

# Journeys Towards an Acceptable Gender Expression: Narratives of People Living with Gender Variance

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## ABSTRACT

**BACKGROUND:** Gender Variance (GV) is an experience that the gender assigned at birth is different to one's preferred gender identity. It includes the possibility of a preferred gender identity being different to either male or female. It is reported that around 4000 people per year access care from the NHS in relation to GV (Gender Identity Research and Education Society (GIRES), 2009) and both the physical and psychological elements of these experiences is well documented. However, little research specifically explores how Gender Variant (GVt) people make sense of their experiences and construct meaningful expression of their preferred identity. The aim of this study is to further the understanding of GV with a view to considering the implications for service provision to this population.

**METHODOLOGY:** The study employed a qualitative method that explored the narratives of the participants. A purposive sample of seven participants self identified as GVt was recruited for a single interview. The interviews used a topic guide to elicit the narratives that these people tell about their experiences. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analysed using a narrative approach to explore what the participants said and the way they said it. This was then situated within the local and broader social contexts within which the narratives exist.

**ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS:** The findings are presented through a global impression of each of the individual narratives and then through discussion of the similarities and differences in relation to the collective storylines. Particular attention is paid to the identity construction and the emotional experiences that take place during the interviews. These two elements are told within and through each of the storylines.

The local and wider narratives available to the participants are used to contextualise the analysis and findings, and so are reported within the analysis. The analysis offers the following findings:

- i) their first experiences of understanding GV was important, leading them to find others who felt the same to gain a sense of hope of a normal life
- ii) sharing their experiences with others was an anxiety provoking time and was part of a decision making process about treatment and establishing an acceptable gender expression
- iii) relationships with family, friends, peers and members of their social context influence sense making and identity constructions of GVt people and typify the challenges faced within their GVt experiences. Some of these challenges were reported as ongoing and illustrated throughout the stories of the day to day lives of the participants
- iv) for these participants distressing emotional challenges were often situated in the past and participants spoke of 'overcoming' challenges. This offered a counter to the more dominant isolation and loneliness narratives within the literature on GVt experiences

The findings of the study are discussed in relation to its clinical implications, the strengths and limitations of the methodology, and directions for future research.

## OVERVIEW

Existing research looking at Gender Variance (GV) identifies the physical and psychological impact that the experience has on individual people (Devor, 2004; Lev, 2004). Further to this, other research has attempted to understand Gender Variant (GVt) experiences in the context of a Western world binary gender system (Nagoshi, Brzuzy & Terrell 2012). However, there is little existing literature that explores the experience individuals have when choosing to live outside of this binary system and, furthermore, how they come to make sense of their experiences.

This study attempts to explore and make sense of the experience that GVt people have in relation to the construction of a personally meaningful expression of their gender identity. The study is particularly interested in the experience of GVt individuals living without full transition to the opposite gender role and, in particular, how these people construct their gender identities. The research situates GV within the local and broader contexts that each participant lives and is interested in influences of the dominant narratives that this group of people have available to them. For example, these dominant narratives tend to be that there are only two possible genders, as well as the medical narratives that suggests physical transition to the opposite gender is the treatment for this set of experiences. Furthermore, the dominant narrative that depicts GV as a lonely and isolating experience that positions individual GVt people as disadvantaged compared with their gender typical peers.

Below is an outline of the content of the write up of the current study.

### **Chapter One:** *'Researcher's position and literature review'*

This chapter comprises a brief account of the researcher's stance as well as the theoretical base on which the study was built. There are four main areas covered:

- i) the background of GV and an overview of the current overview of theories of gender and GV
- ii) the clinical management of GV and the effects it can have on people's lives
- iii) the historical and cultural narratives of GV and its links with self identity
- iv) the clinical relevance of the study including its specific aims

### **Chapter Two: 'Methodology'**

This chapter opens with an introduction to the epistemological position of the research and the reasons for the use of narrative inquiry as a research method. The design of the study is then outlined including a description of the participants and the ethical considerations of the study. The development of the research idea is then considered and acknowledgment is given to the employment of service user consultation. Finally, the credibility of the research is discussed and measures are outlined to ensure credibility within the analysis.

### **Chapter Three: 'Analysis and Discussion'**

To orientate the reader this chapter opens with a description of how the findings are presented. Global impressions of each individual narrative are presented to give the reader a sense of each person's account. The emerging storylines are then outlined and links to the theoretical frameworks and current literature are made in order to offer a context in which they may be best understood.

### **Chapter Four: 'Conclusions'**

This chapter returns to the research aims and offers a response to the questions posed by the research, as well as discussing the clinical implications. The limitations of the research are discussed as well as its strengths. These are combined with the study findings to offer suggestions for future research. The chapter closes with the researcher's reflections on carrying out the study.

## **CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH POSITION AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1.1 RESEARCHER'S POSITION**

Squire (2008) encourages researchers conducting qualitative research to be open about, and make clear, their stance and position towards the topic of their research. This is related to the idea that the researcher's own background, perspective and interest in the topic area provide an important context through which the narratives of the people interviewed will be heard and understood (Ahern, 1999). It is for this reason that the following section will outline the researcher's interest in, and position, to the topic of this research.

The researcher's interest in the project is borne from an ongoing interest in gender and in particular an interest in understanding gender as a social construct. Through voluntary work, the researcher has been fortunate enough to meet and work with individuals whose preferred gender identity is neither male nor female. These experiences invited the researcher to consider the challenges that developing and maintaining their preferred gender identity entailed, particularly in a culture that is organised around each person being either male or female. How then do some people live outside of this gender organisation? And what are the implications of doing so? Throughout clinical experience and training, the researcher has also developed an interest in the ideas of identity, specifically the impact that sitting outside of a social norm can have on a person's sense of self. The researcher believes that individuals construct and maintain who and what they are through the reciprocal dialogue they have with others.

Maintaining a commitment to finding ways for silenced or undervalued voices in society to be heard is something that is important for the researcher. The

researcher feels that this is intertwined with the way in which structures of power are distributed within society. Individuals, as well as groups, described as marginalised can go unnoticed due to being seen as different and, often, less valued.

In linking together these ideas, the researcher is interested in the ways that having a preferred gender identity that differs from the gender they are assigned at birth and sits outside of being male or female, can impact upon a person's life and the construction of a personally acceptable and meaningful identity.

## **1.2 GENDER**

### *Background*

When a baby is born the first question asked is almost always: Is it a boy or girl? Each time we fill out a questionnaire or form we are asked to tick a box to state whether we are: a) Male or b) Female. To use the bathroom in public we look for the stick person that is the same as us to help us know which door to go through. In many respects we live in a very gender organised world. This for most people, most of the time, works well. It is well known, however, that some individuals come to experience their sex and gender in a less congruent, consistent or straightforward way. Some people experience their sex and gender as partially or entirely incompatible in all or some ways. This research focuses on a consideration of the experience people have when their gender assigned at birth does not match their preferred gender identity. This experience is referred to as Gender Variance (GV) (Gender Identity Research and Education Society (GIREs), 2008b).

### 1.2.1 Definitions and Explanations of Terms

Although the terminology within the sex and gender literature, as well as in everyday language, is used interchangeably (Burdge, 2007), definitions will be given here to support understanding of their intended meaning in this project. The epistemological position of the research sees that language is important and

recognises that individuals may use different words or phrases to those outlined below to describe similar experiences. Acknowledgement is also made that some language and terms are coined and used by Gender Variant (GVt) people and that some terms have been applied to this group by the medical and academic fields (Burdge, 2007). In view of this it is for clarity that these definitions and their intended meaning in the current project are provided below:

### ***Gender Identity***

Gender identity is suggested as being an individual's basic sense of being male or female (Golombok & Fivush, 1994).

### ***Gender Role***

Gender role is considered to be the behaviours, attitudes and characteristics that society proposes are appropriate for a specific gender (Golombok & Fivush, 1994).

### ***Gender Queer***

Gender queer is a relatively new term referring to people who do not identify or experience their gender as either male or female. They may experience incongruence with the majority norms in society of using a binary male/female distinction and identify with a type of androgyny, rather than one gender or another (GIRES, 2011).

### ***Sex***

Sex is used to refer to the biological aspects of being male or female - the sex characteristics that a person is born with (GIRES, 2008a).

### ***Transgender (TG)***

The term transgender is used as an umbrella descriptor for anyone who believes their gender is different to their biological sex (GIRES, 2008a).

### ***Trans Woman***

A trans woman is used to refer to a person who was identified as male at birth but lives socially as a woman (GIREs, 2008a).

### ***Trans Man***

A trans man is used to refer to a person who was identified as female at birth but lives socially as a man (GIREs, 2008a).

### ***Transsexual***

A transsexual person is one who has undertaken medical treatment and sought legal recognition to acknowledge their transition to live in the opposite gender to their natal sex (GIREs, 2008a).

### **1.2.2 What is Gender?**

Central to GV is gender; therefore, GV can only begin to be thought about in the context of a clear understanding of gender itself. Considering sex and gender as separate entities is a debate that has been present in the literature for some years. Many argue that the terms could, and should, be used interchangeably stating that there is no distinction between the two (Golombok & Fivush, 1994). Whereas others argue that there is a clear distinction, with sex referring to the biology of being male or female, and gender referring to the social aspects of being male and female (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010). To clarify, within this research the term gender will be used to mean the assignment of a person to being male or female at birth, with the acknowledgement that gender is not simply a matter of biological or genetic factors but is, at the very least, influenced by social factors.

The traditional understanding of gender within a Western society contains four major tenets (Ozar, 2006). Firstly, that there are two genders (male and female); secondly, that every human being belongs to only one of these genders; thirdly, that belonging to a gender is permanent; and fourthly, that gender is determined biologically and is not a matter of individual choice (Ozar, 2006). However, it is

important to deconstruct this idea and consider in more detail and depth exactly what is meant when gender is discussed, that is, to consider the components of gender.

### *Gender Role*

At birth each person begins a journey of gendered social expectations based on their external genitalia. From the moment of birth each child is enrolled in a set of social processes that encourage them to exhibit either masculine qualities, if they are a boy, or feminine qualities, if they are a girl (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010). It can be argued that many of these social processes are so deeply embedded in society that it takes considerable time and effort to notice them. Within the wholeness of having a gender or being gendered there are constituent parts that help to identify what gender each person is. The first of these are gender roles. Gender roles are based on what a particular culture thinks a person should do with their life. This includes their personality traits, mannerisms, what they should wear, how they should walk, and their duties and cultural expectations (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010). Typically women are expected to be caring and sensitive, to use more overt hand gestures when talking, to take the lead in child care and the care of elder family members (Golombok & Fivush, 1994). Conversely, men are expected to be brave and strong, to be less expressive in communication and to take the lead in providing financially for themselves and their families (Golombok & Fivush, 1994). These are organised within an idea of masculinity and femininity, with male people being expected to conform to and perform masculine gender roles and females expected to conform to and perform feminine gender roles (Heath, 2007). Masculinity and femininity act as markers to denote how a person performs in relation to their expected gender role (Golombok & Fivush, 1994).

Gender roles bring with them the history and context from which they emerge. At a societal level changes to these gender roles rarely happen and when they do, they are usually triggered by extraordinary events. An example of changing of gender

roles was visible following World War II (that is, post 1945). Women's roles as care givers and home makers were altered as men went off to war leaving many women doing the work previously done by men. This meant that 'breadwinning' was no longer solely seen as a male gender role in the way it had previously been; it also became part of the female gender role (Golombok & Fivush, 1994). It is clear from this literature that changes to gender role expectations occur rarely and that the ideas and understanding of how to be male and female remain fairly fixed and embedded within Western societies and individuals (Connell, 2002).

### *Gender Identity*

Further to having a gender role, each person has a gender identity. Gender identity is often described as an individual's self defined internal sense of being male or female (Golombok & Fivush, 1994).

It is widely acknowledged that a person's gender identity is not fixed at birth and that both physiological and social factors contribute to the early establishment of a gender identity. As the child matures, their identity is modified and expanded further by social factors (Golombok & Fivush, 1994). It is also acknowledged that a person's gender identity is affected by hormonal changes in the body and, for most people is both heightened and strengthened during puberty (Egan & Perry, 2001). It is expected that an individual's gender identity will be consistent with the outward appearance of the body and that someone who looks female in terms of their external sex characteristics will self identify as a girl, and later as a woman. This process would be the same for boys and men. For most people, this is usually the case (GIRE, 2006).

Having described what is meant when talking about someone's gender, there will now be a theoretical consideration of what determines a person's sex and gender. Such an exploration is essential to orientate the reader before later considering the complexity that divergence from a normative gender brings.

### 1.2.3 Theories of Gender

#### *Biological Theories of Sex and Gender*

Genetically, almost all human beings comprise of 46 chromosomes that are arranged in pairs. In females, each pair is comprised of two X chromosomes and in males one pair is comprised of an X and a Y chromosome. At 6-7 weeks gestation genes on the Y chromosome stimulate the production of androgens (male hormone) that masculinise the foetus (GIRE, 2006). It is argued that, as well as causing the foetus to develop sex characteristics<sup>1</sup>, androgens cause the male brain to develop differently from the female brain, thus causing the difference between males and females. The difference is viewed in absolute terms. The theory suggests that the ongoing secretion of androgens in adulthood, cause men to behave differently from women; for example, in terms of aggression and passivity.

#### *Feminist Theories*

The feminist theoretical position strongly contests the biological theories of gender. They call into question the role divisions between male and female genders, viewing the differences between males and females as socially constructed and culturally determined (Butler, 2004). Feminist theorists register the development of gender through the multiple ways in which gender normality is reinforced, both positively and negatively. This reinforcement is documented by feminist theorists to exist within legal, religious and cultural practices. It is believed that this is with the aim of enforcing adherence to the two defined gender roles, within which the male role remains more powerful than the female (Connell, 2002). Feminist theory aims to deconstruct stereotypical notions of gender in favour of building a more equal relationship between the sexes (Butler, 2004) and also the possibility of having wider choices than conforming to the dominant expectations of masculinity and femininity (Heath, 2007).

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<sup>1</sup> Male sex characteristics are the penis and testes and female sex characteristics are the ovaries and uterus

### *Social Learning Theory*

Social learning theory was developed as an overarching theory to explain social development, including gender identity and role development (Bandura, 1977; Mischel, 1966). The main principles are that individuals' social learning occurs through two processes: reinforcement and modelling. It believes that learning is affected and shaped by positive reinforcement (such as praise, complements and rewards) received for the performance of any given behaviour which leads to a repetition of desired behaviours and extinction of undesirable behaviours. It is thought that children learn some gender behaviours through the modelling of significant same sexed people in their lives (usually parents or care givers) and learn to notice opposite gender behaviours via the same modelling process when observing opposite gendered adults in their lives (Mischel, 1966). It cannot be certain, however, that gender modelling occurs because of the gender of the model or simply the child's preference (or not) of that person. Research supports the theory by highlighting that in Western families where the gender roles are more similar, and thus less defined, rigid and traditional children show less typical gender behaviours (Fulcher, Suftin & Patterson, 2008). Similarly that parents encourage their child's participation in gender typical behaviour by praising and rewarding gender typical behaviour and ignoring or punishing behaviour associated with the opposite gender (Lytton & Romney, 1991).

### *Developmental Theory*

Kohlberg (1966) applied a cognitive developmental approach to gender identity development. The theory suggests that children's understanding of gender is affected by their stage of cognitive development and this is organised through the movement of distinct phases of understanding. Kohlberg (1966) suggested that children progress through stages during which gender is changeable over time and between situations. This occurs until they come to understand gender as constant at around the age of five (Golombok & Fivush, 1994). It is only when a child develops

an understanding that gender is constant that modelling can take place and impact on their personal gender development (Kohlberg, 1966).

Given the strengths and limitations of the theories outlined so far, it may be unsurprising to the reader that a model containing a combination of factors may offer a more comprehensive understanding of gender development.

#### *Multi-Dimensional Model*

Egan and Perry (2001) proposed a multi-dimensional model of gender identity comprising three main aspects:

- (i) a sense of psychological compatibility with one's gender. That is, contentment with one's biological sex and a sense that one is a typical member of that sex;
- (ii) a sense of pressure from parents, peers, and self to conform to gender stereotypes and expectations; and
- (iii) a belief that one's own sex is superior to the other (intergroup bias).

In support of this theory, Carver, Yunger and Perry's (2003) empirical study of 300 school age children demonstrated that by middle childhood children have developed a reasonably stable view of these three aspects of gender identity. Interestingly, this study suggested that the stability of gender amongst their sample was heavily influenced by the avoidance of exhibiting behaviours not consistent with the expectations of their gender.

Allowing for a multitude of different factors to be considered in the development of gender, Egan and Perry's (2001) model is theoretically thorough. It also allows for consideration of an incompatibility with anatomical gender and the possibility of divergence from typical gender development.

#### 1.2.4 Summary

There are multiple ideas and models that attempt to explain typical gender development. The different approaches tend to privilege a single factor in gender development and identity. There does not appear to be a united understanding of how one develops gender identity. By the very nature that there are multiple models to explain gender identity formation, it is clear that gender is an important aspect of each person's life. It is also clear from the various attempts to understand and explain gender identity that there are clear ideas about a 'normal' gender identity development pathway. Thus, experiences that fall outside of the expected trajectory are seen as different to 'normal', consequently resulting in a range of complex, personal, social and societal implications. From the perspective of this thesis, these experiences of gender that fall outside of expected gender development will be referred to as GVt experiences.

### **1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW ON GENDER VARIANCE**

To minimise the potential for bias, a systematic literature search was conducted over an 18-month period ensuring comprehensive coverage of the relevant topics. The search comprised a number of stages ranging from a generic search of the literature using key terms, to more specific searches (see Appendix A for details of the review).

The following section is a synthesised approach to organising the current literature on GV; included is an attempt to understand:

- (i) what GV is and how it is experienced at an individual level;
- (ii) the theories that account for its aetiology; and
- (iii) the way that it is currently understood and managed in an NHS context.

Following this is a comprehensive account of the key issues related to the GVt experience and the literature relevant to the notion of identity will be considered.

### 1.3.1 What is Gender Variance?

GV, as a set of experiences, varies greatly between individuals. Included within the term GV are individuals who experience a sense of being the opposite gender to their assigned birth gender and individuals who feel they are neither male nor female and live between socially defined gender groups (Lev, 2004). Individuals that experience GV are often known as Transgender (TG), though this is a term that some GVt individuals reject on the basis that there is an implied notion that they will or have undertaken a transition of some kind, and this is not always the case. It is important to make clear that the experience of individuals that self identify or are identified by others as being GVt differs widely (Lev, 2004). Notably, there are significant differences in the degree of belief in the fluidity of gender identity; that is, the flexibility individuals can have with their gender (Burdge, 2007; Lev, 2004). Some accept such fluidity only to the extent that one can switch between two otherwise separate, essentialist, and pure gender categories. Others believe that gender identity is still highly malleable and changeable over time and place; this includes moving between male and female or self defining as a third gender which is neither male nor female (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010).

### 1.3.2 Theories of Gender Variance

As with the theories that attempt to account for gender itself, there is a clear polarisation on those that attempt to explain GV. There are two essentialist positions holding on to an almost exclusively singular determining factor: one that claims GV can be solely accounted for by biological factors, and one that claims GV is purely accounted for by social factors.

#### *Biological Theory*

Biological understandings of gender take account of intersex individuals who have different chromosomal combinations to XX and XY and/or ambiguous genitalia. These individuals are thought to fall outside of the traditional gender development pathway. Therefore, research into intersex experiences can be used to understand

further the biological nature of gender and GV. Imperato-McGinley *et al.* (1990) researched a group of 18 people with a specific genetic intersex condition; Complete Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (CAIS). Individuals with CAIS have the XY chromosome (and, therefore, *should* be male). They lacked, however, the necessary hormone, dihydrotestosterone, that stimulates the growth of external male genitalia in utero. From birth all people in the sample were raised unambiguously as female, however, the follow up research showed that 17 people had rejected the female gender role and assumed a male gender role during or after puberty. Other studies support this finding and, therefore, provide a solid argument that the biological determinants of gender are more powerful than the social ones (Imperato-McGinley *et al.*, 1990).

This understanding of GV has received significant criticism for its rigidity and lack of acknowledgement that individuals may be able to make choices about their preferred gender including the way they choose to perform or express their gender (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010). Further criticism is levied at the reliance of biological aspects of gender and a denial of the inevitable psychological and social aspects that form part of each person's gender identity and presentation (Connell, 2002).

### *Feminist Theory*

Although vehemently opposed to the ideas of biological determinism, the feminist theories of gender and GV are, like the biological ones, essentialist in nature. They state that all gender performance is imitative in nature and that even biological sex is culturally bound to gender, making it impossible and artificial to separate out gender and sex at all. Butler (2004) suggests that bodies are made to conform to a particular cultural ideology about gender and it is this ideology which governs social practice. Therefore, Butler (2004) states that it makes some sense to say that biological sex itself is culturally instituted. In discussing the causes of GV, some feminist theorists attribute a sexist society as the first cause. Their suggestion is that the deeply imbedded hetero-normative assumptions that exist within society does not allow a

varied gender expression and this means that individuals are forced to take extreme measures in changing their sex to fit into this hetero-normativity. Further to this, is the idea that the medicalisation of GV, namely gender identity clinics and hormonal and surgical procedures, re-affirm the notion that there are acceptable and unacceptable ways to *be* male and female. This very process is described as reinforcing the rigid gender binary (people must be either male, meeting all male expectations, or female, meeting all female expectations), which in turn allows the patriarchal power in society to remain the status quo (Butler, 2004).

### *Queer Theory*

Derived largely from post-structuralist theory and the ideas of deconstructionism queer theory is grounded in gender and sexuality, and conceptualises gender and GVt identities as social constructs. Queer theory's main aim is to explore and contest the categorisation of gender (and sexuality) stating that identities are not fixed and consist of many varied components (Jagose, 1996). According to the queer theorists, gender, therefore, cannot be categorised or labelled. So, in an attempt to resist normative ideals, the aim of the queer theory of gender is to deconstruct and destabilise the very notion of gender categories. Queer theorists focus on the problems in classifying individuals as either male or female, even on a strictly biological basis. For example, they argue that the sex chromosomes (X and Y) may exist in atypical combinations, for example in Klinefelter syndrome with its XXY combination. This highlights the inadequacy of genotype as a means to define two distinct sexes.

So, what Queer theory allows us to understand about GVt experiences is the suggestion that the impact of socially defined categories contributes to the labelling of GVt experiences as abnormal in some way. Thus, by removing labels and categories, a greater variety of gender expression would be socially acceptable (Jagose, 1996).

Queer theory is criticised by some for its failure to account for the impact of social structures on the fluidity and plurality of gender expression (for example, Hines, 2007) Indeed, by its very deconstructing nature, the studying of gender itself is very problematic as in order to study it one must use the very categories (male and female) that the theory opposes.

