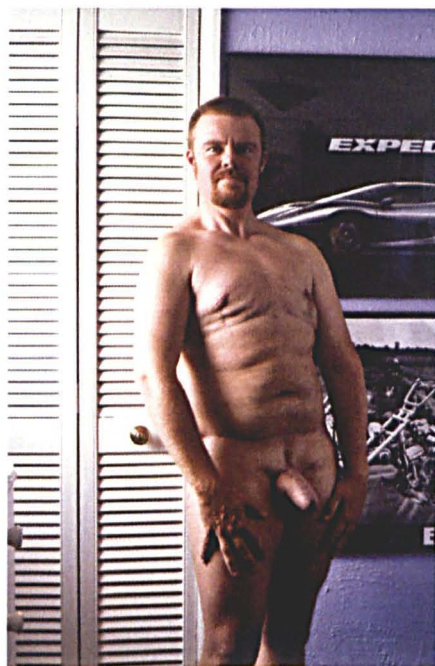


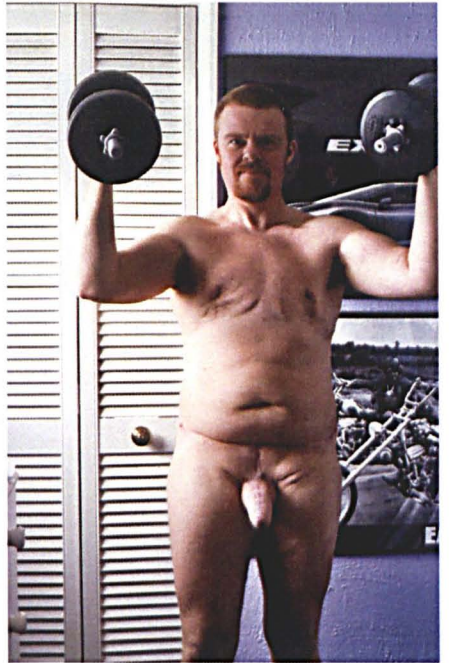
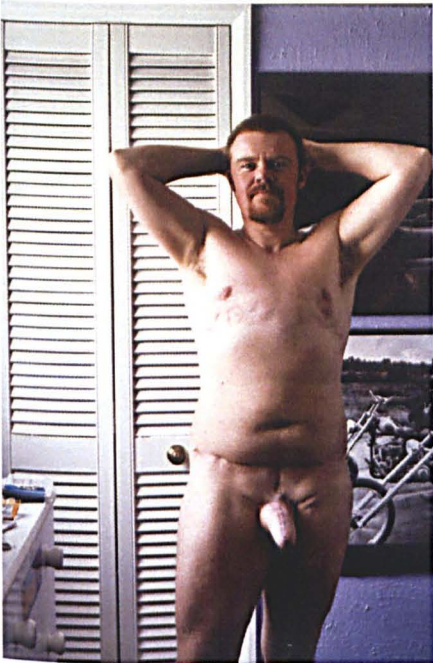
Matt Roberts fitness



Grosshatch 
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This chapter explores Michael's experiences of growing up identifying as a male whilst having the body of a female. Through Michael's account the idea that transsexuality can be construed as a liminal state that enables the person to move from one gender role to another is brought to the surface and the issue of 'passing' is explored as Michael effectively becomes 'invisible' as a transsexual person in the social domain. The dynamic interaction that occurs between seeing photographs of the body and the mental image of the self will be examined through Michael's experiences of pictures taken before, during, and after changing from a female to a male-bodied person.

When I meet Michael for the first time I was struck by the fact that if we had met in other circumstances I would never have guessed he was born an anatomical female. He is at ease with himself and projects a masculinity that does not appear forced in any way.

In talking about his childhood Michael describes identifying with males from a young age and an early recognition of not associating himself with females. This is consistent with the accounts of many female-to-male transsexual people. However, as Robert's account will demonstrate, this is not true for all.

Michael defines his early feelings of masculinity as an "*awareness*". He explains: "*I've always been a male personality, always been a boy in my outlook on life...[with] male interests, starting from very young.*" (Michael, 24.05.03)



Figure 81.

Michael at our first meeting,
11.05.02. C-type print, 40" x 30".
Exhibited in *nu-gender*, APT
gallery, London, 2003.

Michael is the eldest of three children. He has two younger sisters. In talking about his childhood he makes a clear distinction between his activities and those of his sisters. He describes his sisters as “*typical*” girls who played with dolls, teddy bears, and prams, whilst he preferred to play with toy guns and cars. Michael can remember sitting on his father’s knee at a young age watching war films and cowboy westerns. He recalls: “*I always wanted to be like my Dad, ever since I was a little kid...Like most little boys their first hero’s their Dad.*” (Michael, 19.03.04) Michael relates that his father was disappointed that he had three daughters, as he had hoped for sons. Consequently, he gave in to Michael’s choice of toys. Michael remembers that when he was about six years old he took his first bicycle to pieces to find out how it worked. In comparing this to the behaviour of his sisters he said: “*If they had anything to do with a bicycle it was to ride it, not to fix the punctures, not to take them to bits to see how they work.*” (Michael, 24.05.03)

Whilst Michael could not relate to his sisters, he identified with boys around him. A boy of the same age who lived next door became a close friend. He also has



Figure 82.

Michael on his BMX bicycle age nineteen. Photograph from Michael's collection, re-photographed 24.05.03. C-type print, 6" x 4".

male cousins of similar ages to himself and his sisters. He described an incident when his cousins were visiting. Michael believes he was about four years old at the time. The younger of the cousins said that he wanted to urinate so the elder of the two boys took his brother to the toilet. Michael could hear him giving the younger boy instructions on how to urinate whilst standing. Michael remembers feeling that he also should have been shown how to do this. He recalls thinking: *"This isn't fair...where's my equipment?"* (Michael, 24.05.03) He felt that he was physically *"missing something"* and remembers hoping that his genitalia would grow as he got older (Michael, 19.03. 04).

At school Michael developed friendships with boys and spent his spare time with them. Michael believes his appearance contributed to his acceptance by the boys. In describing how he looked at the time Michael said: *"I was always one of the bigger, beefier kids...the same height as the boys, the same build as them really...so, they didn't have a problem with me associating with them or being one of their number."* Michael feels fortunate in that the boys accepted him and didn't treat him as a *"freak"* or reject him (Michael, 24.05.03). When

he talked about these friendships and his integration into the group, Michael explains:

You were just one of the crowd, you were all into the same thing, you all played football together, you'd all go ... skateboarding together, you were all delivering newspapers in the morning before going to school, you were all playing football on the playground at lunchtime, you were all up the trees at weekends. (Michael, 24.05.03)

Michael has difficulty in articulating why from such a young age he was different to the other anatomical females around him. In trying to explain his situation he said:

It's not a case of looking at yourself in the mirror and saying, this is a or this is b, or your parents have called you so and so and they're treating you as such and such. It's nothing like that...It was always there, it was always written into my programme that you're a boy, you're male. And I always accepted that. (Michael, 19.03.04)

Throughout childhood clothing presented difficulties for Michael. His account indicates that from a young age he was highly sensitive to clothing as a marker of gender. I discussed earlier the significance of clothing with regard to the cultural signification of gender and described Karen's use of clothing to provide a surface covering that hides and makes 'invisible', whilst at the same time re-signifying, the undesirably gendered body. Fred Davis asserts that:

clothing...frames much of what we see when we see another
- it quite naturally acquires a special capacity to, speaking

somewhat loosely, 'say things' about the self. Dress, then comes easily to serve as a kind of visual metaphor for identity... (1992: 25)

Building on this argument and taking Michael's description of his gender identity as a male into account it is hardly surprising that being made to wear female clothing created problems for him. Amongst female-to-male transsexual people feminine clothing presents a particularly problematic childhood issue. Michael's experiences are representative of the accounts of the female-to-male participants and transmen who have taken part in my research.

When he was young Michael wanted to wear t-shirts, shorts, and pyjamas whilst his mother wanted him to wear dresses and night dresses. There were constant arguments. Michael recalls his mother using the phrase: "*pretty dresses for pretty girls*" (Michael, 11.05.02), a phrase that he found particularly objectionable. School uniforms also caused problems. There was a brief period of time, during primary school years, when Michael was happy to wear his school uniform. His family had moved to Harpendon in Hertfordshire and he attended a new primary school. Michael was, and still is, a fan of the television series *Star Trek*. He recalls that the school jumpers were the same colour as the shirt of one of the lead characters, Captain Kirk (Michael, 24. 05 03). However, when his family moved to Chichester, in 1975, he attended a school where the boys had different uniforms from the girls. In order to counteract the fact that he had to wear a girl's uniform Michael wore football socks, trainers and football shorts under his skirt (Michael, 11.05.02).

At age eleven, Michael spent seven months at a girl's school. He enjoyed most of his time at school but during this period Michael felt isolated. Not only was he different from the girls around him in his own eyes, but his interests and appearance marked Michael out as different in the eyes of others.

With regard to the issue of preferring male pursuits Michael's experiences are consistent with the accounts of the other female-to-male participants.



Figure 83.
Michael's Star Trek room, 19.03.04.
C-type print, 12" x 10".

Whether the person's physical appearance is noticeably more masculine than that of stereotypically female-born people is variable. For instance, Robert describes his pre-transitional body language as unreadable (Robert, 19.07.01), however his height would be considered average for a female which translates as small for a male and he also has small hands, which are typical in relation to female anatomy. Nik, another of the female-to-male participants also has a slight frame whilst Gerry is taller and more stereotypically masculine in build. In discussing his appearance when he was younger Gerry said: "*When I was twelve, thirteen, I didn't pass.*" (Gerry, 24.07.04) In other words, at a young age Gerry was unable to fulfil social expectations for female physical attributes.

One incident in particular that Michael described illustrates how his appearance and interests were interpreted by others during school years. Michael relates:

There were no boys to play football with and I was so obviously the odd one out...There was a big playground at

the back surrounded by buildings...and in the corner, next to the gym...there was one person, playing football everyday, kicking the ball against the wall. On quite a few occasions I'd boot the ball so hard it went across the playground...to the bike sheds where the hard girls were all standing around smoking and swearing and trying to act impressive. 'Ooh, look at him...What's he doing wearing a skirt? You should be in trousers. What're you doing here, you perv? This is a girl's school.' I just carried on playing football...To me, that was not an insult, it was pointing out the obvious. (Michael, 11.05.02)

Many transsexual people do not encounter significant difficulties with regard to their gender until they reach puberty. Prior to adolescence the differences between females and males are less significant but at puberty the body obviously undergoes changes that emphasise issues of sex and gender. Pre-adolescence Michael was able to comfortably exist in a female body. However, the physical changes he underwent at puberty created a *"feeling of revulsion and anger and frustration all rolled into one."* This period in his life was so emotionally painful that Michael said he *"wouldn't wish it on anybody."* (Michael, 19.03.04) He describes the growth of his breasts by using the phrase *"the chest mal-forming"* (Michael, 11.05.02) and has said that his breasts were like *"cancerous growths... real malformations"* (Michael, 11.05.02). They were so disturbing to Michael and so contrary to his self-image that he developed ways to flatten them. He explains: *"I wanted to keep my chest looking as flat as possible to look like your average boy when I looked in a mirror."* (Michael, 11.05.02)

Michael found a swimming costume from his primary school years that he had outgrown. By cutting off the bottom part he was left with a tight fitting elasticated top. This 'binding' served to flatten his breasts. Michael was unaware at the time that 'binding' is a common practice amongst anatomical females self-identifying

as male. Chest surgery (undergoing a bilateral mastectomy) is sometimes the only surgery that female-to-male transsexual people undergo. The only times Michael didn't wear some form of binding were at night, unless he was staying with a friend and then he would leave the binding on, or when he went swimming (Michael, 11.05.02). The binding tactics Michael employed created difficulties. Sometimes the binding was so tight that he could hardly breathe (Michael, 24.05.03). He also discovered that as he got older he needed to wear more layers in order to give the appearance of a having a male chest. Michael relates:

I could wear [t-shirts] up to about fourteen, but beyond there, especially on a windy day, your clothing clings to you and you can't totally flatten your chest with binding no matter how much you try or how tight it is. I had to wear more layers of clothing on top to hide it. So the summer months used to be a complete nightmare, wearing so many layers and sweating, but it was the only way you could keep yourself looking acceptable in your own eyes. (Michael, 11.05.02)

By age thirteen Michael's group of friends included both genders and by age fourteen he had begun to take a sexual interest in girls. This created further emotional difficulties, as Michael felt that he "couldn't really do anything at the time because of being in the wrong body." (Michael, 24.05.03) The notion of 'the wrong body' was discussed earlier through Karen's experiences. Her account established that the feelings she had towards her body forced her to end the one sexual relationship she became involved in prior to transitioning to a female. Michael's attitude towards his body, and how he believed others would perceive him because of his body, prevented him from having sexual relationships.

In the hope that he might be able to have a relationship with girls he was attracted to, Michael tried talking with female friends, explaining that he liked a particular girl they both knew. The response was always negative. He remembers



Figure 84.