### *Transgender Theory*

Transgender theory stands as a critique of queer theory but incorporates some of the ideas from both the essentialist and social constructionist models of Gvt identity development (Nagoshi *et al.*, 2012). As a theory its development comes from the idea that transgenderism needs to include more than the queer theorists notion that it is possible to move between male and female gender identities. Transgender theorists acknowledge that, whilst the offerings of the queer theory are helpful, it still retains the basic notion of the gender binary and, thus, the restricted idea of gender being only male or female. Therefore, Roen (2001) built upon this arguing that transgenderism could and should also include a 'both/neither' conceptualisation of gender identity outside of the male/female binary. It is here where GV is seen as transgressing the gender binary and, thus, is not necessarily about physically transitioning from one category to the other.

Transgender theory highlights that it is unhelpful to deny the sense of identity that exists from a physical body. Contributing to this theory, Monro (2000) argues that it is important to understand the experience of Gvt individuals and the limitations imposed by the body and its biology on the fluidity of gender and gender identity. This notion, however, is placed alongside the post-modernist view that recognises the fluidity of gender identity within the context of individual lives and the social performance of gender (Nagoshi *et al.*, 2012). Transgender theory, therefore, attempts to synthesise the essentialist and post-modernist positions; offering an integrated set of ideas that attempt to make sense of Gvt experiences. Adding to this, Tauchert (2002) affirms the idea of the continuity between body and mind to

highlight the natural movement between physical and psychological aspects of gender. He firmly opposes approaches that deny or minimise either of these aspects. This addition to transgender theory, therefore, attempts to recognise the vast variations in gender identity and gender related behaviours and, in doing so, acknowledges the range of experiences associated with gender - from physical (or essentialist) to wholly socially constructed (Nagoshi *et al.*, 2012).

Transgender theory also sees embodiment as an essential component of the self. Transgender theory went on to propose ideas about gender identity that incorporated the social constructionist performative aspects of gender with the dynamic narrative process of embodiment and self construction (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010). With this comes the idea that the social environment influences social identity by enforcing individuals to conform to the expectations of identity categories. In line with these categories and expectations, the repeated performances over time, by individuals and groups, also acts as a force in gender identity development. However, it is important to note that this is different to the notion that the physical body acts as the driving force behind identity experiences. Instead, it proposes that the self exists only in relation to interactions between the embodied, self-constructed and socially constructed aspects of identity. In order to then understand the narrative of GV, one must actively integrate these aspects of identity (Nagoshi *et al.*, 2012).

Though various theories have been used to explain the development of gender and GV, none offer a comprehensive aetiological model and none are free from criticism and debate. It is evident that biology is relevant and that gender differences will always be subject to social constructions. It is also important to note that even though biological theories are based on measurable and observable evidence they exist within a sociological, political, cultural and historical context that decides what, and how, to measure and observe. In one way or another, it is likely that all these theories inform the understanding of gender identity and development. It is of

relevance for this research to understand which theories are used to understand gender and GV and the implications that these experiences have on a person's gender identity. For example, what is the impact of the dominance of a biological understanding of GVt for individuals and communities? How might this influence how people think about and understand GV in light of this?

### 1.3.3 History of GV Narratives

The following section will consider the shifting nature of the way that GVt experiences have been considered and written about over time.

Theories relating to the origins of GV have changed over time and, in turn, this has impacted on the way that the experience has been understood, described and 'treated'. Indeed, prior to the 1960's, GV was seen as a purely psychiatric condition and so the notion of illness informed the way that these experiences were understood. The GVt individual, then, was understood to be a homosexual who believed they were actually the opposite sex (Drescher, 2010). The explanation at the time was that GV resulted from delusions or paranoia and was, therefore, a form of madness (Stryker & Whittle, 2006). By the 1960's GVt experiences were then propelled into the field of illness with a need to rectify biological 'mistakes' as professional advocates of the medical model offered challenges to the ideas that GVt people were severely mentally ill. This shift was led by Harry Benjamin who was known as the founding proposer of sex-reassignment surgeries (SRS) (Benjamin, 1966). He began to advocate and educate the medical and psychiatric world about gender re-assignment surgeries that would allow GVt people to live their lives in the opposite sex. Given the predominance of professional narratives being favoured, both these sets of ideas tell individuals (including those with GV experiences) and society how to understand GVt experiences. Such publicised narratives can then impact on how individual people evaluate and interpret their own GVt experiences. Thus, depending on the decade people live in, a GVt person is likely to have at least

some understanding of themselves as a biological anomaly or a sufferer of a severe mental illness.

With the publication of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders III (DSM-III) in 1980, the term transsexualism was defined as a person showing a strong wish to change their physical sex characteristics and gender role continuously for at least two years (American Psychiatric Association (APA), 1980). Suggested treatments included psychotherapy and SRS. There were a number of controversies; some argued that the introduction of transsexualism and its relationship to sexual orientation in the DSM-III was a new way to pathologise homosexuality (Drescher, 2010). The transsexual diagnosis was based on the assumption that sex and gender consisted of binary categories, with treatment becoming strongly linked to SRS and the maintenance of a two gender/sex system. Diagnosis in accordance with DSM-III criteria was necessary to gain access to SRS, which brought with it significant dilemmas and complications (Cohen-Kettenis & Gooren, 1997). Of note are the group of Gvt individuals who either did not meet full diagnostic criteria or whose GV meant that they felt more comfortable with an ambiguous or more fluid gender presentation. This group were not deemed eligible for SRS as they were not seen as 'true transsexuals' by healthcare professionals. This narrative subsequently spread to the wider society. As a result people with Gvt experiences often exaggerated behaviours considered male or female to the medical and mental health professional teams in order to receive genital surgery and the prescribed care pathway (Denny, 1992).

The previous section reviewed the history of the suggested aetiology of GV and touched on the societal narratives that have existed in line with this. As always, history helps to offer a context to the present and so it is hoped the reader will keep this history in mind within the following section. The next section will go on to look at how GV is understood *now*.

#### 1.3.4 Who Does GV Affect?

The National Health Service (NHS) suggests that 1 in 4000 people are receiving medical help for GV related distress (Department of Health (DoH), 2008). A report commissioned by the Home Office and undertaken by GIRES (2009) proposed that 20 people in every 100,000 (1500 adults every year) present with gender concerns. This number has grown steeply in the last five years. Researchers who have studied incidence and prevalence of GV have tended to focus on the most easily counted subgroup of GVt individuals: individuals who present for gender-transition-related care at specialist gender clinics (Zucker & Lawrence, 2009). Owing to this and the restrictions of estimating prevalence in this way, it is likely that this underestimates the prevalence of GV as there are likely to be many people experiencing GV who are not seeking medical assistance (GIRES, 2009). It is also important to note that measuring the prevalence of shameful or socially taboo experiences will often produce an underestimation. This may be an additional factor with GVt experiences.

#### 1.3.5 Clinical Management in the NHS

The health care system in the UK currently uses the 1994, fourth edition, of the *DSM (DSM-IV)* (American Psychiatric Association (APA), 1994) to classify and diagnose those with GVt experiences. This version uses the terms 'Gender Identity Disorder' (GID) and 'Gender Identity Disorder of Childhood' (GIDC) (APA, 1994) to describe what is broadly known as GVt experiences. As the current research is concerned with the experiences of GVt persons over the age of eighteen, there will not be a discussion around GIDC, though, suffice to say that many adults may also have received this diagnosis earlier in their lives. The two main features of the GID diagnosis are:

- (i) a strong and persistent cross-gender identification, and
- (ii) a constant discomfort with the assigned sex (or biological sex at birth)

The diagnosis does not apply to anyone with a ‘concurrent intersex condition<sup>2</sup>’ and should only be applied if there is evidence of significant clinical distress or impairment in social, occupational or other important areas of functioning (APA, 2009). Following diagnosis, if the Gvt individual wishes to consider ‘treatment’ options, they are likely to be referred to a specialist gender identity service and often begin a long journey within the healthcare system (Lev, 2004).

### *Specialist Gender Identity Services*

In order to ensure clarity and support understanding, the recognised stages of specialist NHS gender ‘treatment’ offered to Gvt people will be outlined below. They are presented in the order they are typically offered. It is important to note here that although they may appear as distinct and linear there is significant overlap and movement between transitional stages which varies significantly between individuals (Lev, 2004).

Currently when Gvt people seek help and access to treatment, all are assessed by a member of the medical profession, often a Clinical Psychologist. At this stage the history of the GV is explored and psychopathology is ruled out as the primary source of gender related distress (The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH), 2011). As with all assessments of distress, the length and number of assessment sessions varies from a single meeting to ongoing periods of assessment, lasting many months (WPATH, 2011). At this stage, a primary task for mental health professionals and Gvt individuals is to carefully consider all of the available options (WPATH, 2011).

Given that individuals are in a medical setting discussing their experiences with doctors, psychiatrists or psychologists, implicit or explicit messages of illness or abnormality can be given out and received. This is likely to have significant

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<sup>2</sup> Intersex is a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual characteristics that do not fit the typical definitions of male or female

psychological implications on the way that Gvt individuals relate to, or make sense of, their experiences.

### *Real Life Experience (RLE)*

Undertaking the RLE involves gaining lived experience in the desired gender. This includes, choosing a name, being referred to in the pronoun appropriate to the preferred gender (that is, she or he), and dressing as that gender whilst continuing with employment and education. Before making contact with services, Gvt individuals have often been living socially (at least partially) in their preferred gender role. Despite this and although it varies, many Gender Identity Clinics (GIC) require people to live in their preferred gender role for up to two years before they permit the next stage of transitioning. This in itself can be a very difficult, distressing and unsafe experience, as people's outer appearance is incongruent with their secondary sexual characteristics which can lead to discomfort and social discrimination (Denny, 1992).

Having provided some context to the possible underlying issues associated with current NHS practice, the next sections discuss greater consideration of these physical treatments.

### *Hormone Therapy*

Hormone therapy suppresses birth sex characteristics and stimulates secondary sex characteristics. Naturally, the specific hormone therapy differs according to the sex characteristics at birth. Gvt Individuals born with male sex characteristics can take the female hormone oestrogen to induce secondary female sex characteristics, such as breasts and a more female appearing body shape. This works as the hormones redistribute the body fat which alters the body shape. Sometimes an anti-androgen drug is also taken to suppress testosterone, the masculine characteristic producing hormone. Individuals born with female sex characteristics will take an androgen. Testosterone is the most commonly taken androgen as it is the main hormone in the

body that stimulates the development of male sex organs and male secondary sex characteristics, such as a low voice, facial and body hair growth. It also produces a more masculine body shape through the redistribution of fat from the thigh, hip and buttock area to the stomach area (DOH, 2008b). In order to maintain the physical changes, most Gvt people will take hormones for the rest of their life (Hines, 2007).

### *Gender Confirmation Surgery (GCS)*

Gvt people, who undergo or have undergone surgical treatments to change their gender, are known as transsexual; the surgical process itself is known as GCS.

In England there are less than ten specialist centres providing NHS funded GCS for trans women; and two specialist centres (one NHS and one private) providing NHS funded GCS for trans men (2008b). The context in which the GCS procedures will be described here is in line with the NHS healthcare system. However, it is important to note that many Gvt people opt for GCS procedures through private healthcare in the UK or abroad (GIREs, 2011). There are a number of different reasons for this; easier access, shorter waiting times and less stringent guidelines make the option of GCS outside of the UK very appealing to some. The range of surgical procedures available during GCS is listed below. These procedures are considered the main ones available within the NHS:

*Table 1: Procedures Typically Available for Individuals with a Preferred Female Identity*

<u>Name of Procedure</u>	<u>Aim of procedure</u>
Penectomy	Removal of the penis
Orchidectomy	Removal of testes
Breast augmentation	Creation of breasts
Vaginoplasty	Creation of a vagina
Clitoroplasty	Creation of a clitoris
Labioplasty	Creation of labia
Hair Removal	Removal of excessive hair

*Table 2: Procedures Typically Available for Individuals with a Preferred Male Identity*

<u>Name of Procedure</u>	<u>Aim of procedure</u>
Bilateral mastectomy	Removal of the breasts and reconstruction of the chest area
Hysterectomy	Removal of the uterus
Vaginectomy	Removal of the vagina
Salpingo-oophorectomy	Removal of ovaries and fallopian tubes
Phalloplasty	Creation of a phallus
Urethroplasty	Creation of urethra
Scrotoplasty	Creation of a scrotum

If Gvt individuals do not undertake GCS, as some do not, they will live with some physical characteristics of their preferred gender as well as some sex characteristics of the gender they were assigned at birth.

#### *Outcomes of Gender Confirmation Surgery*

The psychosocial outcomes of GCS, largely based on quantitative studies within the transsexual population, indicate that belonging to the preferred gender role socially (known as ‘passing’) and satisfactory surgical procedures are linked to psychosocial adjustment (Olson & Moller, 2006). In addition, both Green and Fleming (1990) and Lawrence (2003) report that post surgical regret is not common for trans men or women.

#### *Counselling and Therapeutic Support*

Gender identities and expressions are diverse, and hormone therapy and surgery are just two of the many options available for people to achieve comfort with themselves and their identity (WPATH, 2011). As part of their care with GIC’s, individuals are likely to be offered psychotherapy (usually on an individual basis, but occasionally and where appropriate on couple, family, or group basis). The focus of therapy tends to be on:

“...exploring gender identity, role, and expression; addressing the negative impact of gender dysphoria and stigma on mental health; alleviating internalized transphobia; enhancing social and peer support; improving body image; or promoting resilience” (WPATH, 2011, p. 171).

It is interesting to reflect here that the interventions described by the Standards of Care document (WPATH, 2011), are often directed at the individual, and occasionally their family or partner; and whilst compassionate there is no focus on working with communities to promote and encourage acceptance of a broader range of gender expressions.

### *Legal Status*

Legislation now enables Gvt people to obtain legal recognition of their new gender status. Although many Gvt individuals do not seek legal status, approximately 300 per year do (GIREs, 2009). Legal recognition does not have to include hormone therapy treatment or GCS (Gender Recognition Act (GRA), 2004); an important inclusion for those individuals who desire hormone therapy and/or GCS but who have health conditions that make surgery or healing complicated. The introduction of the GRA (2004) has important social implications too, as it invites a new dialogue; one in which a broader and more diverse understanding of gender is legitimised with the support of a legal framework.

### Summary

The previous section was designed to give the reader an overview of the historical context in which Gvt experiences sit, highlighting the shift from a psychiatric to a medical understanding and informed approach. Following this, the current understanding was outlined and an overview of GV within a clinical context was offered. The thesis will now shift to discussion of identity before moving to marry

together the relationship between GV and identity and its pertinence to the current research.

#### **1.4 IDENTITY**

Identity, of course, does not just involve gender, and so the following section outlines the current theories that account for the formation of identity, in its broadest sense. The section then becomes more specific to the important role identity plays within the context of GVt experiences. In an attempt to orientate the reader to the importance of identity within a GV population, identity is then discussed in line with the current understanding of GV. To aid understanding of this complex area, the literature review outlined earlier is re-synthesised within this section.

There are multiple theories that take account for the way in which a person's sense of self or selves, is formed and maintained. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to review in more detail the established identity theories, two key theories will be mentioned. Firstly, Erikson's (1968) eight stage psychosocial development theory states that throughout each person's lifetime, they experience different crises/conflicts. Each of the conflicts arises at a certain point in life and must be successfully resolved for progression to the next of the eight stages. Secondly, James Marcia's theory posits that one's sense of identity is determined largely by the choices and commitments made regarding certain personal and social traits (Marcia, 1966). It is widely acknowledged that these stage approach models lack clarity and explanation of the processes by which progression through the stages occurs (Miller, 2002). Further, the ideas of Erikson (1968) are also criticised for being largely based around male identity and this then being applied to female identity without accounting for the different social experiences of men and women (Miller, 2002). These approaches have also received criticism for their sole focus on macro rather than micro level processes (Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009). That is, their focus is largely at a broader and more generalised level through which individuals pass. Despite there

being legitimate criticism of these understandings of identity formation, within them there is a universal acceptance that gender and gender identity (including GV), plays a significant role in the way that a person develops and maintains their sense of self.

In contrast with the modernist perspective, such as that of Erikson's theory, that there is a fixed, identifiable and examinable self, the narrative approach suggests that identity is constructed through the evaluation and interpretation of events and is highly dependent on the social and cultural context in which it exists. It proposes that there is no such thing as a fixed and unchangeable single self (Kirkman, 2002). The social constructionist approach adopted for this research is consistent with the narrative approach in that the formation of identity or one's sense of self/selves is understood through a person's social interactions, the context in which they occur, and the broader current and historical narratives available to them (Elliott, 2005). In view of this, the narrative approach to identity will now be considered in more detail.

#### 1.4.1 Narrative Theories of Identity Development

The narrative approach to identity suggests that each person acts as a narrator of their lives and it is this narration that constitutes the construction of the self. As events and happenings occur in a person's life, each person carries out their own interpretation and evaluation of them (Bruner, 2004). It is this sense making experience that reflects and constructs a person's identity (Kirkman, 2002). It is important to make clear that the use of a narrative approach is not a way of measuring or exploring identity; rather it is a belief that 'identity' is the stories that are told by a person about themselves. Proponents of the narrative approach to identity assert that constructing a narrative about one's life allows for important continuity over time, including the past, present and future (Riessman, 2002). This is to say that in narration each person's present self serves to represent past and future selves. To further elucidate this idea, identity construction begins in childhood as personally meaningful events are evaluated and interpreted and told as stories to the self and to others (Kirkman, 2002). This continues across the life course, in

particular, in light of each meaningful event that a person encounters. The processes of evaluation and interpretation then takes place and a sense of continuity about who and what a person is now, was then, and will be in the future, is constructed (Kirkman, 2002).

A further feature of narrative identity construction is the importance of culture and context. The concept of self is culturally defined and is dependent on the ideas of the society in which a person is placed (Atkins, 2004). For example, the difference between the cultural dominance of individualist ideas commonly found in Western cultures and the collectivist ideas more often found in Eastern cultures would be deemed important to the way an individual interprets and evaluates events in their lives and how they construct their identities (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997).

#### Narrative Identity and GV

As discussed previously, the identity status paradigms (Erikson, 1972; Marcia, 1966) receive criticism for their lack of consideration of the impact of broader social and cultural ideas that influence identity development. The narrative approach to identity construction has an active commitment in promoting the importance of these factors. This has implications for researching and understanding identity, particularly for groups of people where dominant ideas about the topics and values relevant to them exist at a social and cultural level. Gvt people are a clear example.

Having broadly considered the narrative approach to identity construction, the researcher will now consider how Gvt individuals narrate their experiences, and what can be learnt through the study of Gvt narratives. As with section 1.4, the earlier literature review has been integrated in the following section.

#### 1.4.2 Achieving an Acceptable Gender Identity

It is noted throughout the literature that there are multiple ways that Gvt people achieve an acceptable gender identity. For some people, this will involve full medical

transition and obtaining legal status in the opposite gender to their assigned birth gender; these people are usually known and identify as transsexual. Others choose to have some medical or social transition to achieve personal comfort with their gender. There are other people that choose not to actively undertake specific transition in choosing to identify with a third gender outside of the male/female categories. Further, there are others that choose to live with their experiences by identifying as being both male and female, perhaps at the same time or at different times but without taking specific action to alter their body in any way. As is exemplified by this description, the ways that an acceptable gender identity is achieved, in response to the incongruence that Gvt individuals experience, are multiple as well as very individual.

It is clear, however, that regardless of how they go about it, any person that wishes to step outside of the binary gender system faces numerous social and personal boundaries (Gange, Tewkesbury & McGaughey, 1997). Gender identity is achieved through social interaction with others and within a range of possible social options (Gange *et al.*, 1997). Both gender and gender belief systems are inherent components of the social infrastructure and 'doing gender' in recognisable and codeable ways is akin to speaking the required language of the social world within which the individual lives. For reasons that are not clear, some people's gender identity does not match the assigned gender at birth. Therefore, learning the language of social gender is more complex for those with GV. It is viable to suggest that both gender and gender identity are learned and achieved at the interactional level, reified at the cultural level and enforced at micro and macro levels (e.g. by families, the legal system, the political structure, medicine and the media) (Lev, 2004). Therefore, gender is constructed through each person's interaction with the systems that hold the cultural ideas of what it is to be male and female. Those wishing to undertake an expression of gender that differs from the prescribed norms must then face the task of 'confessing' their gender through social signifiers that are interpreted through the existing social norms and expectations (Gange & Tewkesbury, 1998).

GVt people whose preferred gender identity falls between the binary of male or female or outside of the binary altogether fail to meet the prescribed norms of gender and are considered by some to violate social and cultural expectations (Gange & Tewkesbury, 1998). For some GVt individuals this can mean their expression of gender is rendered indecipherable to, and by, others and the task of negotiating this within the context of constructing a sense of self becomes increasingly important (Gange *et al.*, 1997). Identity construction then becomes even more challenging as there are limitations on the dialogic exchange that the individual can have with themselves and others (Hines, 2007).

There are increasing numbers of people who choose to step outside of this gender binary (GIRES, 2009), instead defining themselves in a non-gendered or multiple-gendered way (Nagoshi et al. 2012). Indeed, Gange *et al.* (1997) attempted to understand the process of identity within a sample of GVt individuals who self defined as members of the transgender community but who were also in search of ways to alternatively categorise their gender outside of the traditional binary division of male or female. So perhaps, it is possible to think about the importance of what different individuals *do* with their GVt experiences. As outlined this *doing* ranges from full medical and legal transition (transsexuals) to the opposite gender to taking no action at all; thus living with the incongruence rather than within traditional gender norms. Perhaps the latter highlights the option of considering multiple perspectives to gender, including the possibility of understanding gender via a dimensional perspective.

#### 1.4.3 Key Tasks in Identity Construction

##### *Identity Formation*

Much of the research exploring the topic of identity formation within a GVt population suggests there are a number of psychological processes which GVt individuals go through when constructing their identity. It is these specific tasks that

differ from the gender identity development of people who do not have Gvt experiences. It is suggested that earlier Gvt experiences can be confusing and lead to feelings of uncertainty. In addition, Gvt people experience feelings of GV alongside learning that gender non-conforming behaviour is unusual and rarely accepted (Carver et al. 2003). This can often result in silencing and secrecy of Gvt experiences (Gange *et al.*, 1997). It is thought that the anxiety of feeling different, and as though one has nothing in common with peers of the same birth gender, can become problematic and isolating. Often, Gvt people are then oscillating between gender-conforming behaviours and non-conforming behaviours, the latter ones often being experienced as more personally comfortable.

As there are very few accounts of GV identity formation from Gvt people, much of the current understanding is based on conceptual frameworks by authors such as Nuttbrock, Rosenblum & Blumenstein, 2002). Nuttbrock *et al.* (2002) propose an account of identity formation in the context of social relationships. They suggest there are four key components: awareness, performance, congruence and support of identity in relationship with others. These components help with the formation of an acceptable gender identity. The implication within this framework suggests that identity is *fluid* and *flexible* rather than *static* and *unchanging*.

Considering further Gvt identity formation, Devor's (2004) 14-stage model is an adaptation of Cass's (1979, 1984) framework of lesbian and gay identity development. It is based largely on qualitative interviews with predominantly transsexual individuals that were assigned female at birth but have medically and socially transitioned to live in a male role. In his model, Devor (2004) suggests that the initial stages of the transsexual experience involve an unfocussed discomfort and anxiety that gradually becomes more specifically related to one's birth gender. Over time this leads to individuals experimenting with their gender presentation and making a concerted effort to remain in line with their birth gender. Although, and as Devor himself acknowledges, this does vary enormously between individuals,

transsexual individuals go on to discover information about transsexuality and in turn begin to experiment with their preferred gender, including clothing and mannerisms. As the experience progresses, Devor describes the middle stages of his model entailing an increasing identification with a transsexual identity and simultaneous decreased identification with the assigned birth gender. From this position, Devor suggests that individuals go on to seek further information about transsexuals and seek contact with similar others within transsexual and transgender communities. It is at this point, according to Devor that transsexual individuals begin to test out transsexual identities within intimate relationships before beginning gradually to share their transsexual status with others, including family, friends and colleagues. The latter stages of the model involves the individual seeking formal medical transition including hormonal and gender reassignment surgeries that allows them to go on to establish a post-transition identity. Devor notes then, that the final two stages of his model involve an integration of the transsexuality into a broader sense of themselves before establishing a sense of pride that for some involve taking positions of advocacy for transsexual others.

The model has strength in that it draws on existing theoretical research with Gvt people. Devor (2004) emphasises the role of two underlying social processes in identity development: witnessing and mirroring. Although they are closely related with both serving a purpose of validation of self through interactions with others, witnessing and mirroring also involve somewhat different processes. According to Devor (2004), witnessing is the process wherein other people see the Gvt person in the same way that the Gvt person sees themselves. If there is a mismatch from others regarding this perception/experience psychological distress and unhelpful behaviours can result as the individual attempts to cope with this (Devor, 2004). Thus witnessing would appear to be an incredibly important process in achieving a personally comfortable identity. On the other hand, mirroring refers to the Gvt person seeing themselves within another person who is considered similar (Eliaison & Schope, 2007). Devor (2004) asserts there is a human need to connect with others

and know that we are recognised, accepted by our peers, and are not alone with our experiences. Social contact with other Gvt people forms an intrinsic way of constructing an acceptable gender identity (Hines, 2007).

Having stated this, there are limitations to these models and these will now be considered. Lev (2004) indirectly notes that due to the range of variation of individual Gvt experiences models of identity construction are not always helpful. Highlighted by the author himself, this is also a criticism that could be applied to Devor's (2004) model, as it is unable to account for the subtle and major differences Gvt individuals experience in their ongoing identity construction. Additionally, Devor's (2004) model does not account for the differences for those who are assigned male at birth and those that are assigned female at birth, even though the societal and cultural narratives for these groups are different and are likely to significantly impact on identity formation. Finally, there is also an absence of understanding for those Gvt individuals that feel they belong to a third gender. Thus, gender is defined and experienced in many, many different ways.

#### *Decisions about Physical Changes*

The breadth and depth of physical interventions available to Gvt individuals have been detailed previously (see section 1.3.5). Decision-making around physical changes is thought to be highly important to Gvt individuals' experiences and one which most Gvt individuals consider (Lev, 2004).

#### *Sharing Gvt Experiences with Others*

The importance of sharing Gvt experiences with others is reflected in the literature. Almost every publication on Gvt issues contains tools and advice on how to do this. The sharing of Gvt experiences with other people is thought to play an important role in the individual construction of a Gvt gender identity (Gange & Tewksbury, 1998). Gvt people will disclose their Gvt identity and experiences many times during their life and research findings suggest that disclosure is generally a time of increased

stress for Gvt people and those around them. It is believed that this stress can often increase a Gvt individual's vulnerability to loss of family or community support (Lev, 2004; Devor, 2004).

The literature relating to the narrative approach to identity construction informs us that the stories people tell to others about themselves is of key relevance in the construction of their identity (Kirkman, 2002). Therefore, this should also be the case for Gvt people. Disclosing one's Gvt feelings and experiences can lead to unpredictable responses from others. Some of these may be rejecting or damaging to the Gvt individual and reflect societal ideas about how acceptable it is to live outside of gender norms (Israel & Tarver, 1997). On an individual level, this experience is not always the case as many Gvt people are supported and accepted by family, friends and colleagues. Nevertheless, the reality does exist that Gvt experiences will not be universally accepted or understood, and it is this aspect that is likely to have sizeable psychological implications for the ongoing construction of a meaningful sense of self and identity.

### **1.5 RELEVANCE FOR CLINICAL PRACTICE**

There is increasing interest in gaining a subjective understanding of experience within Clinical Psychology (Johnstone & Dallos, 2006). It is well documented and thoughtfully argued that the information gained through qualitative interviews can enhance clinical understanding more than traditional quantitative and positivist methodologies can (Wells, 2011). Conducting this research into the lives of people with GV is particularly important given the social and political context in which Gvt experiences are immersed. As a group of individuals, dominant ideas have emerged through the medical world, such as the narrative of being "trapped in the wrong body". This is in an attempt to generally describe and account for people's Gvt experiences. However, it is well documented that the experiences of Gvt individuals vary enormously (Lev, 2004; GIREs, 2011) and greater understanding of this variety is necessary. Greater understanding of this complex issue can lead to further clinical

understanding and informing of practice. This in turn can have a positive impact on the care that is offered to Gvt people.

## **1.6 RESEARCH AIMS**

### *Summary and Aims of the Current Research*

GV is the phenomenon wherein individuals have a significant discomfort or dissatisfaction between the gender they are assigned at birth and their preferred gender identity. There are numerous models that attempt to account for both gender and Gvt development, all of which are likely to offer something useful in understanding the complex experience that gender entails. Any person that comes to experience their gender in ways that are incompatible or incongruent with their assigned birth gender takes on enormous personal and social challenges in order to achieve a personally meaningful and acceptable gender expression. Research also supports the link between GV and the significant challenges this poses in constructing a meaningful identity and sense of self, particularly for identities that fall outside of the male and female binary (Lev, 2004).

The aims of the current research will be undertaken through addressing the following key research questions:

- How do gender variant individuals story their lives?
- How do gender variant individuals construct the changing nature of their experiences over time?
- How do the stories that gender variant individuals tell about their lives reflect or resist the dominant social and medical narratives?

## CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

### 2.1: METHODOLOGY

#### *Qualitative research*

Over time, positivist scientific methods of enquiry have dominated the research into human experiences (Kirkman, 2002). Towards the end of the twentieth century, following criticisms that quantitative methods measuring experiences was limited, alternative methods of enquiry were proposed to address these criticisms (Bruner, 2004). Of particular note are the ideas proposed by Bruner (2004) and others that suggested qualitative research designs allow rich and idiographic data to be collected and explored for its meaning and the experience in individual's and community's lives to be considered. Further, and of key significance, was the increased notion that language was of vital importance in the endeavour to make sense of human lives (Kirkman, 2002).

Typically, and despite assertions from members of the GV community stating their wish to be "qualified, not quantified", research in the GV experience has been explored through quantitative measures (Sausa, Keatley & Operario, 2007 p. 771). With this in mind, adopting a qualitative approach to this research was in line with the spoken preferences of some members of the GV community. It also offers an important alternative method to address a gap within the existing research.

Multiple qualitative research methods exist and so careful consideration of which of these methods was most appropriate was required (Smith, 1998). This involved thorough examination of the epistemological stance of the research and the main research questions.

#### *Epistemological stance*

It is well known that marginalization can lead to experiences and stories remaining untold and unheard (Bing & Reid, 1996). This project adopted an approach that values the voices of groups and individuals considered to be marginalized in some way. It also draws on constructivist ideas and is aligned with the notion that, whilst individuals know their own experience, there are multiple realities and no single truth (Burr, 1995). Further to this, the research adopted a position that believes realities are socially as well as personally constructed, and that the use of language requires careful attention. People construct accounts of their lives by drawing on the language resources available to them (Frank, 2011). The stories that people tell about themselves are also subject to the meanings that are given to the words, ascribed by others according to socio-cultural norms (Burr, 1995). Thus, “personal” stories must be understood with reference to the wider socio-cultural context in which they are produced and heard.

Although stories were sought from individual participants, this research adopted the stance that each story contains multiple voices. First this recognises the impact of the social and political narratives that are interwoven within the stories told by individuals (Frank, 2011). Also the voices of the various people that populate the narrators’ lives are likely to feature including friends, family and doctors who, over time, have contributed directly or indirectly to the stories and understandings of the narrators’ lives. Then, a further epistemological assumption of this research is the recognition that narratives are formed through co-construction and the narratives are subject to the many ideas, assumptions and biases of the researcher and the participant, and the audience (Frank, 2011; Bamberg, 2011). The approach posits that narratives are subject to time and place and are dynamic rather than static, thus the local context in which stories are told is important (Bamberg, 2011). With this comes the notion that the narratives constructed in the interview would be told with intent, based on current interactions and social experiences (Bamberg & Georgakapoulou, 2011). This does not imply a “hermeneutics of suspicion” or that people’s telling of stories is motivated by an attempt to deceive. Rather it draws

attention to the understanding that people have good reasons to articulate particular aspects of their lives in particular ways, in accordance with their understanding of the situation within which the telling occurs and the audience that hears it (Josselson, 2004).

### 2.1.1 Employing Narrative Inquiry (NI)

Narrative Inquiry (NI) refers to a family of approaches that is concerned with interpreting storied language (Wells, 2011). NI is considered to have its origins in the field of literature (Wells, 2011). The “narrative turn” of the 1990’s saw NI applied to a diverse range of disciplines including anthropology, history, sociology, socio-linguistics and psychology (Riessman, 2008). This approach offers guidance on the focus of research topics, the approach to data collection and assumptions for data analysis (Wells 2011).

There is some debate between the uses of the term ‘story’ and ‘narrative’. A story could be thought of as a single unit of data that relate the ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘where’ and ‘when’ of an event (Riessman, 2000). Whereas, narrative could be understood as a system of stories that link together the meaningful and consequential events in a person’s life as told at a given time (Reissman, 1993). Within this thesis the terms will be used somewhat interchangeably to reflect the use of both stories and narratives from which the analysis took place.

Whilst discussed within the introduction (see sections 1.4), in order to consider the employment of NI for this research, a discussion of narrative is again key at this juncture. The varying definitions and differing interpretations of narrative seem likely to represent the broad and varied ideas incorporated within the approach and its application. Definitions are offered by many scholars who suggest that narrative may be defined as sequences of language that refer to events placed in a sequence, and conveying a meaning, to a given audience (Riessman, 2008; Gergen, 2009). It is well noted that narratives can occur in different forms; they can be spoken, written

or seen in images, such as photographs or films (Riessman, 2008). Differing ideas pertaining to narrative and these different forms exist; however, the discussion here focuses on the use of NI in dealing with deliberately formed oral accounts as this study utilises this form within the interviews. The following principles are thought to underlie NI and its application to the narratives in the questions within this research.

Squire (2008) offers the idea that narratives:

- are sequential and meaningful,
- relate to human experience,
- include an important change or transformation, and
- are a way that individuals make sense of themselves and the world around them.

Furthermore, Riessman (2008) suggests that people live storied lives and as individuals navigate the world attempting to make sense of it, they are natural storytellers (Bamberg, 2011). Thus, in terms of meaning making NI allows for some exploration of how individuals with GV make sense of their experiences and the events of their lives through the narratives that they tell.

Other approaches that fall under the qualitative umbrella, such as Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, 1998) and Grounded Theory (as discussed by Walker and Myrick (2006)) are explicitly concerned with the *content* of written or spoken narratives. Most forms of NI share this notion but are additionally interested in the *way* that language is used; that is *how* narratives are told and *how* events and experiences are organised into the whole narrative (Bamberg 2011; Bamberg & Georgakapoulou, 2008). Further to this, NI places emphasis and value in understanding *why* narratives, events and experiences are storied the way that they are, and what the teller does by telling a particular story in a particular context (Riessman, 2008; Bamberg, 2006). This is further clarified by Bamberg (2011) who suggests that narrators tell their audience how they “want to be understood”

(Bamberg, 2011, p. 8) within their context. The local and wider context of the narrative will now be considered in greater detail.

#### *Local context in NI*

NI assumes that narratives are co-constructed highlighting the relevance and importance of both local and wider contexts (Wells, 2011). At a local level, each story told is designed for particular recipients (Riessman, 2008). This is supported by Frank (2011) whose Dialogical Narrative Analysis (DNA) approach emphasises the importance of the local context in which the narrative account is formed. The co-production of narratives through dialogue and exchange between interviewer and participant are important factors to consider and will impact upon the narratives told (Frank, 2012). Alongside this idea, Bamberg (2008; 2011) highlights the importance of 'small stories'. That is, identities can be constructed by narrators through the interactions that take place, during which no obvious 'story' is being told. Where traditional 'big story' approaches privilege the telling and linking of important life events over time in the narrator's lives, 'small stories' emerge from the interactional construction of conversations and tellings including the language selection, the framing of questions, hesitations, tone and body positions used (Bamberg, 2011). This is something that is referred to throughout chapter 3.

#### *Wider context in NI*

NI highlights the importance of the wider contexts in which narratives sit. This refers to the family, socio-political, and medical (amongst others) narratives that exist about a particular event or experience (Squire, 2008). NI invites researchers to consider how individuals position themselves in relation to dominant narratives about "their" experience as well as how different audiences shape the performance of the individual narrative. Within this research, it may then be possible to observe how the participants make sense of their GVt experiences relative to dominant narratives of GV (e.g. the medical and pathologising narratives). It may also be

possible to consider how the individuals construct their narratives as an indication of how they may wish to be perceived by their audiences (Bamberg, 2011).

### *Political context in NI*

Riessman (2008) writes about the social and political action aspects of NI. As is well documented, individuals with GV are part of a marginalised, less advantaged group (Lev, 2004). Riessman (2008) asserts the possibility that collections of individual narratives can be pooled together in order to mobilise social change. This is clearly highlighted by the feminist, and Lesbian and Gay movements, which grew out of individuals telling stories about their encountered discrimination. These tellings were used to inform policy and equality matters relating to co-habiting and legal rights in homosexual relationships (Plummer, 2006). Careful attention can be paid to the use of language as a tool through which individuals can challenge and resist the dominant narratives that may be oppressive or unhelpful in their preferred identity.

### *Summary*

NI views story telling as a sense making tool through which identities are constructed (Bamberg, 2006). The use of NI is consistent with the epistemological assumptions of this study, wherein identity is understood as created through, and maintained by, language and social interactions (that is, the stories told and heard) rather than an essentialist “something” that may be located *within* an individual (Bamberg, 2006). Stories provide an imaginative space in which people can claim identities, reject identities, and experiment with identities (Frank, 2012).

## **2.2 DESIGN**

### *Service User Consultation*

The study development occurred over a period of twelve months and some key aspects of this will now be outlined. The researcher was fortunate enough to be able to collaborate with a self identified member of the Gvt community, who had an

interest in research in the area. Over a twelve-month period, the researcher met with this consultant to talk through both the initial idea pertaining to the research as well as more specific areas including the interview process. During consultation the researcher was advised to avoid replicating the clinical interview that Gvt people often encounter in a clinical or medical setting. From here, the researcher was able to take forward this idea and share with the consultant the subsequent interview guide that was used to ensure the clinical interview was not replicated. Further to this, consultation with this service user informed the use of some of the language terms that were adopted for the project. Whilst it was impossible to use terms that would be deemed preferential by all members of the Gvt community, it was certainly helpful to consult with a member of this community about language terms in order to ensure that respectful and preferred terms were employed where possible.

The researcher was also approached by a large specialist gender identity clinic in the UK and invited to present the research to the team. This consisted of clinicians considered expert in the area of GV. Feedback was offered and further supported the development of the study.

The researcher believes that both these elements were crucial in designing a meaningful and useful research project.

### *Sampling methods*

The study used purposive sampling; that is, participants were recruited on the basis that they self identified with the phenomenon under inquiry. The richness and complexity of data gathered during interviews can be significant, and Wells (2011) suggests that a sample of 6-8 participants is manageable in terms of exploring the data in sufficient depth within the time and resource limitations of the project.

As the study aimed to hear the stories of individuals that experience GV, the following set of criteria was carefully considered in order to guide the invitation to participate and the subsequent recruitment process:

*Use of English Language:* All participants were required to be fluent in English. This was deemed important for the research owing to the significant role of language in both the production of narratives and within the analysis. Narrative analysis is concerned not only with what is said, but how it is said. This includes specific, and sometimes subtle, use of language such as metaphor which might be lost in translation. The researcher acknowledges that this is not an ideal inclusion criteria and somewhat out of line with the epistemological position of the research.

*Gender:* Individuals classified as assigned males or females at birth were invited to take part. A decision was made to exclude transsexual individuals for the project. The literature suggests that this group of people represent a qualitatively different group; one who have full legal and medical status to belong to the opposite gender to their natal sex. Thus, they do not identify as living with incongruence or to have a fluctuating preferred gender identity as is one of the defining features of GV.

### **2.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

#### *Ethical Approval*

The application process for ethical approval is an important one so that all research conducted ensures the welfare and wellbeing of those involved (Maddill & Gough, 2008). Full ethical approval was given by University of Hertfordshire's School of Psychology on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2012 (protocol number: PSY/06/12/NH)(Appendix B).

The following areas were given particular consideration in relation to the ethical issues pertinent to the research.

#### *Informed Consent*

Participants that expressed an interest in taking part in the research were given the participant information sheet containing information about the study (Appendix C). All interested participants were invited to ask questions about the research and were

informed of their right to withdraw. None of the participants requested this. Prior to the interview, each participant was asked to sign a consent form (Appendix D) which included acknowledgement of their right to withdraw at any time. Participants were also informed that their interview would be transcribed either by the researcher or a professional transcription service who would be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement (Appendix E).

### *Anonymity*

The researcher explained that owing to the style of the research, total confidentiality could not be ensured but that any direct quotations used in the write-up would not be linked to any identifying data. All participants were asked to provide an alias by which they would be happy to be known, a notion in line with Bing and Reid, (1996) who suggests that this allows participants to have ownership over their narratives.

### *Interview Data*

The interview data was to be kept securely on the researcher's laptop and all files protected with password security. Identifying information was kept separately and all participants' data, including transcript data, was stored with their pseudonym. Data will be kept in accordance with the University of Hertfordshire regulations and will be destroyed after three years.

### *Potential Distress*

Research participants were invited to talk about experiences that were potentially distressing (their gender identity). With this in mind, at the end of their interview participants were given a debrief and invited by the researcher to consider any support that they wanted to access. Further, all participants were given a list of useful organisations that offer support to Gvt people (See Appendix F).

## 2.4 PROCEDURE

### *Recruitment of Participants*

During July and August 2012, the researcher telephoned or emailed twelve organisations in the south of England who advertised on the internet as offering support, counselling or advice to Gvt individuals. From this, the study recruited seven participants.

All participants were asked some questions to ascertain some basic demographic information (See Appendix G). A table displaying the demographic information of the participants is shown below in Table 3.

*Table 3: Participants Demographic Information*

Pseudonym	Age	Preferred Gender Identity	Preferred Pro-noun	Ethnicity	Relationship status	Employment Status
<b>Raphael</b>	29	Male-identified	He	White British	In a relationship	Self employed
<b>Jake</b>	23	Male	He	White British	In a relationship	Fulltime student and volunteer
<b>Robin</b>	23	Queer	They (or don't use one)	White British	In a relationship	Employed
<b>Ajax</b>	36	Gender Queer	They	White Irish	Single	Employed
<b>Charlie</b>	26	Tranny Boy	They	White British	In a relationship	Employed
<b>Alix</b>	41	Mixed Gender	Prefer not to use one	White British	Married	Employed
<b>Rose</b>	40	Female	She	White European	Divorced and single	Employed

### *Collecting the Stories*

Mishler (1986) describes stories as being jointly constructed via relatively few open-

ended questions. This places emphasis on the participant 'driving' the research, as it allows them to focus on what is most important to them rather than the agenda of the research. Riessman (2008) states that topic areas can be chosen with some general probes for each. This idea was employed by the researcher in order to facilitate narrative production and to reduce the likelihood of the participants becoming frustrated or unsure of what to say. This is particularly relevant to the participants in the current study as, due to fears of stigmatisation or discrimination, they may not be used to speaking at length about their experiences (Gange & Tewkesbury, 1998). A copy of the interview topic guide can be found in Appendix H. Topic areas chosen were based on their perceived importance in previous research, in relation to the concept of identity and in order to elicit storied responses from participants.

Flexibility was essential during the interviews in order to allow the narratives to be told in line with the narrator's choice of what to tell, this meant that not all participants were asked exactly the same questions. This was in line with the notion that narratives are co-constructed. Expansion of this notion will take place within Chapter 3 (Analysis and Discussion), which highlights transparency about the questions asked, the stories told in response to the questions, as well as the stories that emerged without specific questions.

## **2.5 ANALYSIS OF THE NARRATIVES**

It is important to note that there is no single way to complete a narrative analysis; however, there are guiding principles that underpin the analytic process.

### *Interview Transcription*

Four of the interviews were transcribed by the researcher and three by a professional transcription service. Following transcription, each transcript was read and studied closely. In line with Bamberg (2011) a symbol code (Appendix J) was developed and used by the researcher to support the analysis of the participant's

narratives noting the subtle uses of language in the accounts. For example, pauses, unfinished sentences and emphasis on certain words may be important elements of the narrative performance and so were captured using the symbol code.

### *Analysing the Stories*

The analysis consisted of reading through the transcripts whilst listening to the interview on headphones and paying particular attention to the content, structure and performance of the accounts (see Appendix K for a full transcript and analysis of Ajax's interview). Each transcript was then read several times in order for the researcher to become immersed within the accounts. The researcher used a reflective journal to make further sense of the accounts. From here ideas pertaining to potential plots or storylines were noted for each account. This drew on ideas from the 'big stories' literature that is interested in the autobiographical elements of storytelling and which notes how narratives construct events over time (Riessman, 2002). The local context of the interview was considered, drawing on Bamberg and Georgakapoulou's (2008) notion of 'small stories'; that is, to focus on some of the finer details of the interactions between participants and interviewer. Ideas in relation to the identity construction that was taking place through the dialogue between interviewer and narrator were also noted (Frank, 2012). Furthermore, the analysis process went on to place the accounts within the broader context of the social and political narratives that are available to the participants. This process was repeated for each of the individual accounts and following this, a 'Global Impression' (Lieblich, 1998) was written. Each transcript was then read again for contrast and comparisons across the accounts in order to create the main plots and sub-plots.

## **2.6 CREDIBILITY AND RIGOUR**

The strength of a qualitative research study is determined through reference to criteria such as credibility (whether the interpretations are plausible and meaningful), rigour (whether the interpretations are supported by the original data), and pragmatic usefulness (whether the research can inform clinical practice and

future research) (Riessman, 2008; Yardley, 2008). Several steps were taken to ensure that these criteria were met.