Michael age twenty-three. Photograph from Michael's collection, re-photographed 24.05.03. C-type print, 6" x 4".

being told that if he had been a male the girls he liked would have wanted to have a sexual relationship with him but they did not want a "*lesbian relationship*" (Michael, 24.05.03). In his late teens and early twenties Michael belonged to a church folk group. He particularly liked two of the girls. Again, he was turned down. To this day Michael has not had a sexual relationship. Michael asserts that it is his body that has prevented him from having sexual relationships. Michael explains: "*They definitely weren't interested because of my body. Not because of who I was, but what I was, was the problem.*" (Michael, 11.05.02) He believes that his situation would have been different had he been born an anatomical male. Michael said:

I'm quite sure that if I'd had a normal male body I'd probably be two point four kids myself by now. With all the trimmings, the mortgage, the cat, the dog...if I had been a

normal natural male I would have had normal relationships.

(Michael, 11.05.02)

Unlike many female-to-male transsexual people who initially gravitate towards lesbian subculture, Michael has never considered this a feasible option. His self-identification as a male excludes self-recognition as a female. To identify as a lesbian Michael would have to acknowledge he was female and this is something he feels unable to do. He asserts: "*I've...never been any form of female, never been lesbian or a butch dyke as they get called...I've always been in with the boys.*" (Michael, 24.05.03) Michael also believes that his essential maleness would have prevented a lesbian relationship from the point of view of a prospective partner. He said: "[Lesbians are] *women who are interested in women and they'd see straight through me.*" (Michael, 11.05.02)

As the years continued Michael's abhorrence of his body did not diminish in any way. As a consequence of not having sexual relationships Michael's feelings of being different to those around him increased. Michael relates:

It was years and years of torment...You saw your mates pairing off with girlfriends, boyfriends...and there's you - you're still one of the crowd but you're on your own. Because you couldn't, because of the way you were. You just felt like a freak. It was horrible. Although people weren't horrible to me - that never was a problem. But you just felt like you were so trapped or handicapped...It was awful. I know what they mean by a living hell. (Michael, 11.05.02)

It is common for transsexual people to continue to live with their situation until they reach a point where they are so unhappy that they feel unable to continue. It is at this point that many transsexual people seek treatment. Michael's account illustrates this issue.

When Michael left school he initially worked as a labourer and trained as a bricklayer. He then took a job as a clerk in the County Courts. As a clerk Michael wore a man's suit to work and people who didn't know him would generally call him 'sir' and refer to him as 'he'. But, occasionally someone would use his female name or the pronoun 'she'. Every time this happened it added to Michael's distress. He was becoming increasingly frustrated and angry. It got to the point where he felt he "*was going to explode with frustration and anger.*" (Michael, 11.05.02) Having struggled with his situation for so long his emotional state by then was very fragile. Michael explains: "*Every night I'd wish that the next morning I wouldn't wake up. I can totally understand where people come from psychologically who consider or even attempt suicide. I know exactly where they're coming from.*" (Michael, 19.03.04)

Michael's feelings of desperation were heightened by the fact that he did not think that anything could be done to change his circumstances. He knew bilateral mastectomies were carried out on women with breast cancer but he was not aware that it was possible to undergo similar operations for other reasons. He knew of male-to-female transsexual people, but he did not know that female-to-male transsexual people existed. Then, in 1995, Michael's best friend Mark came across Paul Hewitt's biography, *A Self-made Man*,³⁰ in a local bookshop. Knowing that Michael was having a very difficult time, and realising that this might help him, he bought the book. This was the turning point in Michael's life.

In the middle of *A Self-made Man* there was a section of photographs of Hewitt before and after his transition from female to male. As Michael looked at some of the pre-transitional photographs depicting Hewitt with long blonde hair, make-up, and short dresses, he thought about how he had looked at a similar age. He had been a bricklayer on a building site, worn ex-military clothing, and rode a motorcycle. Looking at the dramatic physical changes Hewitt had achieved Michael had no doubt in his mind about the course of action he was going to take.

30 Hewitt, P., *A Self-made Man*, Headline Press, London, 1995.

He would now find out what could be done to help him. He said: "*I wanted to live. I was sick of this awful existence.*" (Michael, 11.05.02)

The book listed the contact details of Russell Reid. Michael had no idea that treatment was available through the UK National Health Service and he assumed that he would have to pay privately. He telephoned Reid and made an appointment. By that time he was "*literally willing to do anything.*" (Michael, 11.05.02) Michael felt tremendous relief knowing that something could be done. He was living at home with his parents and after his consultation with Reid, he realised he would have to leave the family home in order to transition. Michael took out a mortgage, bought a house, and in September 1996, at the age of thirty-three, he began hormone treatment.

Michael feels that the decision to transition from female to male had been made when he was a child, rather than after his consultation with Reid. Opting for hormone treatment and surgery at this later point in life was merely a path that afforded a resolution of his circumstances. He relates that: "*Actually doing it was a piece of cake but telling everybody was the hard part.*" (Michael, 11.05.02) He transitioned whilst working as a clerk in the County Courts. He is still in the same job and happily works alongside people who knew him as a female.³¹ Michael has also successfully retained his friendships from before transitioning to a male. However, his parents have found it difficult to accept Michael's transformation. They ignore the fact that he has changed physically, will not discuss it at all, and continue to call him by his original female name. Michael legally changed his name in November 1996.

At first when his parents continued to call him by his female-given name he felt it was an insult. He now feels that when they use, what Michael calls the "*A-word*", that they are not talking to him. They are "*using someone else's*

³¹ I discussed in chapter one the fact that it is too daunting a task for some transsexual people to transition between genders observed by people who have known them in their original gender role and presentation. Thus it is relatively common for transsexual people to move away from their immediate background of family, friends, and place of work in order to transition.

name.” For Michael it is hard to come to terms with the fact that his parents have been unable to accept the most important issue in his life. The ongoing situation with his parents is the “*only stumbling block*” that has occurred as a result of taking on a male gender role and appearance (Michael, 11.05.02).

Transsexual people’s families frequently are unable to accept the person’s need to change their gender presentation and role, particularly in the early stages of transition between the genders. In some instances families are not able to come to terms with the situation at all and this is extremely painful for those concerned. For others, over time, families become reconciled to the notion that their offspring, sibling, or parent has changed their gender role and appearance. For instance, Nik still experiences problems with his family and only sees them very occasionally. In contrast, Adrien’s mother is entirely reconciled to her transition to a female and has supported her throughout. Similarly, Dan, who had a son when he was living as a female, and transitioned to a male when his son was nine years old, has said that his son has “*just been brilliant*” and that their relationship “*hasn’t changed*” (Dan, 24.09.01).

In Michael’s case the family issue is particularly poignant with regard to the admiration he has felt for his father from an early age. Michael’s account of looking in the mirror in a barber’s shop in the early stages of his transition highlights the fact that his father continues to be important to him. Michael explains:

I looked just like the way my dad did when he was in his thirties...the facial expression, the frown, the lines in the forehead, the hair starting to recede. Although it was a red headed version - that was my dad looking back at me. And it was a combination of wonderful and weird. I could see the man that was there all along was finally coming through. I could see it. And I was literally my father’s son. (Michael, 19.03.04)



Figure 85.

Michael in his bedroom, 24.05.03. C-type print, 3" x 8".

Since completing his transition Michael has joined a motorcycle club and has made new friends who do not know of his past. For Michael this is a great relief. He has never considered himself to be a transsexual person. He describes transsexuality as a *"journey...travelling from a to b."* The transsexual *"journey"* or transitional space that Michael describes here constitutes a liminal space beyond the boundaries of everyday life. In Michael's view transsexuality is a temporary state that enables him to move from a female role and presentation in society to that of a male. When Michael was in the middle of his surgeries he asserted that he would consider himself *"to be male"* once he had completed the procedures and that he *"wouldn't carry the label transsexual anymore."* He explained at the time: *"I feel like a work in progress. I'm not 100% whole."* (Michael, 24.05.03)

Michael's perspective emphasises the external physical attributes of gender and the two-sexes/two-genders system. It implies that 'male' and 'female' are physically manifested and that they are not biologically or chromosomally dependent. Rather, they are cultural categories that may be achieved through physical change. Despite the fact that Michael now considers himself to be male, he does not deny his past. He said: *"You can't forget where you came from. You can't just wipe the slate of your memories...It's a route I had to take to get where I am now...I had to take the scenic route."* (Michael, 24.05.03)



Figure 86.

Michael age thirty.

Photograph from Michael's collection, re-photographed 24.05.03. C-type print, 6" x 4".

A year after starting male hormones Michael underwent a bilateral mastectomy. By this time he had discovered that the operation was available through the UK National Health Service. However, he felt unable to bear the required eighteen months-to-two years wait on a National Health waiting list and so he paid for the operation to be done privately.³²

Following chest surgery, an important event for Michael was going to a public swimming pool. He had always liked swimming but the public baths had been a *"nightmare"* after puberty. Michael describes how he feels at the swimming pool after the bilateral mastectomy when he relates: *"I went into the men's changing room...just one of the blokes, just fade into the crowd, fade into the queue at the diving board and no one gives you a second look."* (Michael, 11.05.02) Michael's description emphasises that he does not want to be noticed, to be visible, or to stand out in any way. For Michael it is a significant achievement

³² Michael's transition has taken ten years so far from when he started hormone treatment in September 1996. He is currently waiting for minor corrective phalloplasty surgery.

that others now see him as he sees himself and that he has successfully gained a surface invisibility through being able to comply with society's expectations for gender presentations. In other words, Michael now 'passes' as a male in the eyes of others.

Michael's account indicates that his self-identification was formed through relationships with boys and girls in childhood. I do not mean to imply by this that Michael's sense of gender is entirely socially constructed. Rather, his account reveals a complex relationship between internal and external factors. In our discussions specific childhood experiences have emerged as key incidents that contributed to his perception of males and these are in keeping with widely-held social views. For instance, the incident described earlier in this chapter of his cousin being shown how to urinate standing up made a distinct impression on Michael. He believed that he was a male and should have been undergoing a similar 'initiation rite'. His feelings of being excluded left Michael with the impression that *"being able to stand up and pee is the Holy Grail. It's the ultimate. It's a bigger deal than fathering a child...It's an ordinary, everyday function that most males do without thinking about."* (Michael, 24.05.03)



Figure 87.
'The Billy doll', 21.08.04.
C-type print, 12" x 10"..

Underlying Michael's experience of this incident is the notion that the penis symbolises and signifies maleness. This is central to his idea of a male and is also fundamental to the concept of the gender dichotomy. Growing up Michael was aware of the difference between his anatomy and that of the boys around him. He said he felt *"envious, jealous I suppose, that they were complete and I was missing something."* His feelings of not having a penis were so intense that he said it was like *"missing a leg"*. Michael made the point that prior to undergoing genital surgery he could walk down the street, or go swimming, and was perceived by others as a male, however, he still felt *"incomplete"* (Michael, 19.03.04). Discussed earlier in this chapter, Michael's lack of male genitalia also prevented him from embarking on a sexual relationship. He believed that he would have more confidence in approaching women if he had a penis (Michael, 11.05.02, 24.05.03). When Michael was looking at photographs we had taken when he was half way through his phalloplasty operations (Figure 88) he said: *"That was the beginnings of the feeling of being complete, being normal, of having what should have been there all along."* (Michael, 19.03.04)

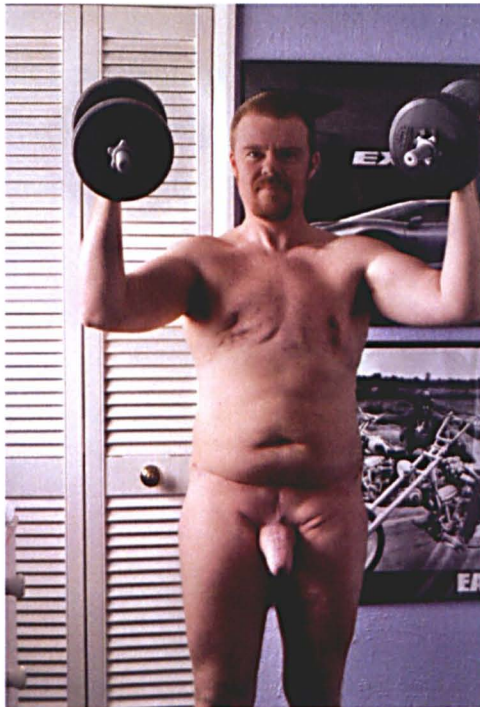


Figure 88.

Auto-portrait, half way through the phalloplasty surgeries, 24.05.03.

C-type print, 7" x 5".



Figure 89.

Michael pre-phalloplasty, 11.05.02.
C-type print, 12" x 10".