### *Reflexivity*

The researcher kept a reflective journal throughout the research process. Personal reflections were noted following each interview and during each of the listening of the interviews and readings of the transcripts. This is in line with the philosophy of the research and the belief that the narratives were co-created between the dialogue of the researcher and the participant (Frank, 2011; Bamberg 2011). In line with this was a commitment from the researcher to engage with the influence that their own demeanour, age, gender, class, ethnicity and many other variables are likely to have had on the accounts and this was discussed during supervision. This notion will be referred to again within chapter three, where the analysis and discussion are presented.

Supervision was used throughout the project, and particularly within the analysis of the data to discuss and think about credibility, consistency and a coherent argument for the arguments the researcher was making. An additional supervisor, who has extensive experience of narrative research, was employed to specifically support the analysis of the findings. Further to this, the researcher was part of a peer support group that discussed issues pertaining specifically to narrative research. This group was attended on some occasions by two experienced narrative researchers, who offered guidance and support in applying the narrative methodological ideas to the current project. These measures were taken to ensure that the research, particularly the analysis was both rigorous and credible and to avoid interpretations that were not firmly rooted in the interview data.

### *Transparency*

The researcher took steps to ensure the process of analysis and discussion of the findings was done with transparency. The detailed discussion in section 2.5 of the

process of analysing the accounts is intended to demonstrate clearly to the reader, the way that the analysis and discussion of the findings took place. Further to this, a document containing a full transcript and its analysis is contained in Appendix K.

#### *Pragmatic Use of the research*

The interpretation and analysis of the interviews was not shared with participants as it was acknowledged that the interpretation was not intended to offer a singular truth of the participants' accounts but the researcher's careful understanding of the co-constructed narratives. This is in line with the epistemological position of the research and in particular the notion that what is constructed as 'truth' can only be 'true' for a particular time, place and perhaps individual (Burr, 1995).

In order to ensure that the research is publicised and can be used to inform working with Gvt people, the researcher intends to submit articles from the research into relevant journals during the coming months and all participants will be informed of this and sent copies should they wish to receive them. The researcher will also be attending a research seminar at the specialist gender clinic that was consulted at the beginning of the project to feedback the findings of the study and has also offered to present the findings to members of the organisations that were contacted for recruitment.

## **CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1 OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER**

The following section contains the analysis of the seven interviews that comprise the research. As previously discussed there is no set way of carrying out or presenting the findings in narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008). As such, the presentation of the results is organised by the researcher to reflect the epistemological stance of the research as well as the research aims. Further, consideration was given to the sense making of the participants stories in line with existing literature and, therefore, discussion of the findings has been integrated into this section.

In line with the epistemological perspective of this study, stories are understood to be both supported and constrained within the socio-political context that they exist and are created. The research is particularly concerned with collective accounts that may gather counter-narratives that challenge 'dominant' stories held within the social world. Plummer (2006) argues that stories that are shared by groups have more political power and are harder to dismiss than stories told by individuals. Therefore, the emerging storylines across the narratives are discussed to reflect group narratives; closeness and distance from group narratives across the individual accounts are also discussed. This enables the research to recognise and consider the diversity of each individual's narrative of living with GV within the structure of the collective narratives. More detailed discussion of the presentation of the emerging storylines follows later, at the beginning of section 3.3.

The position of this research also emphasises the unique constructions of stories by individuals in a particular (interview) context. The next section, therefore, begins with a brief introduction of the participants including basic demographic information and brief details of the interview situation. It is hoped that this will enable the

reader to get a sense of the participants (through the lens of the researcher) and as ever to add a little context within which the narrative can be placed. A 'global impression' (Lieblich, 1998) of the interpretation of each individual narrative is then presented to provide the reader with the researcher's overall impressions.

### **3.2 INTRODUCTION TO THE PARTICIPANTS AND GLOBAL IMPRESSIONS**

All names and identifying details have been changed to protect the anonymity of participant's and others. Pseudonyms were chosen by participants for the purpose of this study.

#### **3.2.1: RAPHAEL**

Raphael is a twenty nine year old White British person, whose preferred gender identity is male-identified. Raphael was born in the UK and was assigned female at birth but spent much of his childhood in the Middle East due to his Dad's job. Raphael currently lives in Sussex and his interview took place in a house in his current city. There were no other people present.

#### *Global Impression*

Raphael's strongest narrative was that of being "*an imposter as a woman*". Raphael's account was coherent and chronologically told from his earliest experiences to the present day. Raphael's narrative was conveyed through stories in which he was portrayed as a confused character and as confusing to others. For example, Raphael told a story of being at a sleepover with female friends as if "*I was missing the rule book of life or something really basic like that, just like I didn't quite get it*" in referring to what girls were expected to do/be. Raphael's early life was richly storied, as was the period during which he began to take male hormones. This was in stark contrast with the period of adolescence and early adulthood when he was living in the gender he was assigned at birth, thus producing a sense of journey over time, but with some parts absent or not easily told.

Raphael's account positioned his situation (as "*an imposter*") as impossible to live with and taking agency to masculinise his body was told as a "*life or death*" scenario. Using strong terms such as his GV being a "*pit of darkness*", Raphael invited the audience to appreciate the extreme circumstances constructed in the account and uses these to story the necessity of taking agency within his situation and beginning his hormonal transition.

Raphael's account was quite steady in tone and pace, and there was little variation in speed and very few changes in volume or animation. Having taken steps towards expressing his gender in a way that felt comfortable to him, his tone of voice seemed to reflect a position of having now achieved some peace and resolution. This also places the intense distress he narrated in the past; as something that was no longer difficult and something he had been able to overcome. Raphael's expressed desire to support young Gvt people with their experiences was storied alongside his overcoming of Gvt struggles. This could be made sense of in terms of Frank's (1995) 'quest narrative' idea wherein the narrator details his conquering of adversity to go on to support others with a similar struggle.

### 3.2.2: JAKE

Jake was a twenty three year old white British person who was assigned female at birth. Jake gave his preferred gender identity as male. At the time of the interview, Jake was a full-time Masters student and lived with his partner in the South of England. The researcher met with Jake at his home and the interview was conducted in the living room, whilst his partner was in a room on a different floor. Jake reported that the set up was adequate to have a confidential conversation.

#### *Global Impression*

Jake's account was almost exclusively about gender; there was very little talk of other aspects of his life and even when prompted, Jake re-orientes his story to make GV relevant. Jake's strongest narrative was of overcoming struggles with his Gvt

experiences arriving at his current position of supporting others with their Gvt struggles. Again, this is reminiscent of the 'quest narrative' idea (Frank, 1995). With this narrative there was a clear sense of Jake's experience over time, but only from adolescence to the present day, meaning that much of Jake's talk was situated in the present day. This is in line with the story Jake tells of his first Gvt experiences, which he located in late adolescence. Jake presents richly detailed stories of times and events pertinent to this narrative of a struggle, often re-telling conversations with other people using different voices to demonstrate the characters involved. This use of reported conversations and voices of others may offer legitimacy to his account of his experiences.

Jake's account told the story of his ongoing negotiation of performing his gender in different social contexts through the comparison of "who he is" in relation to those around him:

*"(..)like when I'm just at home, I guess I do think about myself as being quite as sort of a bit queer" and "(..)when I'm in a queer space it it, I, it feels as though people are looking at me like "Oh you're just normal and boring" [...] "But then in sort of hetero-normative spaces, it's like the opposite because I feel there are times when, especially if it's a like a male-male dominated space, I feel like I have to sort of, butch up a little bit and be a bit more manly".*

Jake's account was humorous and engaging as he told funny stories about his day to day experiences. This was engaging and may have invited the audience to join his claimed identity of now being comfortable and even playful with his experiences: *"I'm like, I can play with this, I can exist in this weird in between space, that's fine".* This performance of having overcome past difficulty to reach a position of comfort with his identity was also consistent with broader cultural narratives of suitable pathways for people who go on to help others.

### 3.2.3: ROBIN

Robin is a twenty three year old white British person, whose preferred gender identity was given as “Queer” and preferred pronoun as “they”. Robin was assigned female at birth and was raised and still lives in the South of England with their partner. Robin is employed full-time. The interviewer met with Robin at their home and the interview took place in the living room. Their partner was also in the house, but Robin reported that they were confident that a confidential conversation could take place.

### *Global Impression*

The strongest narrative within Robin’s account was of how people “*do not understand me, they don’t know how to take me*”. This narrative was constructed through several stories in which Robin was constantly re-positioned from their preferred queer identity to their birth gender by family in particular: “*They almost try to reassure me that I’m female*”. This narrative was situated in the present day and there was no sense of a beginning or progression to it; it was told as it exists currently. The narrative is further achieved through the dialogical exchanges between Robin and the researcher, during which Robin asked often if what they were saying was “*Okay*” and saying “*I’m not very good at explaining it*” or “*I don’t know that I am making sense*”. This conversational exchange could also be seen as contributing to the narrative of not being understood by others.

A second narrative that was present within Robin’s account was that of wanting to be seen outside of gender. This is achieved by Robin’s resisting being positioned by gender by the researcher, both in giving their preferred pronoun as “they” and also through re-orienting the topic of conversation from gender onto other aspects of their identity. When asked directly about gender related experiences Robin repeatedly replied with: “*I don’t really think about it*”. The resisting of being positioned and restrained by gender was further achieved through the richly narrated stories on a variety of Robin’s interests, hopes and ambitions where gender

was not made relevant. This helped to engage and enable the reader to believe Robin's invitation to be viewed as both more than and separate to their gender:

*"If you concentrate on the fact that before gender you were a person with interests and thoughts and stuff and that's the important bit, and relationships...umm they're the bulk of what you are."*

Both the amount of non-gender talk and the use of humour to engage the audience form part of the way the narrative was constructed as "being outside of gender".

#### 3.2.4: AJAX

Ajax is a thirty six year old White Irish person who was assigned female at birth. Ajax reported a preferred gender identity of being gender-queer. They were born and raised in Belfast but at the time of the interview lived alone in London and were employed full-time. The researcher met with Ajax at their apartment in London to conduct the interview.

##### *Global Impression*

Ajax's narrative told the story of having different internal and external experiences of their GV. Internally, Ajax told of having found a way with GV that "*works for me*" but "*externally it is more difficult*" living as someone who was neither male nor female, but has a "*blurred gender*". The account was coherently narrated and there was a clear sense of Ajax's journey over time in relation to their gender identity. Ajax recounted stories from their earliest experiences of a "*disconnect gender wise*" through to their adolescence and early adulthood during which time they considered medical intervention. The pace of the account was steady and the events that have contributed to Ajax's GVt experiences were narrated confidently and linked to describe their progression of an internal achievement of being "*much more comfortable*" than in their earlier life.

In terms of the narrative of their external experiences of their gender, Ajax's account told of their preference of having a "*blurred gender*" but that they had learned from

experience that this leads to both them and others feeling “awkward”. For example, when having their gender confused whilst eating out with colleagues. Ajax goes on to tell of how they had learned to manage:

*“I just want to avoid that type of embarrassing situation which is why I wear a long-sleeved shirt at work, you know.”*

On the one hand this appeared to position Ajax as having agency in managing social situations. However, this agency was also limited as Ajax’s stories showed how they were unable to achieve their preferred “blurred” identity in their social world. The contrast of these stories made the narrative of different internal and external experiences convincing to the audience.

Another thread of the account was Ajax’s attempts to resist being positioned by their gender and the invitation to the audience to know other parts of themselves (aside from their gender). This was achieved during the account by reminding the audience that place, politics and religion was more central to their identity definition and, thus, gender was told as being less relevant:

*“(..).to be quite honest, you know, in terms of identity, gender isn’t, gender is not my...the key way I identify. The most important thing for me is place, so I identify by place rather than gender.”*

Stories about these elements of Ajax’s identity were told with greater volume, intonation and richly described and were engaging to listen to.

### 3.2.5: CHARLIE

Charlie was a twenty-six year old White British person, whose preferred gender identity was, in Charlie’s own words a “Tranny Boy”. Charlie was assigned female at birth and raised in the south west of England but lives now with their partner in London and was employed full-time. I met with Charlie at their home in London for the interview.

#### *Global Impression*

Charlie's account of their experiences was humorous and entertaining and the strongest narrative was of the constant resistance to belong to one of the binary gender groups: *"I'm not a girl but then I'm also not a boy..."*. Charlie constructed this narrative across time from the age of around 19 years to the present day and told stories in which Charlie's character was constantly recognised by others as being a pioneer for being able to live outside of the gender binary. The stories were quite persuasive:

*"I was the first person to walk in and be like, "yea, you can use whatever pronoun you want for me. I don't really care". And that was quite radical at the time".*

The progression of this identity was told over the previous few years and threaded through stories about university, jobs, friends, politics and relationships creating a simultaneous identity of being like gender typical peers of their age that was told alongside resisting being positioned by the gender binary. Charlie's narrative did not include any early life experiences and talks of these were resisted by Charlie who orientated the account back to stories from their late teenage years to the present day. It was therefore not clear whether stories of earlier life "fit" with this preferred narrative.

Similar to that of the quest narrative, Charlie's account constructs a convincing narrative of using their own Gvt experiences to challenge dominant gender narratives and expectations: *"So my transition made me a hardcore separatist feminist"* positioning themselves as using their own Gvt experiences to challenge social norms and encourage those around them to question gender norms.

Charlie presented the difficulties they had encountered in relation to their preferred gender identity in a humorous way and introduced other characters (always strangers to them) that constructed the narrative of seeing Charlie's gender as difficult to make sense of. This was told as stories of feeling hurt and offended. Despite reference to these feelings, Charlie's account was light hearted and the

stories were told with humour. This made the account easy and enjoyable to engage with.

### 3.2.6: ALIX

Alix is a thirty eight year old White British person whose preferred gender identity is a mixed gender. Alix prefers not to use a pronoun, but when unavoidable uses “She”. Alix gave her marital status as married and with two children and lives in the south of England and works on a voluntary basis. Alix was assigned male at birth. The researcher met with Alix in a room of a charitable organisation that offers social support to Gvt individuals and there were no other people present.

#### *Global Impression*

Alix’s narrative was constructed around a main idea of not wanting to be positioned or identified by their gender: “(..)ideally, I’d like to get away from gender”. This narrative was told in a quiet voice and as a whole was a slowly paced account. Alix often responded with short answers to questions and took long pauses before answering. This may be representative of Alix resisting being positioned by gender by the researcher as well as their attempt to resist societal discourses that suggest each person must identify as one gender or another. An example of this is when Alix says: “I didn’t want to be, you know jump into another pigeon hole if you like” when talking about the decision not to medically transition. The positioning that Alix took to gender then was one that attempted to resist it, and in doing so positioned gender as tempting and perhaps powerful.

The narrative of not wanting to be positioned by gender was further constructed by the relatively few stories that Alix told about them self. In not talking much about their own experiences of GV it was hard to get a sense of their own journey over time. Alix stories a narrative of being confused about why the two genders were seen and treated separately from their early experiences through to the present day:

*“...I didn’t really understand why I was segregated, queues of different lines and stuff you know like “We let the girls go on the bus first” just didn’t seem to be setting the right kind of attitude to gender equality or whatever”.*

Alix’s narrative positioned them as rejecting of traditional gender narratives and there is a sense of this developing a little over time from early memories of not understanding gender segregation at school to the present day where Alix maintains a mixed gender identity.

### 3.2.7: ROSE

Rose was a thirty seven year old White European person who identified as female and was assigned male at birth. Rose gave her marital status as single and divorced and she has two children. Rose was employed full-time and lives on the South coast of England. I met with Rose in a room of a charitable organisation that offers social support to Gvt individuals and there were no other people present.

#### *Global Impression*

Rose’s account is richly detailed and told the story of her experiences from early childhood through to the present day with clarity and coherence of important events. Rose took control of her account, organising it chronologically without the researcher promoting or guiding the process. Rose narrated her journey with detailed stories from early childhood, adolescence, early adult life right through to the present day. The strongest narrative in the account was one of protection; that is, Rose’s need to protect other people from the impact of her GV. This idea was threaded through her re-telling of the significant moments in the development of her gender identity. For example, when she described a time in her early adult life when she shared her Gvt identity with her partner, but not with her family, she said: *“It was for the protection of others. I didn’t want them to suffer”*. When asked what from, Rose stated firmly her concerns about what her family and friends would have encountered from others if she had shared her status with others:

*“Err discrimination, harassment, prejudice, umm how we’d be isolated, lose friends, lose family...how careers would suffer”.*

In her protection narrative, Rose brings in her family to the account and they feature heavily throughout and were described as:

*“(..)so::: supportive, the biggest shock of my life. It was AMAZING”*

and another family member:

*“He was absolutely wonderful, very supportive...umm, absolutely amazing person, a really amazing person”.*

Rose’s repetition of the word “amazing” and her paraverbal<sup>3</sup> emphases and tone invited the audience to see her family in the same way that she saw them. The stories during which Rose’s family were present can be viewed as counter narratives to the more commonly told stories of Gvt individuals as isolated and excluded. Thus, owing to her Gvt experiences Rose resisted being positioned as isolated and excluded in contrast to the dominant social narrative of Gvt experiences.

A further important narrative in Rose’s account was that of her life being enhanced rather than hindered by her Gvt experiences. Rose achieved this by telling small stories about her successes within the army:

*“they are the elite of the county. And I thought that’s what I’m going to do [...] Actually I did really well umm I passed out as a section commander. I very narrowly missed what was called the King’s budget which is for best recruit. I only missed that because I got back trooped when I was on training because I broke my foot, so”.*

The performance of these stories was engaging as they were told by Rose with rich and varied intonation that was both inviting and captivating.

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<sup>3</sup> Paraverbal communication refers to the messages that we transmit through the tone, pitch, and pacing of our voices.

### **3.3 EMERGING STORYLINES**

The following section presents the researcher's interpretation of the collective storylines. The storylines will be presented and intertwined with two key aspects: the identity work that takes place within the narratives and the emotional experience. Emotions are well documented to be an important organising feature of human experience and the construction of identity for GV people is a focus of the current research. The focus on identity entails considering the storylines that the narrator chose to tell, the way they were told and how this related to a preferred sense of self. For this reason both the emotional experiences as well as the identity work that went on during the accounts will be inter-woven with the storylines, or plots. This method is known as quilting (Saukko 2004) and through this the researcher has attempted to interpret and articulate the stories of the narratives whilst also "stitching them together" (Saukko, 2004 p. 303). Finally, all of the interpretations of the storylines and the interwoven commentary on identity construction and the emotional experiences in the narratives take place within the local and broader context in which they were co-constructed. It is these contexts that hold the narratives together, pertaining true to the stance of the epistemology of the research.

Throughout the analysis section the reader will see references made to the current available literature and an interpretation of how these findings sit within the current research base. This is in an attempt by the researcher to place the analysis of the research in the context of other ideas about GV that already exist within the research and knowledge base.

A diagrammatic representation of the organisation of the findings can be seen in *Figure 1*, below. The researcher has made clear, where storylines may have been prompted by specific questions asked to the narrator within the accounts.

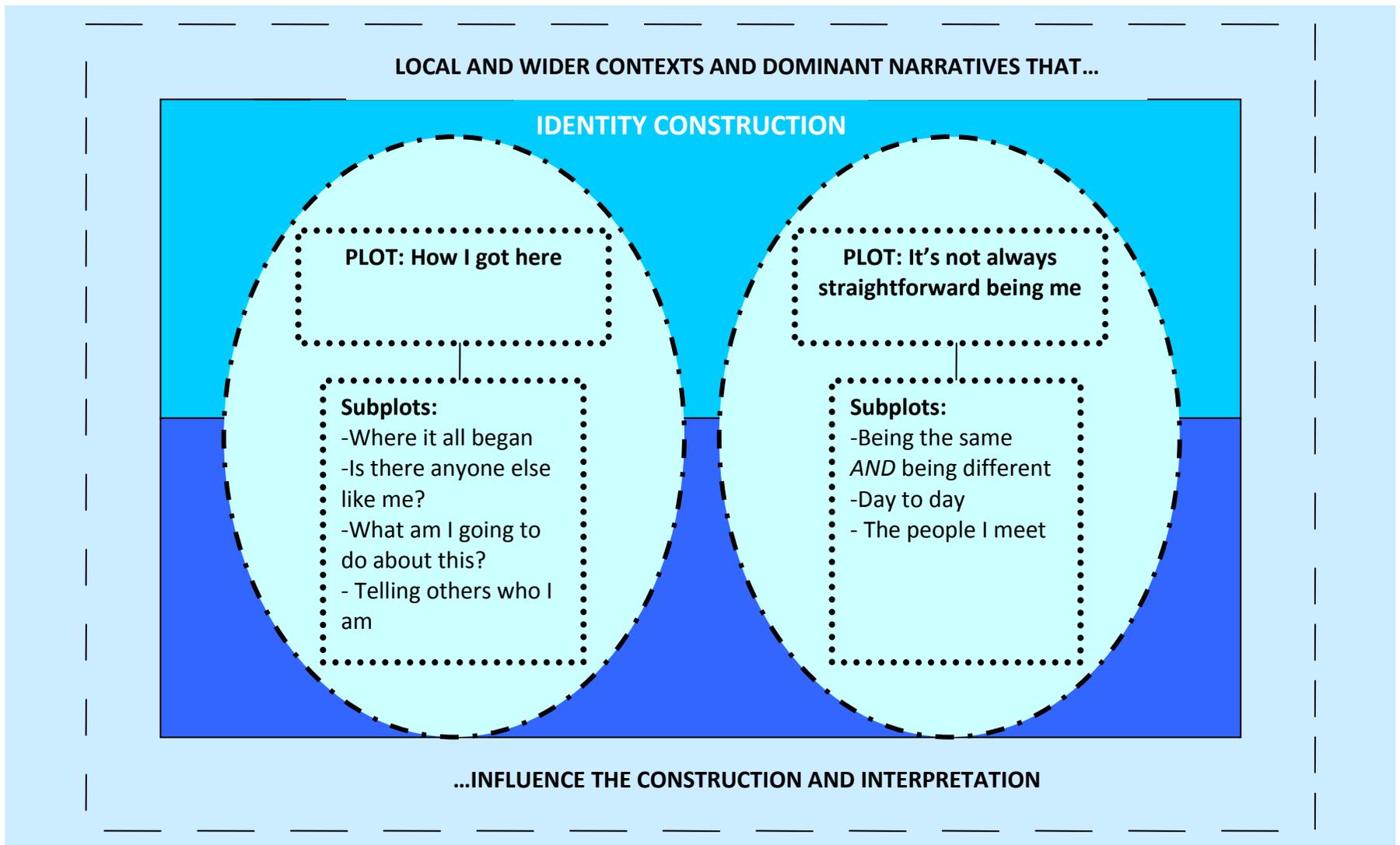


Figure 1: Diagram representing the structure of the presentation of the analysis

### **3.4 PLOT 1: HOW I GOT HERE**

Medical and social discourses about GV experiences contain many ideas about GV, including ways of describing what it feels like (being trapped in the wrong body), when people begin to experience it (in childhood) and what should be done about it. In reality, however, it is known that the experience of GV people varies enormously, not only from other GV people, but also from dominant ideas about the phenomenon. The following section of the analysis is focussed on the relationship with, and journey of, GVt experiences over time as constructed between the participants and researcher during the interviews in the first of two main plots: 'How I got here'.

Given the stated topic of the research outlined in the participant information sheet, as well as the interviewer's opening question it is perhaps unsurprising to the reader that all of the individual narratives contained significant amounts of talk about GV, the way it is experienced and how it impacts on the narrators' lives. There was opportunity within the co-construction of the narratives for movement away from the GV topic which some participants took; nevertheless, GVt experiences were told as significant in the lives of the participants in the study.

#### **3.4.1 Where it all began**

Sense making is well known for its relationship to making difficult experiences more understandable and more manageable to cope with (Johnstone & Dallos, 2006). Sense making relies on understanding experiences over time and within their context (Johnstone & Dallos, 2006). Throughout the literature, it is also well documented that GV people often report their first memories of GVt feelings in their early childhood years (Devor, 2004). This is also reflected in the growing interest in GVt experiences in childhood and the diagnostic criteria containing reference to atypical childhood behaviours as markers of GVt presentations. Clearly, the first GV experiences a person has, particularly in very early life, are likely to have implications on the emotional capacity that a person has in trying to make sense of what is

happening; this would include their understanding of what it might say about them. With only one exception, all of the accounts contained stories about their first noticed or remembered Gvt experience. Perhaps the inclusion of stories about early Gvt experiences reflected the narrator's attempts to account for the person that they were at the point of meeting the interviewer and, thus, are positioned to show how significant events in their lives link over time. The development of an identity occurs over time within the context of significant events that lead a person to evaluate and interpret and then tell others what such events say or do not say about them (Riessman, 2008). Here, the stories of making sense of early GV experiences were typified by emotional confusion and were deemed important enough to be narrated without the researcher prompting or asking directly about first or earliest GV experiences. All tell stories about childhood experiences of gender, and do so in relation to what the experience felt like. We will turn to Ajax, Rose, and Raphael for examples:

Ajax: *"certainly from before the age of four(..)I can remember having a disconnect gender wise" and "So I wo- I had a kind of desire or fantasy to wear different types of clothes. I mean, I remember being very young and wanting to wear a different type of watch, because you had kind of boys' watches and girls' watches."*

Rose: *"Umm I was...the very first time, that actually kicked off the very first time when I was ever caught expressing the way I felt really is just when I sneaked into my sister's bedroom at about five years old [Nic: yea] and she had a teddy bear on the bed that had a yellow bikini on it, pretty big teddy bear [Nic: yea yea yea] it was proper big and I took the bikini off, put it on, my sister came up the stairs not knowing I was in there but I was you know "Ah!" and I just dived under the bed."*

Raphael: *"I definitely always felt umm, I definitely always felt umm a disconnect" and "...usually it was boys that I'd hang out with and they would*

*assume that I was a guy [Nic: Ok] (..)And at the end they'd be like "Oh so what's your name" and I'd be like "Oh Charlotte {changed by researcher for anonymity}" you know [Nic: Yaaa] And they'd be like "Oh, err"(..)you know they'd treat me differently" and "I was missing the rule book of life or something really basic like that, just like I didn't quite get it"*

The stories told by Ajax, Rose and Raphael position themselves as passive against their gender difference but simultaneously as resisting gender normativity from an early age. All of the stories referred to typical childhood experiences such as dressing up, choosing a watch and making friends. With this the narrators position themselves as having similar childhood experiences to others. The notion of difference then was introduced quite subtly, perhaps supporting the construction of being 'like others'. It was also interesting to reflect on the sense of progression over time, as both Ajax and Raphael's stories imply that at the time they were not specifically aware that their experience was related to GV but that now, as adults, the narrators were aware of societal discourses around gender typical behaviour and this was used to make sense of earlier experiences.

The use of the terms "disconnect" by two of the narrators was persuasive at informing the audience that something was different, almost as though something did not add up about their experience of gender from an early age. The use of this term in this way almost created the image of puzzle pieces that should be connected yet are not and this makes it difficult to interpret the picture that the puzzle should show. This is supported in the wider literature on early GVt experiences (e.g. Bockting & Coleman, 2007) and the confusion that can arise from them.

Alix's account of first GVt experience also contained a sense of confusion, although it differs from Ajax, Rose and Raphael in that Alix narrates not understanding gender in general:

*Alix: "Well, I suppose when I was younger, I, I, I was, I didn't really understand all the gender norms that went on(...)[Nic: Yea] I had a bit of a dislike of*

*gender full stop” and “I mean I think I just didn’t like being lumped in with boys!((laughs)) [Nic: Yea] Or I didn’t really understand why I was segregated, queues and lines and stuff you know like “We let the girls go on the bus first”(…) Just didn’t seem to be setting the right kind of attitude towards gender equality or whatever ((laughs))”*

Here Alix positioned themselves as questioning society’s norms and messages about gender from an early age, and this seemed to serve the function of their preferred identity as a person who challenges norms and was critical of arbitrary segregation of different groups of people; a narrative that was present in the rest of Alix’s account in relation to social class and sexuality. The way that Alix shared this idea with the researcher was also of interest, as it was said very quietly. Further, ending this part of the account with “*or whatever*” and laughter allows for less surety or certainty of this stated position. It could also be that Alix was aware that their early experiences were not aligned with the dominant narrative of Gvt people (in that they did not feel an innate sense of being in the wrong gender at an early age) and were, therefore, unsure of how their personal experience would be received by the researcher and audience. As this interaction was at the very beginning of the interview with Alix, this laughter may have been Alix’s way of exiting or ending that piece of narration until they felt more sure of expectations including how the researcher and intended audience may respond to their telling of their earlier experiences and resistance to the dominant narrative of Gvt experiences (Kleres, 2011). The importance of equality for Alix’s dominant narrative was developed further in Alix’s account of deciding what to do in relation to their Gvt experience and is discussed more fully later in this chapter, in section 3.4.3.

The stories told by both Jake and Robin, told of a later awareness of their Gvt experiences than the other participants. Their accounts placed their first Gvt experiences in late adolescence. This is consistent with the research of Hines (2007), who found that some Gvt people do not have Gvt experiences in their early life, considering transitioning long after puberty has begun. Jake described that:

*“Um it was only when I was 16 and I went to a mixed college that it err...sort of changed a bit and (3) I don’t(..)er(..)it’s hard for me to remember how it sort of came about [Nic: Mmm] because it seems like it came really suddenly”*

Similarly Robin explained:

*“I didn’t really think about gender at all before(...)until I was about a teenager and actually the things I was doing was perceived weird by other people and I started-“*

Interestingly, Robin’s story stopped quite suddenly and the narration took a different direction. The relationship to others, and the impact this has on identity development, will be discussed later in this chapter (in sections 3.4.4 and 3.5.4), but of note here was Robin’s exit of this story and the absence of construction of a narrative around initial GVt experiences. Perhaps this was in line with Robin’s attempts to resist being positioned by gender or GV by the researcher. This idea was further constructed throughout their narrative with repetition of *“I don’t really think about it”* and similar phrases when discussing their GVt experiences. As we learn later in more detail, Robin had not disclosed their GVt status to their friends and family, and so it may also be that they do not have access to a narrative about their experiences that they wanted to share with others; namely the researcher and the audience. Nevertheless, this element of the narration supported Robin in achieving movement away from a gender focus; and seemed in line with Robin’s preferred identity focussing on their interests and values as a person rather than their gender identity.

Despite the story Jake told in situating his first GV experience later in life, the same sense of confusion present in the other stories was noticeable; once more, GV was positioned as something that was initially difficult for an individual to make sense of. This confusion was storied by the lack of elaboration within the first account; this left the researcher with a sense of uncertainty around what happened and the shared sense (with Jake) that their GV came out of the blue without an explanation. Both Jake’s and Robin’s accounts sat outside of the most common discourse that would

place GV being present in early childhood. Similarly to Burdge (2007), this can be seen as an important counter-narrative that was less often told.

In contrast to the stories that outline “first GV experiences”, Charlie’s account did not make reference to any early experiences of GV. Aside from reference to the prior four to five years this was in keeping with the whole of their narrative being situated almost exclusively in the ‘here and now’. Charlie’s account was confidently narrated and seemed to construct a strong narrative of being comfortable with being different, even enjoying being able to “*screw with people’s idea of gender*” via their own gender presentation. During the interview with Charlie, the researcher was aware that there were no references to earlier or initial GV experiences, nor any aspect of Charlie’s earlier life. When the researcher made a tentative enquiry into Charlie’s earlier life, Charlie quickly re-directed to their current experiences. In doing so perhaps Charlie was demonstrating their agency in resisting this question in favour of narrating on their current life. It was interesting to reflect on the role of the researcher in the construction of Charlie’s preferred narrative. Were there narratives the researcher was less keen to hear? Perhaps the confident, engaging and humorous performance of Charlie’s account made it less possible for the researcher to enquire more and for Charlie to narrate experiences outside of their strongest narrative.

#### 3.4.2 Is there anyone else like me?

Devor’s (2004) qualitative research cites that an important element of accepting one’s own GV is by connecting with other people that are ‘similar’. In terms of the identity work that takes place, accepting one’s own experience, or not, certainly impacts on the way a person comes to view themselves. In this study, the researcher did not ask any of the participants directly about the process of meeting other GVt people. Despite this, the connection with GVt others features significantly in the narratives of how many of the participants got to where they were at the time of the interview. As with other elements pertinent to the narratives, there was some

variation in stories relating to meeting and finding other Gvt people. It is important to acknowledge that the participants were recruited through organisations that offer support and social connection to Gvt people, and a valued element of this is the opportunity to get to know and spend time with other Gvt people. This context is likely to have influenced the co-construction of stories about connecting with other Gvt people. Connecting with others was storied as important for the individual in making sense and accepting their own experiences and seemed significant for the journey of 'How I got here':

Robin: *"I mean I have had big things that have happened that have helped (..)li:::ke doing a lot of work in the trans gender community at one point in one year(...)all sort of people with all sorts of identities just getting on with their lives and that helped me calm down a bit "*

Jake: *"(..)Umm I talked about it online, I knew a few other trans people [Nic: Ok] so I'd sort of chat to them about it"*

Rose: *"We started looking into support groups for people with gender identity you know"*

In contrast to an earlier sense of difference, this narration seemed to enable participants to articulate a similarity with others regarding their preferred identities. Ajax and Alix also narrated on their experiences of connecting with other communities (the bisexual community and the butch/femme community), as important in establishing connections and social relationships in an accepting community. Similarly, this may also have reinforced preferred identities of being more similar than different, and may also have invited the audience to recognise other aspects of their identities that were important to them. This supports Lev's (2004) findings about the desires of Gvt people to be seen as multi-identified beings. Perhaps this notion was at play within the stories here.

In terms of the importance of connecting with other Gvt people, Raphael also talked about this issue. Here it was in terms of its absence in their past:

Raphael: *“You know and umm(..)yea, you know we didn’t have YouTube then so I was really on my own with it, didn’t know what was going on”.*

Within this talk Raphael offered the audience further rationale for his legitimacy in supporting other Gvt people by locating his lack of connection with similar others as a difficult experience in the past. This was in line with his strongest narrative of having overcome his difficulties to having now found a comfortable preferred gender identity. This talk also positioned Raphael as more able to have some agency over his Gvt experiences when not alone with it. This was developed later in his account when he told a story of visiting a young Gvt person to offer support to them in managing their experiences; again positioning agency within a fellow Gvt person whom he was able to legitimately offer support to as a person who was now comfortable with his preferred gender identity.

It seems plausible that the age of participants is relevant to understanding stories of connecting, or not, with other Gvt people, and has important ramifications for identity development. Four of the seven participants were in their early twenties at the time of being interviewed, and the remaining three ranged from mid thirties to mid forties. Of course the rapid development of social media in the last decade means that the younger participants are likely to have had access to online resources at this important time in their lives and thus more information and opportunities to meet other Gvt people. Indeed, as researched by Raun (2010), the increase in YouTube<sup>4</sup> videos of young Gvt people documenting their experiences increases the possibility of Gvt people connecting with similar others.

### 3.4.3 What am I going to do about this?

The evaluation of significant events contributes to individuals’ learning about themselves and also the ongoing development of their sense of self (Riessman, 2008). As such, the way that Gvt people come to think about the actions that they can take in relation to their experience is likely to be a significant event. So, it is evident from the previous research and literature that the medical and psychological

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<sup>4</sup> YouTube is the World’s biggest online video broadcaster that allows any member of the public to make and share videos with others about any topic of their choosing.

support and interventions that Gvt people access is an important aspect of the Gvt experience (Ellis & Eriksen, 2002). Lev (2004), reports that regardless of their ultimate decisions, almost all Gvt people give thought to medical transition. Although the nature of this research was not to impose pre-established ideas on to the narratives, it was important to acknowledge that researchers, as well as the participants, were already subject to what they know and understand about the topic that was being explored. Of note, was the recruitment of people who did not identify as transsexual within the design of the study. Unlike transsexuals they did not have full medical and legal transition to the opposite sex. Five of the seven individual accounts contained spontaneous stories of their personal decision-making process about whether or not to undertake medical transition; in the other two accounts the question was asked to the participants. The narration of stories about decision-making is important as they tell the audience something about the possibility of taking agency, or not in relation to their Gvt experiences.

The collective stories of deciding whether or not to undertake medical transition were told in terms of their part in the narrator's journeys. The storyline across all but one of the accounts contained the idea that the decision making process was a long one requiring lots of thought, questioning of oneself and the importance of doing what was right for them. Here we can turn to Charlie, Jake and Rose for examples of this:

*Charlie: "I don't know how I made this decision. In the end it just kinda(...) it made itself for me [Nic: Okay]It just really consumed me and it meant that I stopped for a long time.." and "Having worked in a sector for long enough(..) working as volunteer in the sector for long enough, I knew if I needed I could. I knew that I could tick boxes if I needed to get the medical transition, but still I just kept on and on questioning myself"*

*Jake: "So I spent a lot of time thinking about it then as well and probably about my first two years of university just thinking and sort of then getting on*

*with life and then going “OH MY GOD! but what if I’m wrong?!” and questioning it, until then it had gone on long enough and I knew it was time to make the decision(..) scary time”*

*Rose: “..when I look back, it was there forever, always there as a choice I needed to make, but there was always other things, you know, my wi-ex wife, my children, family, needing to protect them all, so I suppose the decision to do nothing is what I did first if you see what I’m saying. Then to do anything else is forty years in the making..”*

While participants’ stories differed in terms of the length of time needed, all but one account conveyed a sense that this was not something that was undertaken lightly and that the narrators want this to be known. This is perhaps typified by Raphael’s description of deciding to undertake partial medical transition as “*life or death*”, stressing just how important this part of his journey was. The use of this phrase countered potential accusations that Gvt experiences and decision-making about transitioning are trivial. Further to this, Raphael appeared to be drawing on medical/illness discourses and the taken for granted idea that medical problems must be addressed. This also moves GV out of a social or psychological discourse and into a medical one.

Interestingly, the stories of decision-making featured very few real life characters; they were stories in which the individuals only talk relationally about themselves. Perhaps the lack of other characters in these stories revealed something about the unspoken nature of Gvt experiences in general. This part of the story seemed to tell of an experience where there was an un-named ‘character’ telling the narrator to question their experiences and ideas. It was interesting to wonder if this was the un-named voice of societal discourses around the fixed and natural nature of gender, subtly prompting the narrator to ask surety of themselves, as if their experiences are uncommon and unusual. The questioning of oneself- “*I was tired of sitting on my*

*bed and questioning myself” (Jake) and “I kept doubting myself to make sure it was real” (Charlie) work to let the reader know that the narrator has thought through what they have done and, by arriving at a sense of certainty, thus claimed back a sense of agency. Further, the way in which the stories were narrated was interesting - for Charlie the prospect of undertaking medical transition seemed to challenge their identity as a pioneer of ‘how to be truly queer’, and so the minimal elaboration served to not exacerbate this challenge or make it obvious.*

Whilst Robin’s and Ajax’s accounts offered an alternative to the collective storyline of a long and thought-through process of decision-making around medical transition, it seemed that this was still an important part of their story. For Ajax to retain a queer and blurred gender presentation *“Quite simply, I don’t want a male body, I don’t want male genitals”*, undertaking medical transition would be akin to moving away from certainty into uncertainty - their blurred gender was what they preferred. Further to this, Ajax told of their choice to visit their doctor once they had left home to explain their experiences and discuss what their options were but was disappointed to be referred to a clinic for sexual dysfunction. Despite then their attempts to explore what to do with, or about, their experiences Ajax informed the audience that this too remained in line with their preferred blurred gender:

*Ajax: “I wasn’t looking at options in the sense of thinking if I wanted surgery. That’s never been on the agenda for me [Nic: Yes] But just trying to explore gender and legal identity and...” and “So, kind of when I did read up literature, you know, kind of the choices people kind of had and the way it seemed to me, my conclusion was you lived as your birth gender or you kind transition.”*

The delivery of this part of the account was short and sharp. It made the point clear and did not invite negotiation or discussion and this helped to affirm Ajax’s position of contentedness with their blurred gender. Similarly *inclusion* of in depth stories about medical transition would not be in line with Robin’s preference and comfort with *not* talking about or being positioned only *in* relation to their Gvt experiences.

#### 3.4.4 Telling others who I am

Disclosing of experiences is noted within the literature on Gvt experiences to be a time of stress and difficulty for Gvt people and their networks (Lev, 2004; Devor, 2004). It is thought that this is linked to the shame and stigma associated with the GV, and fears of prejudice and not being accepted (Gagne and Tewkesbury, 1998).

Burdge (2007) refers to the anxiety that Gvt people report in needing to share their Gvt status with significant others. Within the accounts, stories which told of sharing Gvt experiences were told as pivotal events and were incredibly richly narrated. For example Raphael refers to sharing his Gvt status as a “*crunch point*” (Raphael) and Robin as something that would be “*unbelievably scary*”. Interestingly, these stories have a theme of protection. There were many stories and ideas of wanting to protect others from any possible impact of their Gvt status. Rose told a richly detailed story of organising a meeting with members of her family in which she describes being “*terrified of how it would ruin their lives-I didn’t want them to suffer*” (Rose). There was a detailed account of escalating anxiety which mirrored a gradual increase in the pace and volume of her speech and the repetitive justification for having to tell her family “*who I am*”, (a phrase that was repeated six times in this part of her story). Repetition of this phrase works to impress upon the audience the importance of her Gvt identity and of, thus, being recognised. Rose told the intricate details of the story:

*Rose: “I protected everyone for so long i-iit was finally time to tell them who I am so I(...)I remember getting all the chairs in the right places, I’d decided who would sit where you know, I got everyone some water, had no idea what they were going to say, if I would even have a family at the end of it, but now I can remember every word of it. I told them who I am and who I will always be”*

This can also be seen as orienting to, and resisting, cultural ideas often heard in relation to sexuality and GV, where individuals were told by others that their

experience was “a phase that will pass”. Raphael also narrates in relation to this idea in re-telling when he shared his Gvt status with his parents:

*Raphael: “ (...) with my parents, they’re the ones I was really worried [Nic: Ok] about cause like I think, I don’t know, I really care about what they think and you know so I had to make sure they knew it was serious, so I sat them down, really REALLY worried and told them you know I’d walked the line of gender-it was a crunch point-and that I had to tell them how difficult it was...”*

Responses from family were absent in all narratives except for Rose’s and Jake’s. Rose uses the speech of others (particularly her father) and adopted a different voice (presumably attempting to sound like him) to relate his response to learning of her Gvt status. This use of direct voicing conveys the emotional salience of the experience, in that she was able to recall exactly how and what was said (Kleres, 2011). The content of the reported response may also have supported Rose’s preferred identity as being accepted by everybody and not having any difficulties in relation to her GV:

*Rose: “Because he said, “You know what we knew that son. I’ve known that because of what you used to be doing, there was something different about you, you know”*

This in turn may invite acceptance from the researcher and the audience. Using the words and adopting the voice of others can offer legitimacy to the claims that participants make about their lives (Bamberg, Da Fina & Schiffrin, 2011); so here Rose claimed acceptance legitimately by telling the audience the exact words that denote this. Similarly Jake’s account of sharing his status with his family involved his adopting the words he remembers his family responding with:

*Jake: ““No, we don’t think it’s true you need to think about this more, you need to have some counselling, you need to take the slow route to figure this out” Bla:::h Bla:::h Bla:::h”*

His telling of this story, in particular the inclusion “*Bla:::h Bla:::h Bla:::h*” may have been used to invite the audience to rubbish what his family responded with in the same way he does by inferring that their words are not worthy of narration.

Jake had already told about the years he spent considering and accepting his own experiences:

*Jake: “I spent too many hours and days and months aaand even years coming to terms with this with or without their approval, I’m done with it now, I’m fine with just being me”*

In going on to tell this story he was again letting the audience know that he had overcome the difficulties that GV presented him without the support of his family. This resonated with the idea of ‘Quest Narratives’ suggested by Frank (1995) and defined earlier. This is pertinent to some of the stories about sharing GVt status in this study; for example, Jake’s experience of sharing his status with his family and their initial non acceptance through to eventual acceptance, mirrors the notion of placing distress in the past and the moving towards acceptance in the present.

In terms of identity, the parts or ideas that a person holds about themselves that cannot be shared with others are of interest. For example, if the idea stands that a person’s sense of who they are *is* the stories they tell others about themselves, what are the implications for those stories that are untold? Why is it important that some GVt individuals do not share their experiences with family or friends? Aside from one of the individual narratives, the shared narrative across participants around disclosing their status was a significant event that contained much thought. Perhaps this thought enables participants an opportunity to share the impact that GV has on their lives; a chance to let others know that there are implications outside of private experiences that take place. Two of the participants stated they did not tell their families about their GVt identities and one further participant (Charlie) did not mention whether they had either way. Robin’s account contained concern and the need to protect themselves from telling family about their GV:

Robin: *"I'm not very good at coming out about anything" because "(...)they've got hostile in terms of transgender issues, if it comes up on TV or something or in a newspaper they can be very well, well I say they, it's actually just one person, but I don't want to say just in case [Nic: Yea ok] They, yea:::, they can get very hostile to things that, it's almost as though they perceive them as a threat still, which I don't really understand".*

Robin's story lets the reader know that they believe their family do not understand them (their strongest narrative within their individual account) and that in sharing their experiences with their family there could be a hostile reaction. The way Robin told this was important as they referred to an occasion where this had actually happened; their family had been hostile about another Gvt person. The use of real life examples draws the audience in by adding conviction to what the narrator says. Aside from the interviewer and the reader, perhaps there was an additional audience that Robin's story was told to; their family. Ghostly audiences is an idea proposed by Minister (1991) to take account of audiences that are not the recipients of the narrative but may be the true recipients for the story. As it was not possible to tell their family in real life, perhaps the on-going identity work of Robin to be understood as more than their gender by them may be being represented during the interview. Further, choosing not to narrate specifically on their Gvt experiences may also serve to protect them from the predicted hostile response of others; perhaps the researcher and audience are included in this.

Similarly Ajax shared that they had not disclosed their Gvt identity with their family: *"to be honest I've never really told them"*. In narrating this, Ajax explained their reasons:

*"I-::: sometimes, I wanted to tell them so much, but I was so worried that it would destroy them"*.