There is a considerable difference between this response and Michael's reactions to photographs taken before undergoing genital surgery. On looking at pictures of himself from this phase of his transition, he asserts that he can not associate himself with the partially female body he sees in the image. He says that the top half of the body "*is*" him but the bottom half "*isn't*" (Michael, 19.03.04). Having seen himself as a male in his mind, Michael is unable to identify with the image that is neither wholly male nor female. In response to Figure 89 he said:

I look at that picture and I can't associate that body as being me. The head's attached, but it could be a special effects photograph where someone's scanned my head and stuck it on. I wouldn't call it a male or a female body. It's an alien body, it's extra terrestrial, it's neither one nor the other...it's very odd...it's like it's not me, it's like what I have now has been there all the time. (Michael, 19.03.04)



Figure 90.
Michael's spare
bedroom, 21.08.04.
C-type print,
10" x 12".

Michael identifies with the male elements in the photograph but not with the genitals that are female. His reaction here reveals the relationship between images and self-perceptions, or to put it another way, between the internal self-image and pictures in the external world. Moreover, it demonstrates the dynamic interaction that occurs between seeing pictures of the body and the mental image of the self. As Peggy Phelan asserts: "The relationship between representation and identity is linear and smoothly mimetic. What one sees is who one is." (Phelan, 1993: 7)

When extended to Michael's home environment Phelan's theoretical position provides insight into the difference between the pictures Michael displays and those that are out of sight or destroyed. His home is filled with images and objects associated with masculinity. The photograph in this context becomes a 'social actor' (Edwards and Hart, 2004: 4). The masculine affiliation of these objects plays an important role in affirming Michael's self-image as a male in displaying his masculinity to others. It is a boyish rather than a manly environment.³³ Action man toys are displayed on a bedroom shelf, whilst in the

³³ Amongst female-to-male people and transmen it is common for the person to initially identify with the concept of a boy rather than a man. Sometimes this does not change and the person continues to identify as a 'boy'. However, others describe the experience of this identification shifting so that they grow into becoming a man. A comment made by Dan illustrates this point. Dan said: "*I knew...that I should really be a boy, not a man. It wasn't until I transitioned that I actually got to grips with being a man as opposed to being a boy.*" (Dan, 24.09.01)



Figure 91.

Michael in his living room, 24.05.03. C-type print, 10" x 12".

sitting room and spare bedroom there are model cars and motorbikes. There is a room dedicated to Star Trek, filled with collectibles and costumes. Pictures and posters showing his interest in motorcycles, cars, the American Civil War, films, and cartoon characters are in every room in the house.

Further insight into the significance of the images in Michael's home environment is provided by Michael's comments on the photograph in Figure 91. He said:

[This] is a good depiction of me and my life situation cause my religion is Star Trek...There's two portraits there that I've done of the Star Trek actors...and there's a signed photograph there with a couple of the actors in it. And I work in a Crown Court and I'm one of these saddos that loves their job and there's a picture of me in the background there with my wig and Court clerk gear. There's a sketch I did of my favourite judge...There's a picture of me and my boss at the top there. And one of my other great passions, of course, is motorcycles and here on the mantelpiece are little model motorcycles.
(Michael, 19.03.04)



Figure 92.

Michael age eleven and his sisters.
 Photograph from Michael's collection,
 re-photographed 24.05.03.
 C-type print, 4" x 6".

Michael also displays framed photographs from his past on shelves in his living room, kitchen and spare bedroom. These include three pictures of girls with whom he wanted to have sexual relationships (one of these is represented in Figure 84), a pre-transition photograph with his first motorbike (bought for him by his father on his eighteenth birthday), and a childhood picture of himself with his two sisters. In discussing the childhood photograph Michael relates:

*Looking at it now - that's young Michael...with his two sisters.
 I just look like a typical boy. I've got flared jeans, trainers,
 the tracksuit top, the pageboy haircut, no toys, teddies, or
 anything like that. Whereas the two sisters there you notice
 they've both got teddy bears with them. I think the youngest
 one's got an elephant, the other one's got a horse. (Michael
 19.03.04)*

One can conjecture that this picture continues to be displayed in Michael's living room because the photograph supports the notion of Michael as a young boy. As Roberta McGrath argues: "Photographs and memorials trade on selective memory; they allow us to forget through an act of remembrance. This makes them...a special kind of commemorative object that simultaneously preserves and obliterates knowledge in a single stroke." (2002: 2) Thus this picture serves to

provide evidence of Michael's perspective that his gender has always been male and that he should have been born a male. In this context the picture constitutes, for Michael, a very important photograph.

Edwards and Hart suggest that:

Often material forms reflect public and private functions of images. What is displayed, formally framed in the semi-public spaces of the home, and what is hidden away in boxes, lockets, wallets or family Bibles? This applies equally to the display of photographs. (2004: 12)

The notion of the 'public' display of photographs is strengthened in Michael's case by the pictures that are hidden from view. In contrast to the photographs on show, Michael has other pictures that are kept in a cupboard drawer in his bedroom. These are photographs he has taken of the phases of his surgical transition, beginning with pictures before his chest surgery (Figure 93). He made this record to enable the medical profession to see each stage as the procedures advanced. He also thought the pictures would help his friends to understand what he was going through, although this turned out to be unnecessary, as they were very accepting of Michael's transformation to a physical male (Michael, 19.03.04). Michael has said that he may publish these images in the future in order to make the information available to people considering similar operations.³⁴ He showed me a photograph he had taken two days before his bilateral mastectomy (Figure 94). The image had been framed to show his breasts and exclude his head. Michael explains:

³⁴ Usually surgeons show prospective patients photographs of past procedures. Pictures of post-surgery results are also available through, for instance, Loren Cameron's *Man Tool* (2001) and *Body Alchemy* (1996). Michael claims that when people are deciding on whether or not to undergo surgery it is helpful to see as many pictures as possible. He also believes that seeing photographs of the possible outcomes may provide peace of mind for those concerned.



Figure 93.
Auto-portraits
of Michael's
transition from
his collection,
24.05.03. C-type
print, 12" x 10".

I intentionally wanted my face out of it. I didn't want my face attached to that body...relating me to being that...as if that body belonged to me at any time in my life...I never, ever wanted to see my head attached to that. (Michael, 24.05.03)

When Michael looked at this picture he became noticeably upset. He later defined this reaction by saying it made him physically ill to look at the photograph (Michael, 11. 08. 05). For female-to-male transsexual people, over and above all other physical attributes, the breasts cause the greatest of difficulties. We have



Figure 94.

Pre-chest surgery. Photograph from Michael's collection, re-photographed 24.05.03.
C-type print, 10" x 8".

seen that Michael believed he should have been a boy and grew up inhabiting a body that he could not recognise as his own. Also, that Michael physically manipulated the shape of his torso by flattening his breasts and avoided looking at his sexed/gendered body parts in order to try to come to terms with what would otherwise have been an unbearable situation. In other words, Michael developed strategies in order to 'not see' the body that bear a similarity to those discussed through Karen's experiences. Having now transformed his body to match his self-image these photographs are intensely distressing to Michael.



Figure 95.

Michael in the Star
Trek room, 19.03.04.
C-type print,
10" x 12".

Michael has also thrown away pictures that would otherwise have been important mementos. For instance, Michael continues to be a *Star Trek* fan and even makes costumes to wear at annual conventions. When he showed me photographs from these events Michael explained that even though his participation is important to him he has thrown away pictures that gave an unacceptable indication of his breasts (Michael 19.03.04).

On my first visit to his home I asked Michael to photograph himself. He immediately assumed bodybuilding poses in front of a full-length mirror (Figure 88). I would not have considered asking him to take on such poses due to their association with typically masculine ideals. For Michael, the performativity of the photo-space enabled a 'theatre of the masculine' that bears a similarity to Loren Cameron's performance for the camera described earlier. Within the photo-space Michael was able to display his achievement of having become male and of 'being' male, with the body in a central role. The fact that the photo-space is a 'virtual' or liminal space beyond everyday life is significant in this regard as this enabled the body to play a part that reflects the importance of the body in transsexual experiences.

The pictures were taken in Michael's bedroom and it seemed pertinent that this was the position in which he had stood to take his transitional photographs. Later, when I looked at this series I was drawn to the similarity in some of the pictures between the poses Michael was striking and the display of action man toys on the shelf behind. He had himself gone into action. The pictures were taken when Michael was only half way through the phalloplasty procedures. He was pleased with the overall image the photographs presented and a further series was produced on completion of the phalloplasty construction surgeries. Figure 96 is one of the pictures from the second set of photographs.

As we have seen, the realisation of Michael's self-image involves having male genitalia. Furthermore, Michael's experiences demonstrate that images have the potential to facilitate a powerful dynamic that can either affirm or challenge



Figure 96.

'Michael', taken on completion of phalloplasty construction surgeries, 21.08.04. Digital lightjet print, 40" x 30". Exhibited in *Somatechnics*, Macquarie University Gallery, Sydney, Australia, 2005.

the self-image. For Michael, the photograph establishes 'proof' of his externalised masculinity, authenticates it, and provides a "counter-memory" (Barthes: 1993: 91) to his pre-transitional body and experiences. Thus it is not surprising that it is only since completing the phalloplasty construction surgeries that Michael has been completely happy with naked pictures of himself. He is proud of the image of himself in Figure 96. For Michael this is a celebratory picture that shows his external physicality aligned with his self-image. In contrast to his reactions to earlier photographs, on looking at this picture he exclaimed: "*I never get tired of looking at nude pictures now...I just love looking at these pictures...I'm a bloke*

and anyone says otherwise they can just look at those photographs.” (Michael, 19.03.04)

Through describing Michael’s experiences with photography before, during, and after his transition to a male this case study demonstrates that photographs of the body have the potential to facilitate a powerful dynamic that can affirm or challenge the transsexual self-image. The fact that the photo-space is beyond daily life is shown to be significant as this enables the body to play a part in the presentation of the self that reflects the centrality of the body in transsexual experiences. Through Michael’s account it is also established that pictures in the domestic environment can confirm and display the gendered self-image and that photographs that are hidden or destroyed are as significant in terms of what they reveal as those that are on show.

Michael’s perspective on transsexuality as a liminal state illuminates the way in which ‘female’ and ‘male’ can be construed as cultural categories that can be achieved through physical change, rather than being biologically or chromosomally dependent. Furthermore, Michael’s account demonstrates that since undergoing hormone treatment and surgery he has effectively succeeded in becoming ‘invisible’ in society by conforming to stereotypical male presentations.

CHAPTER FIVE

KITTY

















This case study of Kitty's experiences demonstrates the way in which the photo-space functions as a key to unlocking the internal dialogue between the self-image and the external world that takes place through images.

Kitty's account will establish that gender is not necessarily contained within the binary categories, that it may be construed as a fluid entity, that the genitals are not always the defining feature of gender identities, and that surgery is not a necessary outcome of transsexuality. Kitty's experiences in public spaces will provide evidence that it is necessary to be 'seen' to belong to one or other of the socially sanctioned genders in order to successfully interact in the social sphere.

Kitty self-identifies as a "*she-male woman*" (Kitty, 05.06.03). In other words, she sees herself as both a she-male and a woman. A she-male is a term used to describe someone born anatomically male, who undergoes some physical changes but retains male genitalia. Kitty takes female hormones (oestrogen) but she has had no surgery. In talking about her gender identification Kitty asserts:

I know there are some natural born women who would say that I'm not the same as them. I say, well, I'm not the same as you...why can't there be two variations?...To me, at the end of the day, I guess I'm both. Ultimately I am a woman...you could also look on me as a she-male...She-male woman. One

may seem on the surface to cancel out the other, but it makes sense to me. (Kitty, 05.06.03)

Kitty's description of her gender identity highlights the difficulties that can be encountered in relation to terminology and self-definitions of gender. Kitty's term 'she-male woman' is her own hybrid invention that she has created because of the lack of suitable definitions. Earlier, at age sixteen, when she started to identify with transgender categories Kitty found the widely used terminology problematic. She relates:

When it first came out properly, when I was sixteen, after I'd left school...I thought I was a transvestite, that's the word everybody thinks of and a transvestite covers everything, which it doesn't. And the further I went on with it the more I got to know. And it wasn't long before I realised that a transvestite is one thing, transsexual is another thing. And then I thought, 'I'm a transsexual'. But then it was only 1982 and there was no information around at the time. (Kitty, 05.06.03)

When she talks about her childhood, Kitty describes it as "normal". She recalls that she enjoyed playing with boys' toys and that she had no desire for girls' toys. However, between the ages of seven and ten she began to realise that there was something different about her. Kitty remembers having an early interest in clothing and accessories. She recalls: "*When I was a child...I used to find things and I never put them on...I just played around with them a bit...just scarves or something.*" She relates that she found this "confusing" (Kitty, 05.06.03).

Consistent with the accounts of the other participants, adolescence was a difficult time for Kitty. She could see boys around her changing in ways with which she could not associate. Kitty describes how she felt when she asserts:

"That wasn't me, it simply wasn't me." (Kitty, 05.06.03) The difficulty she had in understanding and expressing her feelings resulted in problems at school. Kitty said that she was bullied because the other pupils *"could see things in me because I wasn't changing in the way that everybody else was changing."* (Kitty, 16.07.06) As a result she started to play truant from school.

Whilst she continued to live in the family home, Kitty hid her feelings regarding her gender and cross-dressed in secret. At age twenty-five Kitty left home and began her transformation almost immediately. Within six months she had started hormone treatment. She describes this period in her life as *"scary"* and *"daunting"* (Kitty, 05.06.03). She had moved to a rough council estate and she had no friends. Within a few days of moving into her new home she knew she *"had to go over"* and that when she did she *"wasn't going to stop"* (Kitty, 05.06.03). Kitty had originally intended to have gender confirmation surgery but she decided against it. She explains:

My intention was to go for the full thing...I did want it but I guess I also felt that I needed it to be a full woman and I came to the conclusion I didn't need it and I guess the interest in wanting it went away...I've decided now that I don't want the operation. If that changes later on in life, then fair enough... but at the moment I'm happy enough. (Kitty, 05.06.03)

Kitty's description articulates a potential fluidity of gender. She is happy with her body in its present form, but she does not wish to rule out the possibility of a future change. In discussing her male genitalia Kitty asserts: *"I don't particularly like them, but I don't particularly dislike them either."* Kitty self-identifies as a lesbian and is comfortable in sexual relationships with others. Her male genitalia, although unusual in the context of a lesbian relationship, play a conventional part in sexual activities. However, she said: *"I didn't really think it was supposed to be done."* In the early days of her transition to a she-



Figure 104.
 ‘Frances’, 2002. C-type print,
 60” x 40”. Exhibited in
nu gender, APT gallery,
 London, 2003.

male woman Kitty sought guidance by contacting gender support organisations and she recalls that she was given pamphlets regarding, amongst other issues, sexual relationships. They were written for people transitioning between the gender polarities and Kitty found she had to resolve her issues regarding sexual relationships on her own (Kitty, 05.06.03).

Kitty and I first met as a result of her seeing a photograph of mine depicting Frances, a person with female breasts and male genitalia, who self-identifies as a she-male (Figure 104).³⁵ It was not until some time later that I realised that the picture had been significant with regard to Kitty’s decision to contact me. The reason it had attracted her attention was that it presented a body image with which she could identify. In chapter one I discussed the issue of body consciousness and the fact that seeing the body constitutes a significant area of concern in the relationship between the person’s inner and outer worlds. Identifying with images of others contributes a further dynamic to the process of self-visualisation. This has formed an important strand in my research.

³⁵ *Time Out* London 8 - 15, 2003 listing for *nu-gender*, APT Gallery, London.



Figure 105.
 'Kitty and the mirror', 05.06.03.
 C-type print, 12" x 10".

Kitty has shown herself to be highly sensitive to representations of people with which she identifies. Lacan argues that images or others in the exterior world captivate the person and become incorporated into the self-image (1977:2). The work undertaken with Kitty demonstrates that images constitute a focus for mediation between inner and outer worlds. I do not mean to suggest by this that transsexual people's gender identities are formed through responding to cross-gendered images of others. The participants' accounts indicate that there is a primary internal sense of gender. Rather, it appears that images of others form a particular focus that enables the internal self-image to become externally manifested.

Figure 105 is of Kitty sitting on her bed looking at herself in the mirror. The photograph shows that Kitty has placed pictures she has cut from magazines above the mirror. The images are of stereotypically sexualised females and several of them have bleached blonde hair that bears a similarity to Kitty's. If Kitty were to sit at a greater distance from the mirror she would see her own reflection at the same time as the images. Figure 105 emphasises this relationship and places Kitty in the same frame as the females in the pictures.

As Figure 105 indicates Kitty identifies with images of females. When she was describing a reaction she sometimes has to women on the street she said: *"I'll look at a woman, at a certain something and that's me."* (Kitty, 05.06.03) Kitty is intensely aware of the defining qualities of the female body beyond genitalia and secondary characteristics. For instance, when she was looking at the photograph in Figure 105 she remarked:

It was only the other day I got a good look at my back in the mirror...I'd noticed on other girls, usually when you look at [their] backs their shoulder blades are pulled out more and... you can [see] the spine going down...and I noticed that it was the same on me. (Kitty, 10.07.03)

Kitty also identifies with images of popular female film stars. In an email I sent prior to our first meeting I asked if Kitty could name anyone with whom



Figure 106.

Mata Hari, photograph c. 1910. Picture from Kitty's collection. Digital inkjet print, 10" x 8".



Figure 107.
 'Kitty', 05.06.03.
 Digital lightjet print,
 30" x 40". Exhibited
 in *Somatechnics*,
 Macquarie University
 Gallery, Sydney,
 Australia, 2005.

she identified. She promptly replied and included pictures of Mata Hari, Marilyn Monroe, Constance Bennett and Hedi Lamar. In an accompanying text Kitty described characteristics of herself that she recognised in the images. Of the Mata Hari picture (Figure 106) Kitty wrote: *"This shot of Mata Hari for me represents so much."* (Kitty, 15.05.03) In an interview three weeks later she explained: *"Mata Hari, to me, tends to sum up very much myself."* (Kitty, 05.06.03)

The identification with the image of Mata Hari that Kitty expresses here is significant with regard to much of the photographic work that was produced with Kitty. As I have suggested, the photo-space is a liminal space that enables the dialogue between the self-image and the external world that takes place through images to come to the surface. As a result of this performative encounter the photographs provide a record of the 'becoming' or 'being' that which Kitty would like to be.

Figure 107 is a photograph that was constructed by Kitty. She wanted to be photographed in her boots and feather boa. She initiated the pose and made adjustments using a mirror until she was satisfied with her appearance. At the time I did not make a connection between the photograph she was creating and the Mata Hari picture. However, having studied the two pictures I now would suggest that there is a resemblance between the images. The similarity resides in the fact that both pictures depict generalised orientalist fantasies that are highly

sexualised and consistent with the idea of the glamorous Orient. Whilst Mata Hari is draped in lengths of fabrics, Kitty uses saris and scarves from her collection to create an exotic backdrop. Both Kitty and Mata Hari are transformed in these pictures into orientalist odalisques.

Kitty is drawn to notions of the East. I asked her when this interest began and she replied: "*I first realised when I was a child, about the same time as everything else. I always had that inkling at the back of my mind.*" (Kitty, 19.10.05) I quoted earlier from a description Kitty gave of playing with "scarves" in her childhood (Kitty, 05. 06. 03). There appears to be a connection between Kitty playing with scarves as a child and collecting exotic fabrics in adulthood - both are associated with her idea of the East. Furthermore, the figure of Mata Hari, for Kitty, may embody the essence of her earlier feelings and also those that she experiences in the present.

I would suggest that these pictures of Mata Hari and Kitty reveal how images of others enable the externalisation of the self and provide insight into how the process of identification operates. The subject sees the original image, recognises her/himself in the image, internalises it, incorporates it into the self-image, and subsequently externalises it through personal expression. Figures 106 and 107 both depict idealised representations. This would appear to support Lacan's theoretical perspective of the self-image as an idealised version of the self that the person perpetually strives to attain (Lacan, 1977: 2). The notion that Kitty's self-image is projected in Figure 107 is underlined by her response to the photograph. She exclaimed: "*This is me...It's everything that I am.*" (Kitty, 07.03.04)

I wondered if Kitty's strong interest in the East had come about through knowledge of the *hijra* of India. When I asked Kitty if this was so it immediately became clear that she had no knowledge of the *hijra*. Her reply was: "*Do they still exist?*" Kitty went on to clarify that her fascination relates specifically to images of females from the Middle East and India. She explained: "*They're feminine, they're very majestic...I've seen some Arabic ladies in the shops who*



Figures 108 and 109.

Kitty draping herself in a sari to become like a goddess, 05.06.03. C-type print, 10" x 8".

are covered and they just look so beautiful." Kitty continued by saying that this interest had been there: *"All my life...I feel I've been there before, that I was there before."* Whether one believes that we have one life, with or without some form of afterlife, or whether one believes that we travel through many lifetimes is not the issue here. Kitty's account indicates an intense depth of feeling and reveals a powerful identification with the subject. (Kitty, 19.10.05)

Kitty's daily life tells a different story from the glamorous image depicted in Figure 107. She is unable to blend in with expected gender presentations and as a consequence she is frequently 'read' as either a transvestite or a transsexual person in the social sphere, causing her considerable emotional distress. In other words, Kitty is not able to 'pass' as a biological female. She has been spat at on the street, shouted at, pointed at, accosted by drunks, and is often stared at. When we have been out together people's reactions have made me feel very uncomfortable. One evening when we had met for a drink in Soho I suggested



Figure 110.
Kitty in Soho, London, 02.07.04.
C-type print, 4" x 6".



Figure 111.
Wig stall, Kilburn High Road market,
London, 02.07.04. C-type print, 4" x 6".

we finish our drinks outside the bar (even though it was raining) as Kitty was being stared at. Another time, in a café near her home, we had to leave before finishing our drinks because of the jeers and laughter from three men at the table next to us.

Kitty's experiences show that in order to be able to interact with ease in public spaces it is necessary to be 'seen' to belong to one or other of the socially sanctioned genders. The confrontational behaviour that Kitty repeatedly encounters in public spaces demonstrates that gender beyond the binary categories constitutes a threat to some people. The fact that transsexual people are "programmed to disappear" (Stone, 1991: 295) was discussed earlier. I suggest that the reactions to Kitty described here are significant with regard to why many transsexual people seek "a form of sanctuary in the gender roles they adopt." (Whittle, 1996: 212)

Figures 110 and 111 were taken one day when Kitty and I were out together. As we walked through Kilburn, Soho, and the West End I was repeatedly struck

by the similarity between Kitty's visual presentation and images of others. It can be conjectured from this that Kitty is trying to present a stereotypically female image and to assume a female role in public spaces. Figures 110 and 111 demonstrate the relationship between Kitty's hairstyle and choice of hair colour and those worn by others.

In Figure 110 both Kitty and the model on the billboard advertisement display their femininity through their choice of hairstyle and hair colour whilst at the same time hiding their eyes. The sunglasses and black coat that Kitty wears constitute her main outdoor clothing throughout the year, despite the weather. (Figure 111 was taken at an indoor market stall and Kitty removed her sunglasses as it was quite dark.) In Figure 110 Kitty appears more comfortable than in Figure 111 and this, I would suggest, is because in the first she is partly hidden from view by her dark glasses. For Kitty, the sunglasses fulfil two criteria. They are associated with ideas of glamour and they also provide a form of mask which hide her eyes and enable her to feel less conspicuous.

This concept of combining a notion of the glamorous or exoticised female image whilst at the same time being hidden from the view of others came more prominently to the fore when Kitty obtained several *burqas*.³⁶ The idea of wearing the *burqa* appeals to Kitty on two counts. First, the garment connects with her idealised fantasy of the East. Secondly, as the *burqa* covers her completely it provides a surface 'invisibility' in public spaces. This enables Kitty to interact in the social sphere without the difficulties that she encounters because of her unstereotypical gender appearance.

A connection may be drawn between Kitty's use of the *burqa* and Karen's virtual female characters. Both the *burqa* and the computer characters provide an 'invisibility' whilst also projecting a female image. In other words, Karen's computer alter-egos enable her to interact in a virtual world in which her physical

³⁶ The *burqa* is one of a range of garments that completely cover the person from head to toe. They have different names in different languages.



Figure 112.
Kitty in her burqa, 09.08.06.
C-type print, 6" x 4".

body is unseen which parallels the way in which the *burqa* covers the body and facilitates presenting as a female in public spaces.

The picture in Figure 113 shows Kitty travelling on the London underground and her apparent wish to hide from the view of the other passengers. This photograph was not performed for the camera. I felt uncomfortable taking the picture as it might have drawn attention to Kitty but at the same time I was so surprised by her response to the situation that I felt it was important to record it. The picture also shows that Kitty's coat, in comparison to the clothing of the other passengers, might be rather warm for the time of year, thus emphasising its function as a covering that hides the person rather than clothing that is worn in relation to the weather conditions.

For Kitty, the conflict between how she sees herself and how others see her, and consequently respond to her, constitutes a major source of distress in her life. This issue was instrumental in her desire to take part in my research. Kitty explains:



Figure 113.
Kitty on the tube,
London, 02.07.04.
C-type print, 4" x 6".

As I understand it, the work we're doing...is very much a reflection of me, which I've wanted for a long time, an opportunity for me to tell myself as I am, and show myself as I am...even your closest friends sometimes don't see you as you are...people basically see what they want to a lot of the time, so I'm trying to leave something behind...that people can look at...and whether they believe it or not...I know that is Kitty up there. (Kitty, 05.06.03)

When I asked Kitty how she felt about her genitalia being visible in the photographs she responded: “...that's part of me...I wish the emphasis was more on my face, or my breasts or something, but it's part of me...It's pictures of my body...and I'm proud of it.” (Kitty, 05.06.03)

Kitty's assertion is contrary to the popular medical opinion that a desire for genital surgery is an essential criteria of a transsexual identity. Her response reveals that the genitals do not always constitute the focus for transsexual people. Whilst there is much common ground amongst the people who have contributed to this study the feelings that people articulate about their sexed/gendered body parts constitutes a significant area of difference. Furthermore, Kitty's gender

identity provides evidence of the fact that not all transsexual people identify as either wholly female or male. The relationship between the self-image, in other words the way the person sees themselves in their mind, and how they respond to parts of the body would appear to be key to the development of gender identities beyond the female/male categories.