This was situated in the past for Ajax with no suggestion that they still had a desire to share this with their family. It was likely that this tells the reader something about their position to GV - one that they have come to find internally comfortable and

acceptable - and importantly notes the progression of their experience over time. In these stories families were cast as characters that could be seen as both not accepting of the narrator but also vulnerable to being “destroyed” by GV. This use of emotive and strong language demonstrated the power that GV was given within the stories and highlighted a significant difference from their peers who do not face either “destroying” their families or seeking acceptance based on their preferred gender identity.

Alix is one of only two parents who participated in the study; this was an important context to hold in mind when attempting to make sense of Alix’s identity. It is worth noting that there is a considerable absence in research into GVt people’s experience of parenting. In the current research, Alix’s sharing of her GVt experiences seemed to be narrated in a way that fitted within both ideas that emerged. Alix tells of similar experiences to Robin and Ajax in never sharing their GV with parents. However, they express the necessity of sharing it with their children. Alix expressed their reservations of telling their children when highlighting that other people advised them not to:

*“I think there were attitudes towards them really and whether that was a good thing for them?(...)-I was asked”.*

This is an interesting style of narration, and out of sync with the majority of Alix’s account, wherein they spoke exclusively from a first person perspective and made very few references to other people. Narrating in this way created a distance between Alix and the content of what was said placing uncertainty or potential discord in the voice of ‘the other’. This was in keeping with Alix’s constructed identity of being relaxed and calm, and at times narrating in more of a sterile than animated way about their experiences. Sterile narration refers to storytelling where there is minimal change in tone, pace and intonation. (Kleres, 2011). Interestingly, the researcher’s tone throughout the conversations with Alix mirrored their quiet tone (certainly quieter and with less intonation than in the other interviews);

perhaps this impacted on the construction of Alix's identity and, furthermore, on the stories narrated in achieving it. Alix's lack of stories over time, and their constant questioning of such unhelpful gender stereotyping and presentation of their current GV as "who I am" actually offers a counter narrative to the narrative of 'How I got here'. This counter narrative offers resistance to the dominant idea of journeying through difficult times and also resists the pathologising cultural narratives around GV. Similarly, Charlie resisted this via the lack of narration around their earlier life experiences (as discussion in section 3.4.1).

Raphael's richly narrated story of telling his parents about his GVt identity formed a major part of his account and was told as an important event in the sequence of events of his journey. Raphael narrated:

*"Umm(...)I was really really worried about telling them and umm and umm, I sat them down and I talked to them about ho:::w(...).I just, I always felt like I walked the line of gender and I couldn't do that to myself anymore because it felt just like a do or die situation".*

The use of "umm"s and lack of fluidity are indicative of the difficulty in narrating this part of the story. The story of telling his parents was the longest piece of his narration and was characterised by pauses and disjointed sentences and Raphael's tearfulness seemed to indicate the emotional salience of it. It felt as though this fell outside of Raphael's strong narrative of now being:

*"I'm at that point now where I'm not um struggling with myself, I'm not struggling with my identity, I'm not struggling with my life".*

It is interesting to consider whether Raphael's account drew on cultural narratives about how long a person is 'allowed' to legitimately struggle before they need to 'move on' and find resolution. Further to this, the dominance of Raphael's narrative of now being ok, may have been upheld in order to legitimise to the audience his hopes for the future to support young GVt with their experiences. How would an audience feel about a person in a supportive role not having found a 'resolution' to their own difficulties?

### **3.5 PLOT 2: IT'S NOT ALWAYS STRAIGHTFORWARD BEING ME**

The collective narrative of 'It's not always straightforward being me' seemed to focus on stories situated in the present; telling of the on-going nature of the participants' experiences. Examples are narrated by Raphael, Jake and Charlie who told stories of an exchange of experiences, from being seen socially in the past as butch women to now being seen socially as effeminate men. This element of the narration highlighted the idea that managing their own gender in the social world continues on, despite theirs and other's attempts to resolve it. The stories told may also speak of the resistance these narrators have to the dominant discourse that decision-making around medical transition, whether taken or not, marks a movement towards the end of the journey. The narrators here suggested not, and perhaps this is an important finding that needs to be voiced.

The collective storyline 'It's not always straightforward being me' comprised of the challenges of being a Gvt person. Narrators faced a dilemma in narrating problems that may still be present or on-going in their lives as there was a tension between needing to narrate important aspects of their lives and risk being seen as not coping; which may be further stigmatising (Riessman, 2008). These storylines were complex and told within the context of all narrators' claims of being content with their current gender identity expressions yet also include the ongoing nature of their experiences. The storyline oscillated between ideas of being the same as *and* different to their gender typical peers. Claims of sameness were made through stories of the importance of friends and friendship groups, the desire for intimate relationships and meaningful employment.

Many of the stories were told relative to everyday experiences or interactions and perhaps these offer a contrast to the seemingly more significant life events that were told within the 'How I got here' storyline. Also contained within this storyline was the role of others and how relationships and interactions with other people seemed

part of what 'is not straight forward' for the participants. Two distinct sets of characters featured in these stories - strangers and intimate partners. Interestingly, family members did not feature as heavily within this storyline. Perhaps this is relative to the age of the participants and the fact that in line with the expectations of the social world, people have begun to separate from their birth families and seek connections elsewhere via partners and intimate relationships (Hines, 2007).

### 3.5.1 Being the same AND being different

All participants were asked at the start of the interview to talk about their gender identity in the context of signing up to be interviewed about GV. Naturally then, this already places each participant's response in the context of their gender identity being significant or different in some way. It is important to bear this in mind when attempting to make sense of the stories which related both to claims of being the *same as* and *different to* gender typical peers; it offers an important context and one that was imposed by the research itself.

Across the collective narrative there seemed to be a 'to-ing' and 'fro-ing' between stories of being "*just like everyone else*" (Robin), that is, a claim of sameness and "*having to think about e:::very little thing*" (Jake), a hint of difference. This was the case both between and within the individual accounts and was stated explicitly by Alix:

*"Yeah that's probably a bit of a clash because in some ways I don't like standing out. Bu:t in other ways I don't want to be something I'm not. So it's a bit of a contradiction really".*

This may typify an important feature of the narratives of GVt experiences; the constant evaluation of sameness and difference to non-GVt peers. The way that almost all of the narrators storied this experience invites the audience to go to and fro with the narration perhaps giving them a sense of the sameness and difference claims that were made.

Ajax talked about difference from their peers in the context of meeting partners, and in particular that this was a different process for them than for their gender typical peers:

*“So I cannot go out, kind of drink, kind of coffee shop, you know, kind of look at the lady and think “Oh she looks nice. She’s reading Fifty shades of Grey I’ll go give her my phone number”, I mean, you know ((laughs)) [Nic: ((laughs))]*”

This was countered, however, by lots of references to gender and GV being unimportant in their life: *“I don’t really think about it a lot, to be honest it’s not the most important thing-place is the most important thing”* (Ajax). In terms of identity work, the latter could be seen as Ajax’s performance of a preferred identity not to be positioned only in relation to their GVt experiences; an issue discussed eloquently by Gange and Tewkesbury (1998). Similarly to Ajax, there was lots of talk of sameness within Robin’s account, largely reflected in the relatively small amount of talk about GV and preferred gender identity. Being seen as similar to their gender typical peers was executed by reminding the audience of their own wholeness as Robin says:

*“You don’t have to think about gender all the time, I mean even if it, even if you do break away from the binary, it’s not a big issue and it doesn’t have to be [Nic: Yea] If you concentrate on the fact that before gender you were a person with interests and thoughts and stuff and that’s the important bit(..)and relationships”.*

In doing so, Robin could have been resisting the positioning of their gender by both the researcher and the societal idea that being male or female is a highly significant factor in one’s identity. This talk could also have been a performance to their family, whom they describe as being *“obsessed with reminding me that I am my birth gender”*. During Robin’s narration there was a sense that they may have been inviting the interviewer and audience to position them outside of the gender lens in the way that they describe wanting their family to do.

*Being* the same as non GVt peers included stories of *wanting* the same as them. This sameness is expressed in key aspects of their lives and which were often seen as

major life events such as buying a house, having children, getting a job. Jake narrated:

*“I want you know, a house, kids, family, all the sort of traditional old fashioned kinda things. Umm(...)and to, to sort of being in a place where I felt that I can do that, I can bring up my kids in a happy sort of way...”.*

Through this Jake claimed an identity of similarity and difference with peers, one which was likely to have been constructed throughout his past experiences of making sense of and understanding that his GV was different to many other people, but experiencing this within his need to get the same out of life as many of his non GVt peers. This notion is highlighted by Taconnelli (2008) in their recognition of the importance of person centred care with GVt clients to highlight their desire for futures similar to that of their gender typical peers.

Charlie’s strongest narrative was built around being different from other people, and enjoying this role. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that within their account the presence of stories of being different were told with confidence and pride. They articulated this in rich detail with humour and with a steady, but engaging, tone and pace. Charlie narrated that they were one of two *“poster children for the fact that you didn’t have to transition the way that everyone said(..)part of the original screwy gender queers”*. This claim of radical difference was made, not only in relation to gender typical peers, but also other GVt people. This identity claim gained support by another story of a position that confirms this identity claim:

*“I was the first person here who held the position that I held within the XX {name of organisation removed by researcher for anonymity} to not be like a binary transsexual”.*

As difference appeared to be an organising factor of Charlie’s strongest narrative, stories of sameness were less obvious within their account. However, stories of sameness were present, though interestingly were narrated more quietly and less humorously than the rest of their account. The performance of the telling and relative absence of stories of sameness joined forces and were convincing of

Charlie's identity claims. On the two occasions where sameness to non GVt peers was claimed they pause to reflect before answering:

*"Hmm that's a good question (4.5). The th-, the things, umm, that is ha::rder to pin down I guess. I am....like friendshi-- and relationsh—but particularly like having groups of people who you share like time and things..."*

It seemed that sharing ideas about wanting or being the same as others is less in line with Charlie's expressed preferred identity, and perhaps in too stark a contrast to being a "poster child" for gender queerness. The change in tone and voice was also important along with the pauses that may indicate Charlie's narrating of unfamiliar material or material outside of their preferred identity (Bamberg, 2004). The inclusion of hints of sameness may also have contradicted Charlie's spoken desire to "do good work" by not doing as others expect, challenging assumptions and making people question their gender assumptions in general. Perhaps this identity was at play during the co construction of the interview when Charlie told of having just been to the barber shop alongside painting their nails with coloured glitter polish as we chatted.

An exception to the contrast of being both the same and different to gender typical peers was found within Rose's account. Here there were minimal stories that alluded to a felt sense of being different in the present day. This was in direct contrast to Rose's account of her earlier life where she told of feeling very aware of her GV being different to other people, reflected in her concerns about sharing with her family. The absence of stories about challenges in the present day seemed to fall in line with Rose's preferred identity of being accepting and happy about her GV. Rose's preferred identity is also spoken through her words where she stated: *"If anything, my gender identity has enhanced my life, I have got a good balance of everything"*. Whilst this may have served to remind the audience of Rose's preferred position it may also suggest that Rose was resisting the master narrative of GV being a difficult and lonely experience.

### 3.5.2 Day to day

All participants' told small stories about their day to day lives; perhaps this helped the narrator to explain and describe the day to day realities of their life. These stories, although undoubtedly serving different purposes in different accounts, collectively seemed to inform the audience that their experiences were not only relative to the well documented Gvt experiences (e.g. transitioning, medical intervention, disclosing to others) but also to their daily lives, whatever this entailed. Again, this left the researcher with this sense that a part of these Gvt experiences was always present; perhaps, although there was a claim that they had found an acceptable gender expression, navigating their day to day lives still brought about challenges not faced by their gender typical peers. An example of this was told by Jake when he described his struggle with clothing; *"It's annoying when it's hot to have to wear a binder"* and *"It's annoying to have to choose what clothes to wear so that people don't see my binder"*<sup>5</sup>. The repetition of the word 'annoying' to describe these experiences ensured Jake's current experience of day to day challenges was heard. Ajax's account contained a similar experience within their day to day (swimming) that they are unable to do:

*"I love to swim, but I cannot go(...)I do not feel I can go into leisure centres for example and you know, communal changing rooms. You know, the last time I went to a leisure centre was seven or eight years ago and kind of(...)I just felt so uncomfortable"*

Similarly when narrating about day to day challenges that GV continues to pose, Ajax said:

*"I made the mistake of coming down to the restaurant wearing a t-shirt so the waiter kept calling me Miss whatever. And you know, these were kind of senior bankers that, you know, had viewed me as male [Nic: Yes] And so that was the most embarrassing evening of my life"*

Clothing is also referred to in the context of everyday challenges by Robin who narrated:

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<sup>5</sup> A binder is an item that is worn to flatten breast tissue to create a non-female appearing chest.

*“Umm where we live now is different [Nic: Mmm] Umm there have been times where I felt like I need(..)I sh-, well not need, I should dress in a way that fits people’s expectations of my birth gender [Nic: Ok] That’s a mouthful! (laughs) [Nic: (laughs)] Umm and it’s felt dangerous and then at the same time it’s felt like even if I did that, it wouldn’t look right because it wouldn’t be right with me”*

All these examples use emotive language to highlight the struggle: ‘most embarrassing’ and ‘so uncomfortable’ (Ajax), ‘dangerous’ (Robin). Further, Raphael shared a story about a friend in his city who was attacked due to their Gvt status: “... found out she was trans and beat the crap out of her”. The telling of this story seemed to enable Raphael to spell out the on-going challenges of being Gvt in his day to day life but through telling the story of what a fellow Gvt person experienced only days before the interview. In using the story of another person, Raphael placed himself outside of the experience but still as a possible victim of this kind of response from others. This could also be understood within Raphael’s identity construction as a person who had overcome the challenges of being Gvt, and resists the possibility that they themselves may still have struggles. Perhaps this was also relative to Raphael’s earlier claim that their experience of now living in their preferred gender role was “One hundred percent positive”. The contradiction here represents the potential difficulties that exist and that may be an untold story; one that could not be explicitly narrated within the context of the interview.

#### 3.5.4 The people I meet

Across the accounts the social nature of human beings is narrated; stories about relating to and interacting with other people were heavily present. Whilst the importance of relationships for emotional well-being is widely acknowledged, social interactions can also cause stress and anxiety. This is particularly so if one fears the response and reaction of others to one’s experience or expression of it. As Jake described, this can be the case for Gvt people, who face hostile or un-accepting

responses from others- in reality the dilemma is that each person exists within a matrix of social relationships rather than in isolation:

*“Yea yea, I think it was just that because to me if I’d just have been like isolated on a little island I could have just gone, yea I’m a guy, ta-daa let’s get on with life...”*

As with most people, other people frequently featured in narratives about lives. Perhaps though, what is more interesting here is the way that the Gvt participants positioned themselves *in relation* to other people, and with this, what this may say about *the role* of relationships. Aside from family members, (who were discussed in section 3.4.4), the other main characters featuring across the narratives were intimate partners and strangers. The term stranger is used to refer to the other characters that are not well known to the narrators but are included within the stories that were told. The way that other people responded may play a pivotal role in how Gvt people integrated their experiences with the ongoing construction of their sense of self (Ryan, 2010). As discussed in section 1.4.3, this reflects the importance of mirroring and witnessing in line with the findings of Devor (2004). The inclusion of other people in the accounts and in particular how ‘others’ are positioned and cast in relation to the narrators will now be discussed.

The collective narrative of interactions with strangers demonstrated the way in which Gvt expressions or behaviours are highlighted or pointed out by strangers positioned them as *governors* of the ‘gender rules’. The research demonstrated this below in a number of stories:

*Jake: “(..)coming out of a bar [Nic: Mmm] and there was a guy who, we were both sort of, we were both dressed quite similarly and I was dressed a little bit campy and Jess {changed by researcher for anonymity} was sort of dressed a bit androgynously and some guy just went “are you two guys or two girls” [Nic: Yea] and it made me really cross and so I sort of went up to him and I went “Can you not tell?””*

Ajax: *"They're not trying to be unkind, most of the time, they just aren't sure whether to Sir or Madam me, and then I see them giggling. It's awkward for them and it's embarrassing for me. Genuinely"*

Robin: *" They see me as female and gay [Nic: Mmm] and people react to that, people react to that very differently so when I do try to explain a bit more who I am they get confused (laughs) [Nic: Ok] And they want to go back to what they were expecting"*

Identities are evolving, dynamic and constantly constructed in relationship with others (Bruner, 2004). Therefore, the importance of the relationships and interactions that people have with other people within their social context is an important one as it impacts on the evolving and dynamic identity constructions that take place. In terms of the identity work that took place within the co-constructed accounts, the use of stories of interactions with others added legitimacy to the participants' experiences (Bamberg, DeFina & Schriffin, 2011). Perhaps in demonstrating the way their experiences were sometimes viewed by others through recounting conversations or interactions the individuals were offering a preferred identity of placing GVt struggles into 'the other', rather than placing it within themselves. This also enabled the creation of a preferred identity of being at ease with one's own experiences, despite the difficulty or confusion that others have with them. The containment and positioning of strangers as characters seemed to represent the social rules about gender and this may fall in line with dominant narratives suggesting GVt people experience isolation and loneliness as other people are unwilling to accept and legitimise their preferred gender expression. The language used within these stories (e.g. *"it made me really cross"* (Jake), *"fear"* (Ajax), *"awkward for them and it's embarrassing"* (Ajax) invited the audience to notice an emotional undercurrent that was not spoken explicitly. Perhaps for example, in Jake's story, the setting up of characters that act unfairly to him in the story encouraged the audience to also feel Jake's anger; this then was a persuasive way of engaging the audience to connect with Jake's story (Kleres, 2011).

Linked to the idea of the role of the 'other' in relation to the development and maintenance of an acceptable gender presentation, Jake articulated a thought provoking insight:

*“When you have a straightforward gender presentation its ok, but when you don't you need the rest of the world to tell you that you are what you feel you are. But often they don't-they say “Oh I respect you” but that is different from someone looking back at you and saying yes you are a man.”*

This was an interesting reflection and, in terms of its implications for clinical practice, one that the researcher was particularly interested in; especially given the content of the previous discussion. It could be understood in terms of Devor's (2004) notion on 'witnessing' which notes the importance of the preferred gender identity being fed back as the identity that is seen by others. This in turn could have important links for the stories that are told about an individual, for example person X feels like a man (which I respect) vs. person X is a man. This has implications for identity coherence and will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4 within the implications for clinical practice.

Along with the strangers that are cast within the storyline, intimate partners also featured heavily in the collective narratives. The role of significant partners was cast differently to that of strangers; where participants face the on-going challenge of explaining, describing and justifying *who* they are. The role of partners was almost polar opposite; they were cast as characters that offer unconditional acceptance and an almost indescribable sense of understanding of the GVt person (e.g. Robin: *“They ju::st get me. Totally”*). It is well documented that acceptance by others can enable the GV person to accept their own experiences (Ryan, 2010).

Further exploring the concept of acceptance, the identity work that took place regarding acceptance within intimate relationships in the telling of these stories was considered. The inclusion of these stories within the accounts may have contributed to preferred narratives of being accepting of their situation and allowing the researcher to also know that others accepted them unconditionally. This may also

have served the notion of being seen as similar to their peers and in line with the Western notion which emphasises the importance of being in a relationship. The inclusion of these stories offered a counter to the dominant narratives of isolation and loneliness that is often portrayed in the media (Nagoshi and Brzuzi, 2010). For example, Robin stated:

*“(..)I am getting better at it-now after something happens I can come home and say “partner, give me a hug” cos I know they get it, and they’re oka::y with me”.*

Similarly from Charlie:

*“All I have to say these days is, “Oh umm(..) I’m feeling really sparkly at the moment” and they know(..)they get it”.*

Charlie’s use of almost coded language with their partner again implies a special connection or understanding that is different to that seen in other relationships. All of the other participants (Jake, Ajax, Alix and Rose) referred to the important role intimate partners’ played with unconditional acceptance; the only exception to this was the absence of this in Raphael’s account. Acceptance from others was storied as a factor that enabled the Gvt person within this study to begin to accept their own experiences. It was no surprise then that intimate partners seemed to be cast as the ‘good characters’ and narrated in terms of their value. This was also important to consider in relation to family members (discussed more in section 3.4.4 in the disclosing of Gvt status to family members). Here, family members were cast in less consistent ways (as can be seen in more variation across the individual accounts).

## CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSIONS

### 4.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

It may be helpful at this juncture to revisit the aims of the study before offering a summary of the main findings. This is intended to orientate the reader back to what the study hoped to offer a credible answer to. Three main questions were outlined as a definition of what the research was asking and the following summary will be organised relative to these questions.

#### 4.1.1 How do gender variant individuals story their lives?

The study found that most participants narrated their lives with richness and depth. Most participants created a narrative of their changing experiences over time and for some (but not all) a position of having overcome many problems, which now lie in the past. However, at the same time, all participants talked of ongoing challenges of living with GV. The study found that individuals narrated about their GVt experiences in addition to other meaningful parts of their lives and identities. This meaning making allowed most of the participants to create identities that were in line with their peers, and move away from a sense of 'difference' they previously experienced. The sense of 'difference' was coupled with a sense of 'sameness' with peers. It is important to note however that one participant in particular articulated their enjoyment of their sense of difference and a commitment to not move towards a sense of sameness in the same way the other participants narrated. The role of relationships with others featured heavily, suggesting that the participants construct who they are and how they want to be known through the relationships they have with other people (Bruner, 2004). This relational context spanned families, friends, peers, colleagues, healthcare professionals and even strangers.

#### 4.1.2 How do gender variant individuals construct the changing nature of their experiences over time?

The study found that all, but one, participants offered stories about the GV across their lifespan, including the importance of their earliest experiences of noticing their GV. Whilst the age varied between participants, all stories were told in the context of questioning what this means about their sense of who they are, and is positioned as the beginning of a sense making process related specifically to their identity. Collectively, the accounts situated distressing GV experiences in the past and a more congruent place within their present; as one participant described “*Now it just kinda works for me*”. Further to this, the study found that participants generally spoke about an ongoing relationship with gender and the possibility that further changes or experiences may be part of their futures. This seemed to typify the notion that the GVt journey was an on-going one.

#### 4.1.3 How do the stories that gender variant individuals tell about their lives reflect or resist the dominant social and medical narratives?

The study was heavily influenced by the importance of local and dominant narratives of gender and GV and was interested in the role this played in the narratives that participants co-constructed. The study found that individual and collective narratives inter-weaved reflecting *and* resisting from the dominant social and medical narratives about GV. Through the performance of their narratives, the participants adopted a position from which there was a tendency to make clear their differences from the societal discourse of a “typical transgender” experience. This was achieved by locating specific experiences that counter existing narratives; such as not recognising experiences until late teenage years, not wanting to be the opposite gender and, and on some occasions, suggesting that GV had no negative consequences for their lives. Indeed, in relation to their GV, while participants acknowledged previous feelings of anxiety, worry, and confusion, most told fewer stories relating to how their GV impacts on their lives in the present. Stories of ongoing negative impact seemed to be played down, and even supported by claims that they do not really think about it. This was in contrast to the day to day stories

that people told which set out an ongoing emotional experience related to GV. There seemed to be an unspoken and unacknowledged emotional undercurrent within which struggle and difference were seen. Thus, there was an on-going dilemma for GVt individuals in wanting to be seen as having “overcome their struggles” and being seen as coping but also a need to tell of their on-going difficulties. One wonders what impact this had on current psychological well-being, and whether it was this process that maintained the on-going journey that participants talked about. There was a desire for an end-point yet in reality there was an on-going nature to this journey.