Kitty's description of feeling "*proud*" of her body reveals a considerable contrast between the relationship she has with her body and Karen's pre-operative difficulties with seeing her genitalia (Karen, 04.01.05). Robert also expresses an acceptance of his female genitalia although he could not come to terms with having "*chests*" (Robert, 14. 03. 04). Whilst Michael's experiences illustrate his pre-surgery abhorrence of both his breasts and female genitalia (Michael, 19. 03. 04). These accounts demonstrate that each person has a significantly different relationship with their gendered body parts from the others.

In chapter one, the term 'third gender' and the concept of a 'third space' with regard to gender were discussed. The findings of my research indicate that the concept of a 'third space' is more appropriate than the term 'third gender', whilst the terms 'gender variance' or gender diversity' are even more suitable, and would be preferable, as these terms remove the emphasis on the binaries as the primary model. There is no indication to suggest that if only three gender classifications were available that the participants in this study would comfortably self-identify within these categories. In discussing Karen's experiences, I suggested that the awareness she has of her innate femininity and masculinity could signify that if there were more gender options available beyond the binaries that she might identify outside the gender dichotomy. In light of Karen's responses to her genitalia, it is likely that she would place herself closer to the female end of the scale than Kitty. Michael's account indicates that he would position himself firmly within the male binary whilst Robert would be likely to place himself closer to the male end of the scale than the female but not within the polarised category. Thus within these four case studies there are four different gender identities.

This issue, and in particular the position that Kitty articulates with regard to not wishing to have genital surgery, constitutes a different perspective on what it means to be a transsexual person contradicting the argument put forward by the author and psychotherapist, Amy Bloom. Bloom asserts:

[Janice Raymond's] essential point that transsexuals are psychologically unstable victims of a society that overemphasises the roles of sexual insignia and gender difference, made sense to me...[if] society were less rigid it seemed neither transsexuals nor the surgery they seek would exist. (2003: 5)

Bloom's argument is built on the dichotomised version of transsexuality put across by the mass media. At first reading the assumption might be made that Kitty identifies as a transsexual woman. On closer investigation her gender identity is revealed as rather more complex. Developing these issues I would suggest that the widely-held view that transsexual people transition from one gender to the other does not go far enough to explain the range of gender diversity that transsexual people are articulating.

I believe that Bloom and Raymond are correct in that society "overemphasises the roles of sexual insignia and gender difference" (Bloom, 2003 :5). However, Kitty states that she has little difficulty accepting her male genitalia. Following an analysis of the participants' accounts I suggest that it is the combined force of internal and external factors that creates gender identities. Kitty's early gender awareness provides an example of an 'internal' experience of gender. She relates:

It had always been in my life...It was in me. It was inside me, and growing up with it, it scared me...I didn't know what it

was. I didn't know what to make of it...because you're not prepared for it. (Kitty, 05.06.03)

Kitty's description here is consistent with the accounts of the other participants. They all assert that they experience an internal gender. Robert describes "*a point where gender [is] pure*" (Robert, 14.03.03), Michael asserts that "*it was always there, it was always written into my programme*" (Michael, 19.03.04), and Karen said "*you feel like a girl*" (Karen, 08.04.03). It is this internal sense of gender in relation to the social world that creates the catalyst for the changes that transsexual people make to their bodies and gender appearance. Whilst Kitty has no desire to have surgery she has changed her body through taking hormones. In her argument Bloom denies transsexual people an essential gender and also appears to be unaware of the significance of hormone treatment in changing the body from one gender appearance to the other.

The limitations of Bloom's argument supports Kitty's assertion that education is needed with regard to transsexual people. Kitty explains:

There's been a lot of moves in the government recently to make sure we can't get refused operations and stuff like that. But it's not quite that simple...To me, and the rest of us, that's just a token. What's needed is education. (Kitty, 05.06.03)

Kitty continues to experience considerable difficulties in the social realm. However, she stresses her gender identification has not been a matter of choice. This claim is indicative of a pattern that emerged in the research. An example of this is provided by Robert's response to the use of the word 'choice' in relation to gender. Robert was reading a paper I had written in order to give me his opinion on a section that concerned his experiences. When he came across the use of the word 'choice' in the context of gender he argued strongly that I should not include the sentence as gender is not a matter of choice (Robert, 17.10.04).



Figure 114.
 'Kitty', 22.09.04.
 Digital lightjet print,
 50" x 40".
 Exhibited in *view
 point* exhibition,
 London College of
 Communication,
 2005.

In talking about her gender Kitty relates: *"But I must admit I wouldn't change it. I couldn't really change it anyway, but I wouldn't."* Whilst others in the social domain react to Kitty as if there is something fundamentally wrong with her visual appearance, Kitty emphasises that she believes it is the gender categories that are wrong. She claims: *"If society's got a problem making me fit the puzzle then maybe the puzzle's wrong."* (Kitty, 05.06.03)

Figure 114 aims to highlight the fact that the spectator (and also society) is 'seeing' the transsexual person from a specific viewpoint. The picture is taken and presented from a position that seeks to emphasise the angle, perspective and standpoint of the spectator. Thus the work aims to bring to the fore through visual means the issue that the prevailing perception of transsexual people constitutes a position that is merely one of any number of possible viewpoints.

This case study of Kitty's experiences demonstrates that the liminality of the photo-space is significant in enabling the performance of the idealised self to be explored. It also illustrates how the photo-space facilitates bringing to the surface the dialogue between the self-image and images in the external world thus revealing the process of identifying with representations of others that is central to the visualisation of the self.

Kitty's experiences establish that gender is not necessarily contained within the binary categories and that contrary to popular opinion, the genitals do not always constitute a focus for transsexual people. Furthermore, surgery is not a necessary outcome of transsexuality. Kitty's account also suggests that gender may be construed as a fluid entity. The responses of others to Kitty in public spaces provides evidence that it is necessary to be 'seen' to belong to one or other of the socially sanctioned genders, in other words to 'pass', in order to successfully interact in the social sphere.

CHAPTER SIX

ROBERT















This chapter establishes that a dysfunctional dialogue exists between non-binary identified people and the social domain. As a result of the work with Robert that is described in this case study, I shall argue that photography has the potential to enable visibility for transsexual people without endangering the individual, and furthermore, that photographs of the atypically gendered body may constitute a challenge to the gender dichotomy.

Robert was born female and self-identifies as 'trans'. He describes his gender when he said:

I'm not really a man and I'm not a woman...I'm trans. So in some ways I'm not really transsexual either...I'm male, but I'm not a man. I'm neither a man nor a woman, but I'm male rather than female. (Robert, 28.05.03)

When Robert talks about being trans it is evident that he is comfortable with his gender and the perspective that this gives him. Robert relates:

There's a lovely saying that one door closes and another door opens but it's hell in the hallway...that's something I think a lot about. Being trans, you're in the hallway, a trans life is the one in the hallway...These doors open and shut but



Figure 122.
'Robert and the mirror',
17.10.04. C-type print,
12" x 10".

at the end of the day you can only open a door into the male world on one side and the female world on the other side and you have to join society on either side. But if you stay in the hallway, which I believe is much more freeing because you're not bound by either side, it's infinitely harder because you're not bound by either side but you're not belonging to either side. The hallway I think is a wonderful place. Hallways can have windows and they can have wonderful views. (Robert, 28.05.03)

Robert initially began to clarify his gender identity following a conversation with a therapist at the age of twenty-three. The therapist had encouraged him to

be proud and accept his body as a female. Robert replied: “*Yes, but I’m not a man.*” (Robert, 18.07.01) This surprised both Robert and the therapist and led Robert to think about why he had responded in such a way. Consequently, he began to explore his feelings towards his body and gender. At that time Robert was going to call himself by the name of ‘Bod’ which was short for ‘a body’ as he believed it implied neither a female nor a male status. After a visit to a second therapist who specialised in transgender and transsexual issues Robert realised that he thought of ‘Bod’ as male.

Following this realisation, Robert started to bind his chest and shortly afterwards began to change his body to bring it into alignment with his gender. He has had a bilateral mastectomy and he has testosterone injections every two weeks. The testosterone maintains the male aspects of Robert’s appearance, such as the facial and body hair, muscle strength, and distribution of fat. Robert is now predominantly male in appearance, however, he has no desire to have male genitalia. He explains: “*I don’t ever see myself in my mind as having a penis and I never have done.*” He has said that when he first heard the word ‘transsexual’ he knew that he “*fitted in there somewhere*”, but at the same time he thought that he could not be a transsexual person because he did not want male genitalia (Robert, 24.10.03). Figure 123 depicts Robert reclining and at ease with his body as it is now. His body language is open and he makes no attempt to hide his female genitalia. Robert’s female genitalia also play a part in sexual relations (he self-identifies as gay) and although he has had sexual partners he has not had a long-term relationship. However, unlike Michael and Karen, he does not appear to want such a relationship.

Robert talks about his body as it is now as being “*complete*” (Robert, 24.10.03). He said:

A lot of what I’ve learnt about life has been through growing up with contradiction and misrepresentation. What does it mean to be misrepresented or misunderstood? And how do



Figure 123.

Robert at Ken and Richard's, 28.05.03. C-type print, 8" x 10".

you then make yourself understood? ...In some ways to have a penis now would be another misunderstanding and it would be another misrepresentation. (Robert, 28.05.03)

Robert's account contrasts with that of Michael who was also born female but said that he felt as if he was "*missing something*" prior to having phalloplasty surgery (Michael, 19.03.04). For Robert, having female genitalia are an important part of his gender identity. I described earlier the Native North American *berdache*, of which the records indicate that their roles constitute any numbers of genders from three to forty-nine (Feinberg, 1996: 27), and discussed that the first researchers into transsexuality argued that there were "an endless number of individual variations" (Ellis, 1933: 198). Building on these arguments, and taking into account the gender perspectives of Karen and Michael, I would suggest that the differences articulated by Robert and Kitty confirm the early observations of Ellis and Hirschfeld that gender is not necessarily contained within the binaries, even in the context of transsexuality.

Robert has talked about the fact that prior to adolescence he did not have a problem with his gender or his body. He explains: *"In some ways my body sense didn't come from a sense of male or female. My sense of identity was much more to do with what I was doing."* (Robert, 24.10.03) Robert illustrates this issue by describing his childhood growing up in the country and his favourite activity of gardening. He recalls:

When young, I was always wearing trousers and little black wellington boots and I was just a farmer. It was wonderful to be out there...digging...But that's how I got by as a child. My feelings were 'being' what I was doing. (Robert, 18.07.01)

Robert asserts that he is aware that 'a farmer' could be construed as a male person but he clarifies that this was not the issue with which he was concerned. Identifying with being a farmer as a child has been the only time that Robert can recall identifying with images of others. In this way Robert's experiences indicate that he is an exception with regard to the overall findings of my study, which suggest that identifying with images of others is significant in the process of externalising and visualising the self-image.

Robert's tendency to focus on the activities with which he was involved continued during his school years. He enjoyed sports and took up canoeing, weight training, circuit training, squash, and playing football with the boys. Again, Robert maintains that he did not perceive his interest in these activities to signify that he identified more with boys than girls. He explains: *"I was in a kind of innocent state of denial which is probably why I didn't know from a young age. I was just me."* (Robert, 28.05.03)

Robert also experienced difficulties when he was growing up, on occasions where he had to wear specifically female clothing. The issue of clothing as a cultural signifier of gender was discussed earlier through Karen's use of female clothing to mask and render 'invisible' a body with which she could not identify



Figure 124.
 'The feather boa',
 14.03.04. C-type
 print, 10" x 8".

and Michael's difficulties with having to wear female clothing as a child. Robert's experiences are consistent with Michael's. Robert relates:

It was hideous because I used to have to go to functions with my family and obviously had to dress up for these occasions... Mum would...[put] this costume on my bed expecting it to be worn...I had a lot of stress meeting people because I was always in this hideous skirt and...silk blouse. (Robert, 18.07.01)

Figure 124 shows Robert during one of the self-directed photography sessions in which he wanted to explore the relationship between specifically gendered clothing and the contradicting signifiers of polarised gender in his body.

It was not Robert's intention to establish a connection to his early experiences with clothing. However, on looking at the pictures from these sessions one can conjecture that they also reflect how he felt at a young age in situations such as the one that he describes above.

Whilst Robert was comfortable with his body before puberty, he found developing breasts in adolescence extremely distressing. He said: "*I couldn't relate to it at all, and I was freaked out by it...I didn't associate with it.*" (Robert, 18.07.01) The significance of the breasts over and above the genitalia constitutes a pattern that emerged throughout the research with the female-to-male transsexual people irrespective of where they identify on the female/male continuum. This issue is demonstrated by the accounts of Michael and Robert whose gender identifications are significantly different.

Because of how he felt about his breasts Robert developed strategies in order to live without having to 'see' his body. The fact that strategies, centring on 'not seeing' the body, are developed by transsexual people in order to enable them to live with a body at odds with the self-image was discussed through Karen's experiences. At the age of twelve Robert removed all the mirrors from his room. He explains: "*In the past having chests...I didn't relate to them and therefore I didn't have any mirrors, so I didn't have to see it. And as soon as I didn't have the mirrors I didn't have a problem.*" (Robert, 14. 03. 04)

However, Robert was not always able to avoid mirrors. At the age of eighteen, when he was attending music college, he was asked by his teacher to look in a mirror in order to improve his viola playing. He was disturbed by this suggestion, argued with the teacher, and eventually stood on a box so that his head was above the mirror. Robert tried to concentrate on watching the bow but he was wearing a t-shirt and he could see that his breasts were noticeable. He pulled the t-shirt out "*to get rid of the bump*" (Robert, 18.07.01). Robert thought that it might have been that particular t-shirt that made his breasts show and the following week he wore a different one. In looking in the mirror he could still see the curve of his breasts. Robert relates:

I was really paralysed to look in the mirror and see that. I had to deal with it there and then so I just put my jumper back on. It was a really hot day and people laughed...At that point I was...totally unused to seeing myself in the mirror. (Robert, 24.10.03)

Robert has a twin sister and the changes her body went through after puberty at times forced an awareness of the fact that his own body must also be changing in similar ways. Robert found it extremely difficult to acknowledge this and tried to cancel out the knowledge. He said:

I'd see my sister changing and I'd think: 'If that's happening to her it must be happening to me too.' But I never really recognised it on myself. On her it looked wonderful and she was...growing up. But with me it was 'no this isn't really happening'. (Robert, 28.05.03)

Figures 125 and 126 show Robert and his sister together. In the photograph Robert appears relaxed and at ease being photographed. In the past he was extremely uncomfortable with the whole idea of photographs. He describes how he used to react to pictures of himself and said: *"I just couldn't relate to them...I*



Figure 125.
Robert and his sister, 27.07.03.
C-type print, 4" x 6".



Figure 126.
Robert and his sister, 27.07.03.
C-type print, 4" x 6"

just couldn't relate to that being in that photograph...because I thought 'it doesn't really look like me'." (Robert, 24.10. 03) Robert found this so upsetting that he avoided having photographs taken. He recalls an incident when he was in Hungary with the school choir and one of the other pupils was trying to take a photograph. Robert relates:

I remember spending an entire evening underneath a table once because someone had a camera and wanted to take a photo of me. And rather than allow them to have a photo, I spent the evening bent underneath the table, eating my meal from underneath the table. And...it looked really odd...but that was the degree of my discomfort at the idea of someone taking a photo of me. (Robert, 24.10. 03)

Robert was aware when he was younger that he "had problems". However, he wasn't able to identify the root of the problems. He said: "*I just didn't know what they were...something was fundamentally wrong and I was not able to say what it was.*" As a result, Robert was angry and "*potentially violent much of the time.*" When he talks about the changes that have brought his body into line with his gender Robert said: "*It takes desperation... You start out desperate, then you gain courage.*" (Robert, 18.07.01)

Robert's family found his changes very difficult to accept. Robert and his sister have always been very close. They are remarkably similar in their way of thinking, manner of speech, and sense of humour, and his sister's opinion was important to Robert. At first it was difficult for her to understand Robert's need to change. Nevertheless, she is now completely reconciled to the fact and they have maintained a very close relationship. Robert's parents initially found it extremely hard to come to terms with the fact that they were effectively going to lose their daughter Rachael. He said that at first they took it: "*Very badly indeed.*" (Robert, 18.07.01) In talking about his decision to have chest surgery Robert said: "*We've*

never spoken about that. We've never spoken about many of the things that have caused a lot of pain." (Robert, 18.07.01)

Robert's parents have now come to accept the changes he has made. His mother recently became ill and since then he has gone to stay in the family home almost every weekend to look after his mother and support his father. Robert, his sister, and his parents have also been on a family holiday. Over the past few years Robert has developed a particularly close relationship with his father, of whom he is very fond. Robert and his father went on a holiday together to Prague, they enjoy watching rugby and cricket on television, and go to rugby matches. When he was talking about his background and his parents Robert said: *"They've both really come up trumps in the past year, which is amazing, since they came from an area like Henley. It is not good to have a trans child in Henley."* (Robert, 18.07.01)

Prior to changing his gender role and appearance, despite his interest in male-dominated sports and the awareness that *"something was fundamentally wrong"* (Robert, 18.07.01), in some areas Robert felt it was necessary to fit in with those around him. He recalls that at school he grew his hair long and describes this as a 'survival technique'. Robert explains: *"[I]f you didn't have long hair you would be teased and your life would just not have been worth living. So part of the survival technique was to blend in."* (Robert, 24.10.03) This brings to the surface the pressure that is put upon the individual to appear to conform to the rules that are adhered to by the social group. Through Kitty's experiences it was demonstrated how difficult it is for someone to interact in public spaces, if having changed their gender presentation their appearance does not fit the expected 'look' of the binary gender categories. Through Robert's account it is established that if a person's appearance does not fit expected gender expressions, whether or not the person has changed their gender presentation, interacting in society becomes difficult. Thus non-binary identified people are unable to openly express their gender identities if they want to lead a satisfactory life in mainstream society.

Before masculinising his appearance Robert experienced many disturbing incidents because of how he looked. He received abuse in public spaces and stares when he used public toilets. Robert explains people's reactions by saying that he did not appear feminine and his body language did not conform to stereotypically feminine ideals. The fact that body language is a culturally learned behaviour was discussed through Karen's experiences of changing her gender presentation. Robert's account expands on this issue and demonstrates that when people do not conform to the cultural models they are 'punished' for transgressing the norms.

On leaving school Robert was given a place at a prestigious music college and trained as a viola player. However, he was once fired from an orchestra because he looked "*ridiculous in a skirt*" (Robert, 18.07.01). A pattern that emerged in the research with female-to-male transsexual people, although not with male-to-female people, is that the pre-transitional appearance is frequently construed as androgynous. As a result female-to-male people and transmen often experience difficulties interacting in society before starting hormone treatment. Another trans participant, David, describes the difference between his experiences in public spaces before and after presenting as a male, saying:

When I was in that middle range, it was absolutely really, really, really difficult to live and function and have an ordinary everyday life...I know I was really restricting myself with who I knew and where I went - all sorts of stuff - the jobs I did. Its really, really limiting...You've no idea the relief that I can just walk about now without being bothered, or harassed, or people demanding to know what sex I am. People getting confused, and people calling me sir, and then calling me madam, and then apologising profusely and calling me love. And the confusion in public toilets, and never knowing when somebody's going to react or hit you or call the police. The



Figure 127.
Robert in Dublin,
30.06.06. C-type
print, 4" x 6".

*constant stress all the time and the fact that that's gone now
is just such an enormous relief. (David, 07.11. 03)*

This statement of David's underlines the point that non-binary identified people are unable to openly lead a 'normal' social existence. In keeping with David's experiences, since taking testosterone and having chest surgery, Robert's life has changed dramatically for the better and he is now able to confidently interact with others in society. Figure 128 shows Robert in an everyday social situation. He is seated outside a café on a busy city street. His appearance is in accord with those around him and the picture illustrates the fact that passers by do not give him a second look. Figure 127 also shows Robert in an everyday situation. In this photograph Robert is depicted looking out at the world around him. Whilst he appears to belong, or to use Robert's word, to "*blend*" (Robert, 28.05.03), the space he inhabits as a trans person is separated from the outside (social) domain.

Shortly after changing gender Robert set up a music school in London for Kurdish refugees and he now teaches music at several London schools. Robert has compared how he responds to situations in the present to how he would have handled them in the past. He recalls that whilst he was a student he could never have gone out in a group of people but since changing his gender role and



Figure 128.
Robert in Dublin, 01.07.06.
C-type print, 6" x 4".

appearance he is perfectly happy going with others to pubs and bars (Robert, 18.07.01). He also described an incident that occurred when he was playing music with some friends who were in a Kurdish band. Robert said:

Mehmet...put me on a stage with five people in the band. Two thousand five hundred in the audience and Mehmet started a new song that I didn't know. And he looked over to me and said into his microphone after the first verse 'Robert' and I'm expected to do a solo!...But I'd never have done that as Rachael. She couldn't have done it. It was asking too much of her. That's putting her in touch with her feelings and she couldn't do that. (Robert, 18.07.01)

In his interactions with others Robert's non-binary gender identity contributes a positive element to the way in which he is able to relate to their experiences. His early socialisation as a female and his re-entry into society as

a male enables Robert to better understand the perspectives of both females and males. As Robert suggests *“being trans...can have wonderful views.”* (Robert, 28.05.03) As well as working with Kurdish refugees, Robert is a Samaritans volunteer working on the telephone help lines. He asserts:

As a Samaritan, you can answer the phone and someone wants to talk specifically to a female volunteer. And sometimes there aren't any around and you ask: 'Can I be of assistance?' And sometimes you'll have people say they never thought they could talk to a man like that...I think had I been a man they couldn't have spoken to me like that. I'm not saying that as a derogatory thing to men. But sometimes, not just as a Samaritan but with the refugees, I access a different space with them. It's almost like people recognise that there's a difference, even though they don't know that I'm trans, they do recognise a certain difference about me.
(Robert, 18.07.01)

When Robert applies for teaching jobs and in similar situations where he feels that people should know that he is trans Robert has always been frank in explaining that he was born a biological female. However, in order to lead a 'normal' life in society he is unable to openly manifest his trans identity. He publicly presents a male appearance and others perceive him as a male. Although Robert expresses frustration that his trans identity is for the most part hidden, he is grateful that he is now able to be employed and *“appear[s] to blend in”* (Robert, 28.05.03).

In chapter one I quoted Janice Raymond's suggestion that transsexual surgery “reinforces social conformity by encouraging the individual to become an agreeable participant in a role-defined society, substituting one sex role

stereotype for the other.” (Raymond, 1994: xvii) Robert’s difficulties before changing his appearance to that of a stereotypical male demonstrates that it is not necessarily the case that transsexual surgery reinforces social conformity. Rather, what this case study shows is that the perceptions of others influence the way that transsexual people are able to appear in public spaces and that in order to fully take part in society it is necessary to be ‘seen’ to belong to the two-sexes/two-genders system.

This brings to the fore why it is that the issues of visibility and ‘passing’ are highly problematic. If people who display non-binary gender presentations are badly treated in society, then it is extremely difficult for transsexual and non-binary identified people to gain visibility without adversely affecting their lives.

Robert is politically active with the aim of bringing about positive changes for transsexual people. Since 1997 he has been involved with *Press for Change*, an organisation that campaigns for equal rights for transsexual people in the UK, and for four years of that time he has been a Vice President. He is on the *Parliamentary Forum for Transsexuality* and he worked as a helpline volunteer for the *FTM network* and has been on the *FTM London committee*. Robert also set up a hospital visiting service in London in order to provide support for female-to-male transsexual people going through surgery.

Robert’s political awareness triggered his interest in contributing to my study. For Robert, the photo-space provides a way for him to be able to stand up and assert his trans identity. The pictures that result from the photographic encounter serve as both a personal affirmation and a political statement. Robert explains:

The only way you’re going to know I’m trans is if I stand up and say so, and that’s why I do it, because I can appear to blend in. If I don’t stand up then what about those people who don’t have the choice to ‘blend’. You’re implying there’s something wrong with being trans if you hide...I’m enjoying

*the opportunity to stand up and celebrate the body and
celebrate the differences in the body...I'm trying to show
an alternative way...I think the photos are very important.*

(Robert 28.05.03)

Robert suggests here that photography may have the potential to offer a way of enabling visibility for transsexual people. This, I believe, is important because of the incidents that transsexual people describe in relation to when they do not publicly conform to the gender system. Photography may be able to facilitate visibility without endangering the individual. This is particularly significant in relation to non-binary identified people because they are entirely unrecognised and 'invisible' in the social domain. I discussed earlier the concept of 'the wrong body' and Jason Cromwell's position that transsexual people are defining their bodies as 'different' rather than 'wrong' (1999: 134). If photography is able to bring the non-binary body into the realm of the visible and culturally intelligible it follows that that which is constituted as 'normal' may shift to include the body that is currently labelled as 'different' or 'wrong'.

Furthermore, I suggest that photographs of the atypical body may challenge the gender dichotomy on another level. Judith Butler argues that seeing the body that cannot be read as that of either a woman or a man questions the binary categories and puts "the reality of gender into crisis." Butler asserts that one 'sees' through the gender categories and that it is the "vacillation" between female and male that occurs in 'seeing' the atypical body that questions the gender system (Butler, 1990: xxii, xxiii). Building on this argument, photographs of the atypical body may have the potential to contest the gender dichotomy through the viewer's experience of 'seeing' the cultural categories of gender through the non-binary body.

In contrast with the description given earlier of Robert's difficulties with photography, he has always seemed to be completely at ease during our photography sessions, in other words when he is 'in' the photo-space, and he



Figure 129.