## **4.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR CLINICAL PRACTICE**

The current research was undertaken in order to explore and make sense of GVt experiences highlighting implications and recommendations for service provision for GVt people. By virtue of carrying out the research the researcher intends to highlight to clinicians providing mental health care the experience of GVt people in the social world, including the challenges they face. Putting aside the debate of whether GV is a legitimate psychiatric condition, it is hoped that putting this group of people on the radar of clinicians will contribute to informed and thoughtful care.

### **4.2.1 Providing Individualised Choice**

The importance of providing choice for GVt people is an essential part of service provision. The variety of ways participants speak about their decision-making process (around what to do with their experiences) echoes Lev’s (2004) standing that GV is vast and the experience of one person does not represent the experience of another, even if they look the same on paper. Clinicians must be aware that it may be the first time that individuals are able to think in depth about their choices when initially accessing services (either specialist gender identity services or local mental health teams). This re-affirms the importance of clinicians working with GVt people to engage with the uncertainty and emotional dissonance this group of people may face about whether they do or do not want to undertake physical transition to their

preferred gender. It is only when truly engaging in the possibility that gender can be acceptable and meaningful outside of the traditional male or female binary that Gvt people can think through *all* of the possibilities available to them. With an informed and engaged clinician, they may begin to bring into awareness all of the experiences they may face, from acceptance of GV, to dilemmas inherent in the decision making process, to day to day experiences of living with GV in relational contexts (within intimate relationships and within relational contexts with strangers).

A notion articulated by one of the research participants is the challenge of living in a world, where at best, only *some* people offer acceptance of a Gvt identity. What is more rarely encountered is other members of that social world offering an acknowledgement that they *are* their preferred gender. This notion is covered in chapter one and is documented as being an important part of the Gvt experience. It would be interesting to consider how this translates to service provision, and the need for individual clinicians to enable Gvt people to know that they will be treated in the identity that they prefer. This may mean that clinicians are able to accept and validate preferred gender identities that sit outside of the binary. This may also include the need to accept fluidity of gender and the possibility of additional gender presentations that they have not encountered before. Perhaps partnerships with community based organisations that have already begun to work in this way can be established and inform the work in clinical settings via ideas sharing and specific Gvt training.

Therefore, from the outset, engagement with Gvt people should include the idea that gender can sit outside of the Western binary, and clinicians must be prepared to think with Gvt people about their gender, their wider contexts and how these two experiences interact. As the participants in the current study seem to desire, offering a holistic perspective may also enable Gvt people, to be seen as more than their gender presentation; having the same needs, ideas, hopes and preferences as their gender typical peers. Therefore, the ability of clinicians and services to offer

holistic formulations of distress, an awareness of wider contexts and experiences and highlighting the interaction of GV on other aspects of a person's day to day life is imperative. Providing a place where validation is given to any struggle, yet with a focus on how positively their lives have transformed with acceptance of their GV within themselves and by others, may enable GVt individuals to negotiate the stranger relational contexts (where day to day distress seems to be situated), more easily.

#### 4.2.2 Provisions for Systems

Continuing the idea of the importance of connecting and staying connected to significant others, the importance of considering the systems that a person is part of is crucial. This study highlights the role that the narratives of families, peers, and society all play in participants' co-constructions of what it is to be a person who identifies as GVt. Whilst all participants are adults and services often work with individuals rather than families, perhaps it would be helpful for services to increase and actively engage families of GVt people in both understanding and making sense of GV and supporting relationships to continue with openness (where appropriate). A role for services could be to facilitate conversations between individuals and their families, and further to this offer support and a place to think through any potential stress or difficulty that is faced. This could go a long way in preserving important relationships and, consequently, the emotional wellbeing of individuals and their families (Eracleous & Davidson, 2009; Ryan, 2010).

The participants within the current study were all over the age of 18 years and, therefore, contact with services would fall in the adult health care domain. Nevertheless, the systemic approach to gender related distress offered by the Gender Identity Disorder in Children Clinics could helpfully inform similar practice in adult services and with this for inter professional learning to occur. Perhaps a systemic approach involving direct work with the families or social networks that GVt

people are part of could also help to remove the emphasis away from the individual who identifies as Gvt, offering a less pathologising approach to the experience.

#### 4.2.3 Utilising a Community Model and Social Responsibility

The epistemological position of the research is one that is aligned with the notion that identity is a dynamic process that is constructed, maintained and changes through the stories that individuals tell about themselves within their relationships. This can include families, friends, peers and colleagues. This is supported by the significant role that relationships with others seem to play in the lives of the participants within this study. Perhaps this is no surprise; we are social beings after all. The implication of this may be for Clinical Psychologists and other healthcare professionals to work more widely and broadly than the individual or even family level. It may also invite Clinical Psychologists to work with organisations within the community feeding ideas into these services as well as learning from the innovative ways GV is understood in these contexts. This study identified that many of the participants expressed their desire to help other Gvt people, and in fact already were helping. It would be of importance to consider the ways to combine this help via community models which mobilise marginalised or under privileged communities (Taccoonelli, Shaw & Sachikonye, 2010). Perhaps such models could be utilised within Gvt communities. As identified within this study, an emphasis on Gvt individuals' own strengths and resources may also help to showcase the successful and rich lives lived by members of this community and, in turn, offer an antidote to the dominant narratives of pathology allowing Gvt individuals to narrate their preferred identities with greater freedom than the traditional binary concept of gender.

In moving away from the binary notion of gender, the invitation from the current research is for both clinicians and non clinicians alike to have conversations and share stories (as in the current research) about Gvt experiences that challenge

traditional concepts. The momentum of such conversations can enable a broader perspective on gender to be heard and, over time, accepted and valued.

#### 4.2.4 Service User and Carer Collaboration

Further, in developing and promoting the strengths and resources that exist within Gvt people and the Gvt community is the importance of publicising this knowledge and utilising it in the provision of healthcare services. This is supported by the DOH's (2008) 'New Standards of Care for people with Gender Dysphoria', who state that substantial service user and carer involvement is crucial in service provision planning. Whilst this is not the arena for an in depth discussion into the service user and carer involvement domain, services would need to ensure that collaboration with users and carers is meaningful and appropriately funded; as outlined in Berry, Gerry, Hayward and Chandler's (2010) position paper on the relationship between mental health practice and social exclusion.

### **4.3 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

An important aspect of research is the transparency and reflection on the limitations that are encountered. Research is seldom flawless, and identifying limitations can help to contextualise the findings further, as well as offer an opportunity to contemplate future research that can address some of these limitations thus adding to the knowledge base.

#### 4.3.1 Strengths

A main strength of this study is that it explores the storied experiences of Gvt people in a way that has not been done before. This research aimed to hear the rich and idiosyncratic stories of Gvt people who are actively making choices to live outside of the gender binary and this is a group of people that are quite often missing in the existing literature. Although it is not possible to generalise the learning from this research (as this was never the intention) it is highly possible to learn from it. As

such the research contributes to the current understanding of GV by sensitising clinicians to some of the issues that might be relevant to their Gvt clients and, therefore, can be used to inform the service provision for this group of people. Furthermore, the narrative approach, with its focus upon the psychological and social factors in meaning making (Wells, 2011) allows for the storying of counter-narratives to the dominant discourses. This can facilitate movement away from unhelpful pathologisation, opening the scope of what can be viewed as 'normal' and acceptable human experience.

#### 4.3.2 Limitations

The role played by the researcher during the interview process is discussed in chapter two. Running alongside the idea that the researcher has an active role in the construction of the narratives is the skill of the researcher at conducting research and interviewing participants. The researcher's background is largely based in clinical work within mental health settings. Mishler (1986) notes that clinicians face challenges when taking on the role of researchers, particularly when interviewing others; the skills required for interviewing do differ in some ways from that of clinical work. The researcher is aware that at times during some interviews it was challenging to remain in line with the role of researcher and not apply some attributes more commonly used in clinical practice, for example to offer validation of the client's experiences. Careful supervision of the analysis was undertaken as well as the researcher's commitment to engage with this possibility through reflexivity and reflection with peers and supervisors.

The current research entailed a single interview with individual participants. It is acknowledged that there are implications with this element of the design. Single interviews are likely to produce less depth than multiple interviews that take place over a period of time. Having time to contemplate and reflect on one interview with a participant prior to a second interview can allow for areas of interest within the narrative to be further explored. The time in between interviews can also allow

individual participants time to think through their experiences and further enhance the sense making that takes place. There are also implications on conducting single interviews with participants, and a significant one is the relationship between researcher and participant. This relationship is likely to influence the account that a person gives of their experiences, with the possibility that less personal narratives are given in the context of less well established relationships between researcher and participant. This is likely to be of particular relevance to the participants within this research, owing to the shame that is often associated with their experiences. It is a good point at which to reflect on the challenges that individuals in the current project narrated in sharing their experiences with significant others and how this may also play out in the research context. Counter to this, though, is that it would be reasonable to anticipate that those that expressed their interest in taking part are those that have chosen to speak about their experiences.

A credible narrative researcher is always likely to ask themselves: Would this person have told this story if they had not been asked? This notion raises the implication of any structure that is imposed onto the interview by the researcher. The current project offered a transparent account of the structure that was imposed on this research, through the opening question that was asked to all participants as well as the topic areas that were included as possible prompts initially identified by the research base. Therefore, the structure of the interviews could have influenced the narratives gained and is likely to have encouraged some narratives and silenced others. Although attempts were made by the researcher to account for some of these within the interviews themselves through reflexivity, reflective journals and supervision, nevertheless, the questions asked of participants are likely to have influenced the narratives that were constructed.

#### **4.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The current research aimed to explore in detail the experience of a small number (seven) of participants. As such, the findings cannot be generalised more broadly

than to those people interviewed. However, it is possible to draw on the findings from the current study to inform useful research ideas for the future. Firstly, it is important to acknowledge that more research into the experience of GV from a narrative perspective would be valuable; to continue to learn from the blend of psychological and social perspectives that make up human experience. From a political perspective further research that gives voice to the experiences of this group of people, who have historically been marginalised and unheard, is necessary and important. This may add to the possibility of changing unhelpful discourses and add to a counter narrative where a greater variety of gender expressions can be more widely acknowledged and even celebrated.

In line with the population at large, relationships with other people were narrated as significant to all participants in the study. Families' responses are cited, as playing a role in the difficulties encountered in sharing GVt statuses in the early stages. The stories told in the current research emphasise an ongoing negotiation of identity that is relative to sameness and difference from gender typical and other GVt peers. Perhaps it is here that it is helpful to emphasise the possibility of finding ways to accept and value both the similarities and differences that each person contains, even when this falls outside of traditional expectations. An avenue for this to be achieved is through family relationships, as this is well documented to be a map for future relationship experiences (Ryan, 2010). Further research could usefully explore the experience of being a parent or family member of a person whose gender presentation is not typical. Understanding parental and care giver's sense making of GV can have important implications in how GVt people may go on to make sense of their own experiences, particularly in the early stages of awareness. The same could also be said for research into Clinical Psychologists understanding of, and experience of working with GVt clients. Relationships here may lay the foundations for accepting and valuing the sameness and difference that seemed so pertinent within the narratives in the current research. The value placed in the more accepting relationships with intimate partners contrasted with the negating impact that

contact with non-accepting strangers can induce. This indicates the value of developing relationships based on openness and acceptance (perhaps via systemic work) and promoting social constructionist awareness within the wider society. Such a strategy could mean that acceptance and well-being is achieved on multiple levels. This may further add knowledge to the support that can be tailored and offered to families and systems of Gvt people. Shared learning through the hearing of experiences of families whose experience of a Gvt member has been positive could help families that are facing more challenging experiences of adjusting to GV.

Furthermore, the current research contained interviews of two Gvt people who were parents and this is an area, as mentioned during chapter three that is significantly under researched. Future research could focus on how Gvt parents communicate their gender expressions to their children. This would be particularly pertinent to Gvt individuals that alter or change their preferred gender expression after the birth of their children (that is parents who's gender changes in some way during the lifetime of their children) as this it would seem, as suggested by the two parents in this research is a significant event for both parents and children to make sense of. Further to this being a significant event in the lives of both children of, and Gvt parents themselves, the narratives around parenting tend to be very gender oriented. The interface of gender based parenting narratives and the Gvt experience contains a richness and potential complexity that would benefit from future research.

#### **4.5 LEARNING FROM THE RESEARCH**

Carrying out this research has taught me endlessly about the value of research and specifically about the use of stories to understand how individuals make sense of the world and constantly construct who they are. Further, the use of stories as research data has taught me to listen out for the different voices that speak when a single person narrates an event in their life. Listening for multiple voices helps situate a

person and their experience in a much larger set of contexts that further help to make sense of experiences that sometimes feel nonsensical.

This research has reminded me of the importance of giving people space to speak and increased my confidence that people are able to narrate their experiences and story their lives. The participants in this research spoke with courage about their choices to find ways to live meaningful lives, even in a world where their choices may not be straightforward to live with. The research also left me with a feeling of hope that it is a worthwhile endeavour honouring stories from individuals and communities that tell of the increasing possibilities of living outside of taken for granted assumptions. This is something that I will take with me into my own future, as well as my clinical work and future research.

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## **APPENDICES**

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## *Appendix A: List of Literature Search Terms*

### **Stage One: Initial search**

An initial search of books and resources at the Learning Resource Centre at the University of Hertfordshire took place as well as searching the Google Scholar and Web of Science databases. The search terms used here were:

Transgender OR Gender Variance    AND    experience; identity; coping; transition

Gender Development                      AND    A-typical

### **Stage Two: Follow up**

The researcher followed up the key references from initial search, locating relevant papers and books and further references.

### **Stage Three: Detailed Literature Review**

Following the initial search and follow up on key references, the researcher conducted a comprehensive literature search over an 18 month period. Boolean operators and truncation options were used with the following search terms:

- Gender Variance – GV, Transgender, Gender Queer, Bi-gender, Transsexual, Female to Male, Male to Female, A-Typical Gender, Gender Identity Disorder, Gender Dysphoria
- Experience – lived experience, personal experience, journey, living with
- Adjustment – coping, change, psychological adjustment, psychosocial adjustment, psychological impact, psychological wellbeing, emotional wellbeing , resilience,
- Transition-surgery, hormones, real life experience, social transition
- Identity – self image, self concept, self esteem
- Narrative – narrative, account, story, life story, biography, biographical disruption
- Relationships – peers, parents, intimate relationships, health care professionals, friendships
- Qualitative Methodology – narrative analysis, narrative inquiry, social constructionism, interviews, qualitative methods, IPA, grounded theory, thematic analysis

The following search engines were used:

- Web of Science
- Google Scholar

- Psyc Info
- Pubmed

In order to access accurate factual information for other aspects of the research, the researcher searched the internet for resources from the following:

- NICE Guidelines
- Department of Health
- Gender Intelligence Research and Education Society
- World Professional Association for Transgender Health
- The Dulwich Centre
- The Centre for Narrative Research

Appendix B: Ethical Approval form

Psychology 3006

**SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL**

**Student Investigator:** Nic Horley

**Title of project:** Journeys to an Acceptable Gender Expression: An Exploration of Gender Variant Experiences

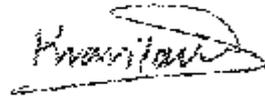
**Supervisor:** Dr Saskia Keville and Dr Fraimò Tacconelli

**Registration Protocol Number:** PSY06/12/NH

The approval for the above research project was granted on 20 June 2012 by the Psychology Ethics Committee under delegated authority from the Ethics Committee of the University of Hertfordshire.

The end date of your study is 30 June 2013.

Signed:



Date: 20 June 2012

Professor Lia Kvavilashvili  
Chair  
Psychology Ethics Committee

**STATEMENT OF THE SUPERVISOR:**

From my discussions with the above student, as far as I can ascertain, s/he has followed the ethics protocol approved for this project.

Signed (supervisor): .....

Date: .....

Registration Protocol Number:PSY/06/12/NH

## **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM**

**Study Title:** Journeys to an Acceptable Gender Expression: An Exploration of Gender Variant Experiences.

### **Who is carrying out the study?**

The study is being carried out by Nic Horley, Trainee Clinical Psychologist, as part of a Doctoral qualification in Clinical Psychology. The study is supervised by Dr Saskia Keville (Academic Tutor at Hertfordshire University and Chartered Clinical Psychologist) and Dr Erasmo Tacconelli (Chartered Clinical Psychologist).

The study received full ethical approval by the University of Hertfordshire ethics committee.

### **What is the study about?**

The study is interested in the experience individuals have of feeling that their biological sex is different in some way to their preferred gender identity. Research supports a link between gender variance and disruptions in identity and sense of self. The study is interested to hear the participants' journeys towards expressing their gender in a way that is acceptable to them, whatever that may be. The aim of the study is to hear within participants' stories what has helped and hindered them in expressing their gender in ways that are acceptable and comfortable to them. It is hoped that these stories will help to give voice to the ways in which the participants negotiate the incongruence between their biological sex and gender identity.

### **What is involved if I decide to take part?**

If you decide you would like to take part in the research, you will be interviewed once by the researcher. The interview is likely to last between an hour and an hour and a half, though sometimes it might be shorter than this. It will take place in your own home or at Hertfordshire University (travel expenses will be paid), depending where feels most comfortable for you. The interview will be audio recorded and afterwards it will be transcribed by the researcher.

During the interview you will be asked questions about your gender identity. If you would like to, you can have a look at the interview schedule which is a guide to the types of questions you will be asked. This might help you to decide whether or not you would like to take part.

Approximately 4 months after you have been interviewed, the researcher will contact you to share what they felt you had talked about in the interview and to ask whether you think that this makes sense.

### **Is what I say in the interview confidential?**

Yes, it is. If you agree to take part in the study your information will be stored in a safe locked location which will only be accessible by the researchers named above. The project may be published in a research paper and if your stories are used in the research your identity will be anonymised by changing your name and other details that would identify you.

The only time what you say cannot remain confidential is if during the interview I have serious concerns that you or someone is at risk of being seriously harmed. This is very unlikely, but should this occur I would be bound by a duty of care to inform others to ensure everybody's safety.

### **What happens if you change your mind about taking part?**

If at any stage before or during the interview you decide you no longer wish to continue, you are free to withdraw. You do not have to give a reason for your decision.

### **What happens next?**

If you decide after reading this information and asking any questions that you may have that you would like to take part in the study I will ask you to read and sign a consent form. After this, we will arrange a convenient time to meet for the interview to take place.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

### **Researcher contact details:**

**Name:** Nic Horley

**Email address:** n.horley@herts.ac.uk

**Telephone number:** 07791 571167

**Address:** Doctor of Clinical Psychology Training Course, University of Hertfordshire, College Lane, Hatfield, Herts, AL10 9AB.



University of  
Hertfordshire



Doctorate in Clinical Psychology  
University of Hertfordshire

Transcription confidentiality/ non-disclosure agreement

This non-disclosure agreement is in reference to the following parties:

**Nic Horley**

**And**

**Dictate 2 Us**

The recipient agrees to not divulge any information to a third party with regards to the transcription of audio recordings, as recorded by the discloser. The information shared will therefore remain confidential.

The recipient also agrees to destroy the transcripts as soon as they have been provided to the discloser.

The recipient agrees to return and or destroy any copies of the recordings they were able to access provided by the discloser.

**Signed:.....**

**Name: Jonathan Dalby-Dictate 2 Us**

**Date: 01/11/2012**

Registration Protocol Number: PSY/06/12/NH

## **SUPPORTIVE ORGANISATIONS INFORMATION SHEET**

Talking and thinking about your experiences may have left you feeling low or upset in some way, this is quite normal and often passes after a few days. However, if these feelings continue or feel overwhelming there are local sources of support and comfort which may already be familiar to you and you may want to access:

1. Please let me know if you feel distressed following taking part in this research. I am happy to think with you about the support that you might need. If you become distressed after leaving today you can contact me using these contact details:

**Nic Horley: E-mail:** [n.horley@herts.ac.uk](mailto:n.horley@herts.ac.uk)

**Address:** Nic Horley, Trainee Clinical Psychologist, Doctorate in Clinical Psychology, University of Hertfordshire, College Lane, Hatfield, Hertfordshire.

2. You can also contact your GP for support regarding gender. You can also speak to your GP if you would like to be put in contact with more specialist gender identity services.

3. You can also contact the following national organisations for support:

### **1. The Gender Trust**

National helpline on 0845 231 0505

[www.gendertrust.org.uk](http://www.gendertrust.org.uk)

The Gender Trust provides confidential care and the helpline offers help to anyone who has enquiries about gender identity issues.

### **2. The LGBT Excellence Centre**

Telephone: 0800 023 2201

[www.lgbtec.org.uk](http://www.lgbtec.org.uk)

The LGBT Excellence Centre is a registered charity that offers support services to any person struggling with issues related to their gender or sexual identity.

### **3. LGBT Switchboard**

Telephone: 0300 330 0630

[www.llgs.org.uk](http://www.llgs.org.uk)

The London LGBT switchboard offers free and confidential support and information to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people across the UK.

### **4. The Samaritans**

Telephone: 08457 909090

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

The Samaritans is a helpline which is open 24 hours a day for anyone in need. It is staffed by volunteers who are trained to listen to your concerns and worries.

*Appendix G: Demographic Information Form*

Registration Protocol Number: PSY/06/12/NH

**PROJECT TITLE: Journeys to an Acceptable Gender Expression: An Exploration of Gender Variant Experiences.**

**BASIC INFORMATION FORM**

<b>Participant Identifier:</b>	
<b>Interview No.:</b>	
<b>Gender Identity:</b>	
<b>Preferred Pronoun:</b>	
<b>Relationship status:</b>	
<b>Ethnicity:</b>	

## Interview Guide

### Gender:

- Can you tell me about how you experience your gender identity?
- Prompt for historical experience of gender and gender variance
- Prompt for current relationship with gender and degree of personal acceptability
- How has this changed over time
- What has changed over time

### Other parts of their life:

- What is important to you?
- Prompt for hobbies, values,
- Have any of these changed over time?

### Physical body:

- Can you tell me about your relationship with your physical body?
- Is this different to when you were younger?
- Has it changed over time?
- If so, how?
- Why do you think that might be?

### Help Seeking:

- How did you come to make decisions around seeking help in relation to GV?
- How did you decide about medical transition?
- Prompt for decision-making around hormones
- Prompt for decision-making around surgery
- What was that experience like?
- Did you discuss this with anyone?

### Relationships with others:

- How do those around you experience your gender identity?
- Prompt for close family
- Prompt for friends
- Prompt for partners
- Prompt for wider society

### Gender Expression:

- What has enabled you to express your gender in the way that you do?
- What has happened over time to make this possible?
- Has anything made it more difficult?