Robert photographing himself, 14.03.04. C-type print, 10" x 12".

also appears to be comfortable looking at the pictures. Having changed his body, photographs no longer present Robert with the traumatic encounter of confronting an image of himself with which he cannot identify. After our first session, when I asked Robert how he felt about the experience, he responded by saying: *"Well, having stood naked most of the afternoon it's certainly something I wouldn't have done in the past! I couldn't have done it."* (Robert, 18. 07.01) A few days later he telephoned to say that the session had been *"an empowering experience"*.

Several of the photographs that accompany this chapter demonstrate that Robert no longer has a problem seeing his reflection in mirrors (Figures 122, 124, 129, and 132). During the course of our work together he moved into a studio flat with large mirror-fronted wardrobes, covering almost the whole of one wall. When we were taking photographs Robert appeared to be completely comfortable looking at his reflection and did not try to avoid the mirrors at any time. Figures 122, 124, 129, and 132 were all taken in this flat. Figure 129 is of Robert composing himself to take a self-portrait. The picture demonstrates the shift in Robert's attitude towards seeing his own reflection that has taken



Figure 130.

130. Robert photographing himself, 24.10.03. C-type print, 8" x 10".

place since changing his body. The way in which he stands is confident and this is shown particularly through the mirror counterpart. It is evident from the photograph that Robert is not afraid to confront the image that he now sees in the mirror.

In our work together Robert wanted to emphasise what he describes as the “*contradiction*” of his trans body (Robert, 28.05.03). As a result of this his genitalia constitute a feature in some of the self-directed photographs. For instance, Figure 130 depicts Robert photographing himself. Robert composed the shot with the camera directed towards his genitals. He is portrayed absorbed in the process of taking a picture. The photograph shows that he is uninhibited in displaying his body to the camera and the arrangement of his body demonstrates the acceptance of his female genitalia.

Stemming from his political concerns and his position as someone who self-identifies beyond the gender dichotomy, Robert also expressed a desire to use the photography sessions to explore the socially constructed nature of the genders. As an outcome of this, in some of the self-directed photography sessions,

(Figures 124 and 131) Robert wore clothing with specific gender associations. The fact that clothing is an important social signifier of gender is an issue that has surfaced repeatedly in the research and was explored through both Karen's and Michael's experiences. Entwistle argues:

Conventions of dress attempt to transform flesh into something recognisable and meaningful to culture... Clothing, as an aspect of culture, is a crucial feature in the production of masculinity and femininity: it turns nature into culture, layering cultural meanings on the body. There is no natural link between an item of clothing and 'femininity' and 'masculinity'; instead there is an arbitrary set of associations which are culturally specific. (2000: 8, 143)

Developing this argument, clothing can be construed as a filter through which the body is viewed. Underlying the clothing/gender equation is the assumption that the cultural markers of gender are the visible signs of the cultural categories of the binary sexes. In other words, the two-sexes/two-genders system is reinforced in everyday life through the feminine and masculine clothing that is worn. Through clothing, the person's sex is also announced to others and is 'read' by others. When we were discussing Figure 131 Robert explained more about the ideas behind the photographs. He said:

You're mixing and matching what society says is OK and what's not OK. In a sense it's OK to be seen as a man...in a shirt and tie but to have the stockings as well suddenly changes the equation because society would say that that isn't what you are suppose to be doing...Which part of it is cross-dressing actually? 'Cos if you look at the genitals then the stockings are perfectly OK and it's the shirt and tie that's



Figure 131.
Robert in tie and
stockings, 28.05.03.
C-type print,
12" x 10".

wrong. But if you look at the face then it's the shirt and tie that's right and the stockings are wrong. But, at the end of the day none of it is wrong and none of it's right. (Robert, 14.03.04)

Figure 131 builds on what Robert calls “*the contradiction*” between the female and male aspects of his trans body (Robert, 28.05.03) and the corresponding social categories whilst Figure 124 explores the impact of overtly feminine accessories (feather boa, lipstick, earrings, stockings) on a predominantly male

body. The body language in both pictures is in keeping with the socially dictated gestures for males, thus emphasising Robert's masculinity and in Figure 131 the genitalia constitute a focal point of the picture. The blue of the shirt and the pink of the feather boa provide additional gender symbolism. These photographs are explicitly performative. The performance that is effected for the camera within the photo-space underlines the fact that clothing and body language are part of the performance of gender that takes place in everyday life. The polarised gender expressions inherent in the body language and clothing bring to the surface the issue that the non-binary identified body is viewed through the binary gender categories. In other words, there is no social recognition of gender beyond the binaries.

Robert has said that he believes these photographs may be more difficult for viewers to accept than those in which he is completely naked. He makes the point that this may be the case particularly for transmen, as the fact that he is shown wearing female clothing could be construed as a denial of his masculinity and a refutation of his desire to be male (Robert, 28.05.03). However, this is not Robert's intention. He explains:

I think in some ways the photos are not really about me, it's about the deconstruction of something far more sinister almost. I think the pressure that gets put on us to construct an identity is quite sinister. (Robert, 14.03.04)

Robert asserts that despite his awareness of the social aspects of gender he believes that people also have a fundamental essential gender. In other words, the sense that one has of one's own gender is communicated to others through performative expression. Robert argues:

There's a point where gender [is] pure rather than a construct. Until you reach that point - is it you or is it society? Or is



Figure 132.
 'Robert and the mirror', 17.10.04.
 Digital lightjet print,
 30" x 40". Exhibited
 in *Somatechnics*,
 Macquarie University
 Gallery, Sydney,
 Australia, 2005.

*it what you've been led to believe and you just compound
 it by becoming it over and over and over again every day?*
 (Robert, 14.03.04)

Robert's statement highlights the repetitive nature of gender expressions and in this sense is in accord with Butler's claim that gender is "a stylised repetition of acts." However, Butler asserts that: "Gender ought not to be construed as a...locus of agency" (1990: 179) and this is not supported by the accounts of those who took part in my study. Robert's argument above demonstrates this point. Robert's questions highlight the complex dialogic nature of gender whereby the internal essence becomes manifested through negotiation with the external world.

Robert's account again overall brings to the fore the limitations of the binary gender categories and the dysfunctional dialogue that occurs in society with regard to non-binary gender identities. This case study shows that by not allowing for expressions beyond the female/male boundaries the gender dichotomy becomes an inhibiting, restricting force in the lives of non-binary identified people. Considerable social pressure is brought to bear so that non-

binary identified people live their lives with what they believe to be their true gender identities hidden.

Whilst photography has the capacity to provide visibility for transsexual people without endangering the individual, I would suggest that photographs of the atypical body also have the ability to call into question the gender dichotomy. Butler argues that gender identities that do not conform to cultural norms provide critical opportunities to expose the cultural matrix (Butler, 1990: 24). Thus I suggest that through taking private atypical visualisations of gender into the public realm the photographs presented here of Robert, and those of Kitty in the preceding chapter, may question pre-conceptions of gender and the body, contest the boundaries of the binaries, and present a challenge to the gender system.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It is well established that visibility is important to the presentation of all people. However, the evidence of my research would suggest that there is a heightened awareness of the visualisation of gender in transsexual experiences that is above and beyond the everyday use of the visual realm. Within the parameters of the 'norm' the way in which the visual signs of gender are widely used is at a subconscious level. Bourdieu asserts that the cultural *habitus* possesses social actors "more than they possess it, this is because it acts within them as the organising principle of their actions" (1977: 18). Thus there is an underlying unifying principle of gender practices in society that is perpetually maintained and continuously reinforced through social interaction.

During the transitional process transsexual people undergo a period where they self-consciously position themselves within the *habitus*. The aim is to 'pass' and for the self-conscious performance of gender signs to become banal. During this period the person develops a heightened level of awareness of all aspects of the visual language of gender.

The photography sessions allowed the subjects to articulate the visual signs of gender that they had accumulated. The practice created a new 'virtual' space beyond the boundaries of everyday life where notions of identity could be performed - a liminal 'photo-space'. Each of the players in the space: the subject, the camera, the mirror, and the photographer all contributed an important element which, when brought together, formed the photo-space. Within the photo-space

every nuance of the visualisation and projection of the self is heightened. In other words, the photo-space is a hyper-visualised space.

Taking part in the research was cathartic for the participants. Through enabling the performance of the way in which the participants use signs of gender the photo-space constituted a 'ritual' "betwixt and between" space which was fundamentally transformative (Turner, 1983: 234).

Methodological development has been key to the analytical development throughout. The methodology was responsive to the subjects and because of this the research moved beyond a formal photo-elicitation study to a profoundly discursive photo-space. This shift highlights the limitations of the methodology in the context of this type of research. Photo-elicitation was unable to accommodate the different ways in which the participants responded to the performative potential of the photographic encounter and the full range of the concerns that they brought to the work. This was particularly evident because of the four-year period of collaboration.

Photography is a form of vernacular, a highly visualised language that is in accord with the subjects own perceptions of themselves. Owing to inadequate representation in society, transsexual people have a particular need to articulate their experiences. However, it is extremely difficult to do so when there is a lack of recognised language with which to describe their gender identities. Moreover, the language surrounding transsexual issues is highly political. If there are no words in the culture to express people's experiences then language, or the lack of language, constitutes a type of repression. The photo-space offered a different form of communication, beyond the spoken or written word, which enabled the participants to articulate their experiences in a way that would not have been possible through words alone.

The photo-space also functioned as a key to unlocking the internal dialogue between the self-image and the external world that takes place through images. Involving subjects in making photographs and reviewing pictures revealed that there was a significant need for photographs to affirm the self-image. This can

be construed as an extension of the process of identifying with the representation of oneself that is seen in the mirror which, as the research established, is of great importance in matters of transsexuality with regard to the well-being of the person concerned.

The inquiry revealed that images from the surrounding visual environment constitute a specific form of focus in transsexual self-visualisation. In other words, identifying with images of others forms a part of the negotiation process that facilitates the externalisation and projection of the self. This was demonstrated through all but one of the participants' accounts. With the exception of Robert, each of the other subjects indicated specific images that had influenced their visual presentation. The participants were able to readily describe why the images were important to them and how, to their mind, the images manifested characteristics that the subject believed they also possessed.

The methodology facilitated the participants' involvement in the making of their own pictures, enabled the creation of portraits from their points of view, and used a mediation process to present their perceptions rather than the photographer's. In this way it was able to establish and move away from the traditional role of the photographer in relation to the subject and enabled the participant to become both the observing 'subject' and the observed 'object' in the picture. Thus I would argue that the photographic work in this thesis presents a new perspective on transsexual experiences that is markedly different from the work of Goldin, Arbus, La Grace Volcano, Opie, and Cameron. Throughout the subjects had considerable input into, and at times complete control over, the making of their own photographs, and consequently they had control over the way in which they were represented. Because the research was undertaken with the participants on an individual basis it enabled their lived experiences to form a part of the work rather than the focus resting on their shared identities. The participants' role in the making of the photographs also freed the work from the concern regarding the expectation of producing positive images of a

marginalised social group that is central to the work of La Grace Volcano, Opie, and Cameron.

The photo-space has potential for further developments in other under-represented communities, for use in therapeutic situations where the self-image is not externally manifested, and in situations where subjects experience difficulty in articulating their self-perceptions through spoken or written language.

The discursive nature of the photo-space enabled the participants' experiences to come to the surface. An important feature of the subjects' accounts was that they established that gender is not necessarily contained within the binary categories. This issue was then explored through a broader context to determine how the participants' self-identifications of gender related to the wider perspective. It emerged that the natural configurations of sex found in intersex 'conditions' support the non-binary concept as these illustrate that biological sex is also not restricted to the female/male polarised system. The dichotomy of the sexes provides the foundation for the concept of two genders thus intersex conditions may be construed as constituting a parallel to atypical gender identities. In other words, neither sex nor gender should be conceived of as being limited to the binary categories.

This position was further strengthened by numerous records of historical and cross-cultural instances of gender beyond the female/male boundaries. These establish that whilst the terminology currently in use is a relatively recent development in line with recognition of the condition, gender beyond the binary system is not a new concept, and that gender-variant people have a history. Thus, the evidence that surfaced in this study contests the widely-held belief in the two-sexes/two-genders system, founded on the assumption that gender follows biology.

Whilst the medical profession and the mass media perpetuate the notion that transsexual people exchange one polarised gender role and presentation for the other my research contradicts this view. The evidence would suggest that it is not the case that transsexual people move from one gender binary to the other in all

instances and that there are significant differences in people's perceptions of their bodies. The concept of 'the wrong body', which configures around the genitalia as the signifier of female-ness or male-ness (Stone, 1991: 297; Cromwell, 1999: 105), has come to symbolise the transsexual condition. I suggest that this does not go far enough to explain the different concerns that transsexual people express in relation to specific parts of the body. The genitalia, as the female or male signifier, form the focus for some, but this is not the case for all. Whilst the 'cure' for the transsexual condition is widely viewed as changing a male body for a female one, or vice versa, my research indicates that the ways in which transsexual people experience their bodies are intrinsically more complex. In the same way that people who identify with the opposite gender polarity undergo physical changes, people self-identifying beyond the gender dichotomy change their bodies to align the body with the gender. Thus the body may be altered through hormones and/or surgery to a form that has elements that are culturally associated with both 'female' and male' categories and as such is also beyond the boundaries of the two-sexes/two-genders system. This raises the question of whether the body/gender/sex relationship might not be more appropriately reconfigured in a model where the body is viewed as a dialogic 'surface' of the person's gender identity with the issue of biological, anatomical, and chromosomal sex constituted as an entirely separate concern.

The experiences of non-binary identified transsexual people that came to the fore in this inquiry offer a new understanding of transsexuality as well as of gender, as atypical gender identities contribute a further dimension to the category of 'the transsexual'. The fact that atypically gendered people are unable to openly express their gender identities is an indication of the dysfunctional dialogue that exists between the social sphere and non-binary identified people. As it does not allow for expressions beyond the female/male boundaries, the gender dichotomy becomes an inhibiting, restricting force in the lives of atypically gendered people. In light of the gender differences that were revealed through this study I would

suggest that the widely accepted model of transsexuality is too homogenised and does not accurately reflect transsexual people's lived experiences.

It is possible that if there was more widespread knowledge of the realities of transsexual experiences, thus deconstructing the current concept of the transsexual, that this might contribute to the erosion of the female/male binaries. After all, the transsexual person who transitions from one socially sanctioned polarity of gender to the other does not present as significant a challenge to the two-sexes/two-genders system as the person who identifies beyond the binaries. Despite this, the existence of the binary-identified transsexual person still serves to undermine the notion that the sex and gender dichotomies are natural by underlining the fact that 'female' and 'male' are cultural categories that are accomplished and achieved by all.

I have argued that the process of learning to present in a different gender does not make the transsexual person any more of a "synthetic product" (Raymond, 1994: 165) than the biological or chromosomal female or male. All women and men imitate the accepted model thus transforming their physical reality into a cultural artifact on a daily basis. The 'passing' procedures employed by transsexual people provide an opportunity to examine the relationship between the internal sense of gender and the social construction of gender presentations. Robert Stoller asserts that transsexual people offer "a keystone for understanding the development of masculinity and femininity in all people." (1973: 215) A project applying the research methodology I have described to non-transsexual participants might offer more conclusive evidence on this matter. However, owing to the criteria of 'normality' that is invested in the gender dichotomy and the stigma of 'abnormality' that certain results might indicate it is also possible that participants may suppress their responses. The issue of 'normality' concerns transsexual people less as they are acutely aware that they are already widely construed to be within the 'abnormal' realm.

Two significant areas of concern and exploration involving the visual realm previously ignored in research into transsexuality have emerged in this study. These are 'seeing' the body and 'being seen' by others. The strategies that are used to enable the person to live without seeing the body when it is at odds with the self-image are important in this context as they underline the significance of the visual domain. If the person does not see their body the gendered self-image is able to be believed to be the 'reality'. However, 'seeing' the body when it is not in accord with the self-image forces the person to confront an image they are unable to recognise as their own. This compels the person to acknowledge that their physical presence in the world does not reflect how they see themselves in their mind. In other words, 'seeing' the body creates a situation where the subject has to confront that, in one sense, they are not who they believe themselves to be.

'Being seen' by others also affords a situation whereby the gendered self-image is either affirmed or contested. The learning process that many transsexual people go through, with regard to cultural practices of gender, in order to present themselves in a different gender presentation means that 'being seen' by others becomes a kind of test that can either be 'passed' or failed. My research indicates that in instances where individuals fear they might not 'pass' there is a desire for a form of invisibility.

In this regard a difference between the experiences of Western female-to-male transsexual people and male-to-female people surfaced in the study. The evidence would suggest that some female-born transsexual people are to a certain extent masculinised before starting hormone treatment whilst it would appear that this is less often the case for male-born transsexual people. The effects of testosterone on a female body would also appear to generally be more marked than those of oestrogen and progesterone on a male body. Thus, male-born transsexual people are more likely to be insecure in relation to interacting in the social domain after transitioning. The differences between female-born and male-born transsexual people is an area that would benefit from further research.

Judith Butler's influential theory on gender performativity suggests that gender is nothing more than a repeated performance. However, in this inquiry the participants' accounts revealed that transsexual people experience an essential gender and that this internal factor is mediated through a dialogue with the external environment. This indicates that whilst gender can only be observed through external factors the internal realm should not be excluded in discussions of transsexual issues.

I would suggest that transsexual performances of gender are undertaken in order to 'be seen' by others as the person sees themselves. In this way, social expectations of gender impact on the individual. 'Being seen' by others is a highly important, inadequately recognised, factor in transsexual subjects' transformations and presentations.

These two areas, 'seeing' the body and 'being seen' by others offer, I would argue, an important new perspective on the negotiation of transsexual gender identities. Up to now, a general understanding of the fact that transsexual people experience a conflict between the self-image and the body has been recognised. However, the ways in which this conflict is experienced and manifested have not previously been examined. My research indicates that these areas of visual experience are highly significant in the negotiation process that takes place between the transsexual person's inner sense of gender and the external environment. This is important because it is through the visual interface that the separation of the gendered self-image from the body becomes evident and the primary position of the self-image over the physical reality is established.

I have been concerned to demonstrate in this thesis that the politics of transsexual visibility is a complex issue. This is because of the 'policing' of gender that takes place in public spaces which contributes towards maintaining and reinforcing polarised gender presentations. Although changes have been made to recognise transsexual people legally and they now have a 'voice' in the debates surrounding treatment and legal matters, everyday life for the transsexual person remains problematic. The accounts of the participants show that despite

the increased public awareness of transsexuality, in order to lead a satisfactory social existence it is still necessary to 'pass' as a biological female or male. If displaying atypical gender presentations results in being treated badly in society then it is extremely difficult for transsexual and non-binary identified people to gain visibility without adversely affecting their lives. Taking this into account I would suggest that photography, if used in conjunction with the subject's maintaining control over when and where their images are presented, may offer a method for providing visibility without endangering the individual.

Butler asserts that we 'see' through the categories of female and male and that seeing the body that cannot be read as that of either a woman or a man questions the binary categories and puts "the reality of gender into crisis." (1990: xxii) Whilst Anne Fausto-Sterling claims that the body can be viewed as "a system that simultaneously produces and is produced by social meanings." (2000: 23) Thus it follows that if the visual is key to the perception and projection of gender in society, then pictures of the atypically gendered body have the potential to de-stabilise the concept of the binary gender system. Building on this argument, I would suggest that photographs of private atypical visualisations of gender taken into the public realm may question pre-conceptions of gender and the body, contest the boundaries of the binaries, and present a challenge to the gender system.

An important aspect of photography in this regard are the key questions of what can and should be shown and in what contexts. In my study the research participants maintained control over when and where the photographs and interview extracts could be presented, exhibited, and published. This raises important ethical issues on research methods in relation to photography, which might be seen to have a broader application. Issues of trust, integrity, and the photographer's responsibility to the subject, particularly in situations that involve the subject's personal life and private concerns, are significant and yet they are consistently overlooked in the use of photography and the dissemination of photographs.

At present it is widely accepted that the photographer has the right to use pictures as and when s/he chooses without consultation with the person depicted beyond their signing of an initial release form. This denies the subject any form of agency with regard to the context in which they are represented. As the meanings of photographs shift in relation to their context it is therefore possible that despite the subject's agreement to a photograph being used they may still be misrepresented. This is particularly important in situations where knowledge of specific aspects of a person's identity might adversely affect their lives. Also relevant is the issue of photographs that are sold for commercial purposes as the picture passes out of the photographer's as well as the subject's control.

In this study sexuality did not form a central concern of the participants and consequently this thesis does not explore the issue. Nonetheless, it is an area that would benefit from investigation, and indeed, it is an issue that I personally wish to pursue in the future. This is owing to the fact that transsexual sexual identities do not appear to follow a consistent pattern. It is possible that the relationship between the subject's gender identity and their sexual orientation might also provide insights beyond the transsexual community.

Finally, this study has been limited to a four-year time span. The outcomes of my inquiry indicate that further research into transsexuality as a whole, and atypical gender identities in particular, is warranted. My conclusions raise the following questions:

Why, despite considerable theoretical advancements and evidence to the contrary, does the two-sexes/two-genders system continue to be upheld?

What other ways are there in which photography might be employed to contribute towards providing visibility for transsexual people?

What aspects of the negotiation of gender in society might be revealed through exploration of the other sensory realms?

This is important work because, despite recent moves to legally recognise transsexual people, the realities of transsexual lives continue to be distorted and suppressed to the point of invisibility.

This study establishes that transsexual gender identities are not necessarily contained within the binary categories and that this is so even though atypical genders are unable to be openly expressed. This would indicate that gender is not necessarily a binary form. If the 'reality' of gender is that it is not contained within the gender dichotomy, and if non-binary transsexual identities exist but are not visible in society, then this has considerable implications beyond the transsexual community in relation to mainstream society.

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Film and Television

- Aberdein, J., (Producer and Director), *Return to Gender*, 'Unique Factuals' production for Channel 5 (Television), 02.02.06.
- Rea, D., (Producer, Director, Camera), 2005. *Sex Change*, Episode 6, Mandrill Television for Discovery Networks Europe, 08.08.05.
- Silverman, V., Stryker, S., (Producers, Directors, Writers), 2005. *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria*, produced in association with The Independent Television Service (ITVS) and KQED Public Television.

Appendix I

Interviews

The following interviews with transsexual people contributed to this study. They are part of a larger personal archive of recorded interviews undertaken with transgender people between 2000 and 2006.

1. Zsarday, Unit 7 Studios, London, 2000, 48 minutes. Undated tape.
2. Karen, Unit 7 Studios, London, 31. 10. 00, 23 minutes.
3. Nikki, Soho cafe, London, 2001, 37 minutes. Undated tape.
4. Jessica, Unit 7 Studios, London, 2001, 12 minutes. Undated tape.
5. Adelle, Unit 7 Studios, London, 2001, 52 minutes. Undated tape.
6. Ashleigh, Unit 7 Studios, London, 2001, 38 minutes. Undated tape.
7. Dan, Unit 7 Studios, London, 2001, 59 minutes. 24.09.01.
8. Janine, Unit 7 Studios, London, 2001, 1 hour 7 minutes. Undated tape.

9. Frances, Unit 7 Studios, London, 2001, 58 minutes. Undated tape.
10. Lynn, Unit 7 Studios, London, 2001, 54 minutes. Undated tape.
11. Luke, Unit 7 Studios, London, 2001, 1 hour 4 minutes. Undated tape.
12. Nik, Unit 7 Studios, London, 2001, 1 hour 20 minutes. Undated tape.
13. Robert, Unit 7 Studios, London, 18. 07. 01, 2 hours 15 minutes.
14. Adrien, Unit 7 Studios, London, 10. 02. 02, 1 hour 19 minutes.
15. Jake, Unit 7 Studios, London, 13. 04. 02, 1 hour 27 minutes.
16. Michael, Unit 7 Studios, London, 11. 05. 02, 2 hours 56 minutes.
17. Siobhan, Unit 7 Studios, London, 23.11. 02, 2 hours 22 minutes.
18. Karen, Karen's grandparents house (her room), 08 .04. 03, 39 minutes.
19. Karen, Karen's grandparents house (the sitting room), 10. 05. 03,
43 minutes.
20. Michael, Michael's house (the sitting room), 24. 05. 03, 59 minutes.
21. Nik, Nik's flat, London, 31. 05. 03, 48 minutes.
22. Robert, Part 1: Ken and Richard's flat, London, Part 2: Farringdon,
28. 05. 03, 1 hour 30 minutes.

23. Kitty, Kitty's flat, London, 05. 06. 03, 44 minutes.
24. Kitty, St. James Park, London, 10.07.03. 28 minutes.
25. Robert, Robert's lodgings (his room), London, Part 1: Before going to the piercing parlour, Part 2: On returning from the piercing parlour, 24. 10. 03, 1 hour 3 minutes.
26. David, David's home (his room), London, 07. 11. 03, 1 hour 40 minutes.
27. Kitty, Kitty's flat, London, 07. 03. 04, 37 minutes.
28. Robert, Robert's flat, London, 14. 03. 04, 58 minutes.
29. Michael, Michael's house (the sitting room), 19. 03. 04, 45 minutes.
30. Robert, Robert's flat, London, 28. 03. 04, 42 minutes.
31. Deeba, Deeba's flat, London, 18.04.04, 38 minutes.
32. Adrien, Adrien's home, 02. 05. 04, 1 hour 14 minutes.
33. Gerry, Trevor's flat, London, 24. 07. 04, 1 hour 26 minutes.
34. David, Café near Piccadilly Circus, London, 05.08.04, 31 minutes.
35. Karen, Karen's grandparents house (her room), 03. 08. 04, 26 minutes.
36. Zack, Zack's flat, 23.10.04, 1 hour 30 minutes.

37. Kitty, Kitty's flat, 29.11.04, 43 minutes.

38. Karen, Recorded telephone conversation, 04. 01. 05, 18 minutes.

39. Anna, Anna's flat, London, 22. 01. 05, 1 hour 28 minutes.

40. Kitty, Recorded telephone conversation, 19. 10. 05, 27 minutes.

41. Gerry, Recorded telephone conversation, 15.07.06, 38 minutes.