Future:

- What are your hopes for the future regarding your gender
- Do you expect anything to change with regards to your gender?
- Life generally, job, family, children,
- How do you imagine your future being?

Drawing to a close/Post interview:

- What was the interview like for you?
- Is there anything you want to ask?
- Is there anything you want to add?
- Was there anything you expected to be asked but wasn't?

Appendix J: List of Symbols used for Transcription

<i>Transcription symbols</i>	Example	Explanation
[square brackets]	<b>A:</b> and then [Nic: Hmm yea] I just left and went home	Represent overlapping speech that doesn't interrupt the speaker but is audible. This is often the researcher actively listening.
(2), (.)	<b>A:</b> I'm((.)) not sure (.) at all (3)	Numbers in brackets represent pauses in seconds.(.) represents a brief pause of 0.25 seconds, like a catch between words.
Hyph-	<b>A:</b> She wa- no she di- did it	A hyphen indicates a broken off utterance or a stutter.
: colon	<b>A:</b> it was so::: awkward!	One or more colons indicate an extension of the preceding sound.
<u>underline</u> , CAPITAL LETTERS	<b>A:</b> It was <u>crazy</u> , he was <u>AMAZING</u>	Underline indicate an emphasis on the word. Capital letters indicate words spoken louder than surrounding talk.
.?!,	<b>A:</b> What was it then?	Punctuation marks indicate intonation rather than grammar
“speech marks”	<b>A:</b> She just said “yeah”	Speech marks indicate the speaker imitating another person
((double brackets))	<b>A:</b> Hahaha! ((laughs))	A non-speech element such as laughter or a descriptor
{additional brackets}	<b>A:</b> When I worked at {name of company}	Additional brackets brackets indicate deliberately omitted text, for example names, for confidentiality purposes.

**First stage of the analysis: First reading of Ajax's transcript, re-reading of reflective journal and ideas about main stories**

Context and Reflective Journal notes:

- They had contacted me in the day to say they may need to cancel as work was so busy-so uncertainty about whether the interview would go ahead. When it did go ahead, I was aware of wondering if they needed to leave because of work commitments
- Interview was fourth of seven-felt more at ease going there and with confidence to ask questions
- There was a lot of laughter during the interview-this felt comfortable during the interview and it felt as though I was being entertained.
- Linked to the laughter-it felt difficult to ask about more difficult times-this didn't seem to fit with the tone of the interview
- Interview ended normally but A mentioned having things to do for work so this played a factor

Ideas about main stories:

- There has been a change over time-recalled first Gvt experiences in early childhood
- Refers to "angst" in the past and comfort in the future-a clear sense of change over time
- Difference between internal and external experiences. Internally feels comfortable with gender identity but externally it's "more difficult"-stories about awkward and difficult things happening
- The pressure to accept that things are difficult socially because of commitment to maintain blurred gender

- Lots of talk about other parts of identity-like politics and religion and travel-a sense that this is what A wants to be known as
- Talk of the future was around wanting financial freedom-retiring in the next few years-several references to financial success-pressure to prove successful?

**Second Stage of the Analysis: Reading for Content, Performance and Identity Construction in Relation to Local and Broader Narratives**

What's the story/idea/theme?

How is it performed and structured?

Reflections and notes on Co-construction and identity creation

Original Transcript	Content related ideas-emerging themes and plots	Performance and structure related ideas-who is narrating/possible audiences/language use	Co-construction ideas-the local and broader contexts including reflections from researcher
<p><b>Nic:</b> Great, okay umm. So, the first question is maybe a <b>broad-ish</b> question but I'm just going to ask you to tell me about your gender identity.</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> It is a very broad question. So, I identify as(..). <b>genderqueer</b>, and for me, that is someone who is primarily female bodied and a masculine identity. <b>So, I don't identify as male or female.</b> Some people view me, some people view me as female, some as male, some don't know. <b>That's fine. It-it- I'm very much in between and I don't want to be anything else so I don't want to, I don't want to transition from something to something else. I've never felt female or male. I have a masculine type of energy but I'm not male. In a similar way, I'm not female either, something that's</b></p>	<p>I am who am I in relation to others and how others see me. Introduced ahead of how introduced self.</p> <p>Acceptance of who I am? I am more than my gender identity</p> <p>Idea of change over time? Has there been a journey to get to a place where gender/GV is not really thought about a lot?</p>	<p>Starts in the present day-stays here for some time.-reflection of the present tense of the opening question?</p> <p>Repetition of the idea-I'm not male or female-repeated to make clear? Or because unusual and need to be hear and understood as felt sense. Back and forth, back and forth-but not oscillating between male and female, "blended" gender</p>	<p>Mirroring my language-how did my use of 'broad' impact on what they chose to share?</p> <p>Genderqueer-a new term to claim an identity</p> <p>Reference to the idea that everyone has to be either male <i>or</i> female</p>

<p><b>blended.</b> I guess, in the past, it would have been viewed as a third identity of some sort. <b>But being truthful, my gender identity is not something that I think about very often.</b> It's not something that, you know, you could've... <b>did many years ago and many years ago, it caused me a lot of angst. These days, it's not really on my agenda.</b></p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Okay. <b>So</b> how would you describe your relationship with your gender <b>as it's now,</b> now is for you?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> <b>It depends internal and external,</b> probably two different things. So internally, my relationship is good and I'm reasonably comfortable in my own body <b>[Nic: Mmm]</b> <b>or at least I don't feel any need for surgery. I don't want surgery. I'm kind of happy who I am.</b> I think many of us would like kind of - different physical attributes but effectively I'm fine and kind of, I-I- I'm comfortable with my gender identity as I see it. <b>So someone who can blend between both, it's kind of both and neither, that works for me.</b></p> <p>So internally, the gender identity works. <b>I tick that box.</b> Externally, it's more difficult. <b>[Nic: Okay]</b> And more difficult because simply for...primarily for practical reasons because some people will identify me as male, some</p>	<p>Ajax introducing the idea of surgery- happy so no need-is the implication that surgery would help if unhappy?</p> <p>Difficulties attributed to practical reasons-no emotional content here? Is it difficult when people are confused by you or don't know what you are? Is it difficult to say that in relation to being comfortable with gender identity?</p> <p>Acceptance of own experiences vs. how others respond to me?</p>	<p>Who would say they're not being truthful? Dominant ideas about impact of Gvt experiences? Must it be a big deal?</p> <p>Ajax refers to past-introducing the first sense of journey. So starts in the present and then refers to the past to highlight how things have changed over time</p> <p>Again-back and forth between two ideas-internal vs. external as separate and distinct</p> <p>"I tick that box"-interesting language choice-is feeling ok internally a marker of something?</p>	<p>Establishing gender identity now to then understanding what and how it has changed over time</p>
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<p>as female, some just won't know, and some will get confused. So it becomes...it's more...so my relationship with gender identity internally is good. Externally, it's more problematic.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Okay. So thinking about what you just said, how it's changed. There was a time when it caused you a lot of angst. How would you describe how it's changed over time then? What was it like? What was your relationship with gender like?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Umm, I-I guess that I...at times, I probably...at times, many years ago, I did feel very disconnected. I-I-I felt in the kind of wrong gender presentation. Umm, I lacked knowledge of wh-wh-wh-what the options were and I also got...I also got frustrated when I looked at the options. And the options were of no use to me. It was kind you know, you transition or nothing. And I didn't want to transition through anything. I just kinda want to be me. I don't want surgery. I don't want, you know I don't want to necessarily to change status. I'm just happy who I am [Nic: Mmm], living my life. But for many years, I probably didn't see I can do that. And I'm quite religious. So my religious views sometimes have caused some conflict with my gender</p>	<p>Unsure of the options of what to do about feeling 'disconnected'-part of the process is to figure out what to do with experiences? Alone? Who else was around who had the same experiences?</p> <p>Interface of different aspects of identity-refers to religion-what are the narratives there that influence experience of GV? Heteronormativity-divergence as "sin". Finding a way to be GVt and maintain religious beliefs</p>	<p>"I-I-I-I" and "Wh-wh-wh-"difficult to get the words out. Harder to say?</p> <p>Talks through changes over time- decision-making-there were no options so stayed as I am</p> <p>Repetition of the phrase-"I'm just happy who I am"</p> <p>Account remains in the present day</p>	<p>I was nervous here-I felt like it wasn't OK to ask about more difficult times and the "angst"-but it seemed important. Of all the content-this is what I picked up on-potential influence of what Ajax goes on to share...</p> <p>Prompting for more explanation over the change or development over time</p> <p>Refers to narrative of expectation that have to switch genders from birth gender to opposite gender?-then resists this by saying that eventually they found a way to do it</p> <p>Preferred identity creation-being successful-placed after comment on earlier experiences being 'reasonably</p>
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<p>presentation and sexuality, comes into that as well. So: for many years, it was reasonably difficult. I said reasonably difficult, it didn't, or it didn't ...it wasn't something that destroyed my life, you know. [Nic: Yea] I have a good education. I've always had good employment. So I've had success. But certainly in the last...probably the last eight or nine years, I've just felt more comfortable with who I am. I don't try to...these days, I'm not looking to change my...change how I express my gender[Nic: Sure], whereas before that I probably was looking for some sort of validation or something. Nic: Okay. That's religious. That's quite a difference then to now being kind of here saying it feels really comfortable. I just wonder if you have any sense of what it is that made that possible for you. How did that...? Ajax: Yeah. I think ultimately, it was internal, kind of internal...I just think over, over time, an internal kind of self-acceptance of some sort. Nic: Okay. That self-acceptance, it sounds important. I'm just wondering where that comes from. Is that something that's purely internal or is that in relation to other people that you know, a wider</p>	<p>Repetition of theme-I'm ok now. But what does this say about the past? Implication that there was a journey to get there?</p>	<p>Didn't want to commit to sentence so offers mediator/get out with "or something".</p> <p>Again sense of progression/journey over time</p>	<p>difficult'. Desire to be seen as successful relative to assumption that I feel GV is problematic? From diary- What do they make of me as a 'psychologist' wanting to talk about this issue. Link to asking about my job pre interview</p> <p>In the room, I had a sense of a journey-what had got them here? It felt comfortable for Ajax to be talking about themselves as being ok now-I was intrigued by what had gone before as this seemed more difficult or less favoured to narrate on</p> <p>Introduced by me-relationships with other people</p>
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<p>society, friends, family?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> It's(..).I think it's more internal wider society [<b>Nic:</b> Ok], so I mean firstly, kind of, in terms of friends and people who accept me for who I am [<b>Nic:</b> Yea], I've got a reasonable amount of friends who I've kept for 20 years plus [<b>Nic:</b> Yea] and who have kind of come with me, if that makes sense, and I'm still close with many of them. I've got a fantastic relationship with my parents. I always have had and even when I didn't have...even if at times if I didn't have a fantastic relationship with my parents, it wasn't gender related [<b>Nic:</b> Sure] or sexuality. It was other reasons. So I'm incredibly close to my parents [<b>Nic:</b> Yea]. And within the(..).more so when I was in the states, you know, there is a, ahh you know, a community there that is at least in-in California that is, was very accepting of people like myself and had built up a very good network of people there who I know and people who kind of...who understand or judged me like the gender queer energy, whereas when I was growing up in Belfast, I loved Belfast to bits but Belfast doesn't take grits for someone like myself in some respects. It's much more conservative and non-cosmopolitan</p>	<p>Suggests movement-journey-from there to here</p> <p>Separation of gender and difficulties/problems</p> <p>Connecting with and finding others who accept me is important-they "like" the queer energy. Importance of finding similar others in the world that are the same or can see me for who I am</p> <p>Difference relative to non- gender related factors-growing up different in Belfast is not the done thing-not acceptable?</p>	<p>First use of exaggerated language-emphasises point</p> <p>Contradiction-"always fantastic relationship" then refers to a time when that wasn't the case</p> <p>Colloquial language-only insider would understand this-link to the vague description of self-who is Ajax-"someone like myself"</p> <p>Formal language-business like tone to the interview as a whole-denotes seriousness/formality to discussing the issues</p>	<p>Preferred identity is that gender is not problematic in relationships. Ajax telling me that they are accepted by friends and family</p> <p>Part of this bit of narration is educational-Ajax is educating me about politics</p> <p>I felt very interested in the experience of growing up in Belfast-it reminded me of the importance of early life context that I had forgotten at the start of the interview</p> <p>You need to understand my context to know what I mean.</p>
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<p>[Nic: Yea]. But when I said Belfast is non-cosmopolitan, you need to...you should understand that before I was in my 20s, I never spoke...I think I spoke to one person who was not 100% Caucasian. [Nic: Ok-Yes] That's how I...you know, my background is very different to most people who say live on the mainland.</p> <p>Nic: Sure. So do you think that had an impact as you were growing up on things like your gender and your sexuality?</p> <p>Ajax: I think, yes. I think that plus my religion which I...and I am still religious, that plus my religion probably kind of made me try to fight it...kind of maybe not really fight it, but kind of keep it under control.</p> <p>[Nic: Sure] keep it, keep it, keep it away.</p> <p>Nic: Yeah. Was that quite...was that a conscious...were you aware of consciously trying to keep it away?</p> <p>Ajax: Yes, I think so.</p> <p>Nic: Yeah?</p> <p>Ajax: Yeah.</p> <p>Nic: And was that changed from keeping it away to that self-acceptance?</p> <p>Ajax: Yeah, that was an evolution.</p> <p>[Nic: Yea] So that's been over a period of...I've been aware of being gender different from as early as I</p>	<p>Impact of attempting to get away from experiences. Link to experiential avoidance. This is situated in Belfast-conservative context-when moved to California-easier to accept owing to finding community? Importance of acceptance by others for acceptance of self.</p> <p>Ajax takes the story back to early experiences-perhaps to orientate to the start of the evolution process.</p> <p>Early experiences as "disconnect" gender wise.</p> <p>Ajax saying-where I am today is part of a longer process-gender different from an early age-it's taken a while to get here</p> <p>The process goes on and on...</p>	<p>Battle language-then qualified-too emotive?</p> <p>"keep it, keep it, keep it away"-repetition of this-ensures they are heard</p> <p>"evolution"-natural process of change over time in order to survive? Again use of quite formal terms/language.</p>	<p>Fight against Gvt experiences-impact of religious narratives?</p> <p>Referring to gender narratives by placing self as gender different-GV here is positioned as different rather part of the norm</p>
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<p>can remember [Nic: Ok]. And, you know, certainly, from before the age of 4, I can remember having a disconnect gender wise [Nic: Ok]. So that acceptance has been...has taken a long time. And it has been an evolution, so it wasn't that one day I felt conflicted and the next day, I didn't. It has been a long process, it has been a long process</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Is it still a process, do you think?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> I think probably in some respects, it probably is but it probably never ends. But I do know that over the last 8 years...I'm saying 8, it could be 6 years, it could be 10 years, but over the last so many years, I'm just much more comfortable on-on-on gender type issues.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Okay. So there's something now that is much more comfortable?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Much more comfortable internally. Externally, it still...it can still cause me angst.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Yeah. In what way?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Well kind of, in very simple terms. I travel a lot [Nic: Mmm] so I fly a lot. And airport security is a massive issue for me [Nic: Ok]. So that's not to do with my personal gender identity. It's not whether I feel male, female, or something in between, but sometimes my kind of boarding pass and passport doesn't</p>	<p>The challenge of the real world still exists-regardless if I feel comfortable or not.</p> <p>Practical example-travelling and airport security-world cannot make sense of me and that can be difficult</p>	<p>Struggle to get words out-unsure what name to give it?</p> <p>"angst"-out of the tone of the rest of the interview</p> <p>Emotive language-terrified of the experience of having trouble getting through security because appearance doesn't match legal status.</p> <p>Disruption in narrating-again out of confident performance of rest of interview-</p> <p>"uncomfortable" repeated five times in</p>	<p>I was aware of wanting there to be permission to still find it difficult or for there to be struggles as this seemed hard to say. In reflection, I should have thought about the identity construction. Ajax reminds me of what they have already said as my question may have contradicted preferred identity</p>
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<p>always match what someone sees. And you know, that, airport security I am, I'm terrified of, especially in the United States you know. I actually carry a letter from a doctor you know that states, you know, states, your kind of, you know Persons Name, you know kind of that. So they're a kind of, they're... umm I forget the exact words [Nic: Yeaa], their, kind of gender presentation may not match their legal status. [Nic:Ok] I've never actually had to use that letter, but I do get into very uncomfortable situations with security [Nic: Yeaa] people in airports, and I sometimes felt I...it's nice to have it as a backup. So I do feel quite, quite... I feel uncomfortable at airports. Genuinely</p> <p>Nic: Yeah. No, I believe you. I kind of...it's easy to say that it's quite a hefty sort of process to kind of get through. And if you travel a lot, I guess that happens a lot.</p> <p>Ajax: Yea exactly. So you know I will go through the airport security and kind of...they don't know...a lot of people won't know whether to sir or madam me or whether it should be a man or woman giving me a body search. [Nic: Ok] It's actually...it's just, it's very awkward and sometimes it puts...it's not always that the security officials are being</p>	<p>Feeling uncomfortable at airports</p> <p>Story continues-more elaborated-more able to speak-the every day realities of resisting gender norms</p> <p>Feeling responsible for the feelings of others in the situation where gender is hard to decipher/doesn't fit neatly</p> <p>Powerless-its left in the hands of others to decide who I am-and they can change their mind or get it wrong-there's nothing I can do</p>	<p>small space-quality of the experience-repetition to make the point more heard/valid</p> <p>Unusual for Ajax to use different intonation-perhaps effective way of making a point without going into detail</p> <p>Use of other's speech-legitimises experience-makes it more real/believable-what I'm telling you is true</p> <p>Repeats back my question-thinking</p>	<p>My need to offer reassurance? Ajax making it clear there are still some day to day struggles but these are placed outside of their internal experience and into the interaction with the world-distances problems/potential distress?</p> <p>Assumption? Perhaps they don't manage it? Closed down opportunity</p>
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<p>deliberately insensitive. Sometimes, they just feel uncomfortable and in most cases, not all, but in most cases, they're not trying to offend me. [Nic: Yes] So I kind of also feel bad that they feel uncomfortable and embarrassed. Sometimes, they ask, "Are you a male or a female?" Sometimes, they automatically decide I'm one or the other. And then two seconds later, they decide I'm something else. [Nic: Ok] It's kind of...it's quite weird, but ultimately, it's just incredibly uncomfortable.</p> <p>Nic: Yeah, it sounds it. How have you come to manage that then?</p> <p>Ajax: I think just with difficulty, [Nic: Yea] with extreme difficulty. How do I manage it? I survive it. There's no, there isn't an easy solution. And the reality is that there probably won't be, you know...kind of it, you know, those people who are somewhat in the middle, I think it's more difficult. I think it's probably easier for someone who is transitioning or has transitioned because they...so you know whether someone passes or doesn't pass, they make a very clear statement about who they are and who they want to be. I'm not actually doing that. You know I'm in this, I'm one of those people who are</p>	<p>Being in the middle is harder-people don't what to make of me and there's no solution to that-I don't want to transition-I want to be me-but there are challenges that come with it</p> <p>Transitioning to opposite gender makes a statement about who you are-but Ajax doesn't want to do that-don't want to be anything-to change-or transition-want to live as I am and find a way to make that work</p> <p>Repetition of the idea that some people see Ajax as male and some see them as female</p> <p>The ongoing nature of being me! All in one evening, some people think I'm male and some female-because this happens so often does it make it difficult to be anything other than passive?</p>	<p>about the answer- "survive"-close to the language of "evolution" used earlier in the text</p> <p>Very clear, confidently narrated story-content could be upsetting but there is no emotion-linked to preferred identity of being OK as I am?</p>	<p>to say that they don't? I wonder if I have joined in the preferred identity that everything is ok internally now?</p>
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<p>in a middle ground. [Nic: Yea] Some people instantly see me as male. Some people instantly see me as female. For example, one evening last week or the week before, I was like with a friend, umm in the evening. And it was the first time we were out together for the evening, and you know, I forget the exact number of times, but she counted the number of times that evening in which people have referred to me by a gender pronoun [Nic: Sure]. And suddenly, four or five have referred to me as a male pronoun and four or five have referred to me as a female pronoun, you know, all in the course of the one evening. So we would get into a taxi and I'd be called "Sir." We'd go somewhere else and I'd be called "Madam." We'd go somewhere else and I'd be called "Sir," [Nic: Mmm] and she was amazed, you know she was really amazed by this you know, I'm used to it so it doesn't amaze me, but then when someone else sees it, it does get quite, quite umm...it's interesting, you know, that kind of...it is interesting.</p> <p>Nic: And I guess it sounds to you like it's becoming more normal for that to happen.</p> <p>Ajax: More normal but it is</p>	<p>Other people are amazed by my experience-but it's normal for me</p> <p>I'm still aware of my difference all the time-because pronouns are always needed and it doesn't work like that for me</p> <p>Continuation of the story-so after I get through one difficult stage-the next</p>	<p>Use of repetitive language again-helps position the Amazement as far apart from the normality of being "used to it"</p> <p>Doesn't finish-what is left unsaid?</p> <p>Doesn't finish-is distress/difficulties illustrated by examples of stories or encounters with others rather than told as feelings experienced by the self?</p>	<p>I also felt amazed by this-a real insight into what life it like "in the middle"</p> <p>Seen as understanding others point of view-interesting as I felt very annoyed that this happened to them-though they didn't appear too.</p>
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<p>something...and that's why I probably said externally, gender is more [Nic: Yes] of an issue than internally. It is more normal but it's something I'm deeply conscious of and is something that I'm still uncomfortable so the worst-case scenario is where someone always needs to, is where someone always refers to people as a gender pronoun. [Nic: Sure] So after I've go through the airport security, if I'm on flight and someone is bringing around food, it's kind of... British Airways is a case in point. If they, if it's a transatlantic flight, it's a f- it's a proper food service. And they call everyone either sir or madam [Nic: Yes], which I...normally, I can understand why some people like it because it's polite. It's incredibly difficult for me because they won't know, a lot of people won't know what to call me, you know. [Nic: Yes] And it makes oth- it makes them feel uncomfortable. I then feel uncomfortable because they're uncomfortable. It's a vicious circle. [Nic: Absolutely] And you know, and once or twice I've actua-, because I'm conscious with this, I've actually seen like air stewardesses, you know (laughing), like pointing to me or they think they're being discreet- They're</p>	<p>Other people don't know what to call me-they don't know what to say-and that's uncomfortable-there is no name for me?</p> <p>Conscious of what others think-I'm aware of what they think/do and then it makes me more uncomfortable</p> <p>Acceptance that there's no easy way? This is how it is-this is how it's going to be</p> <p>Doing things to make life easier-a sense that I have to live in a world where its not straightforward so I need to do things that will make it a it easier</p>	<p>Repetition of the word "uncomfortable" three further times</p> <p>Narrated more quietly than other bits-painful-use of laughter? More socially acceptable-in line with preferred identity? experience of shame but not able to show the emotion?</p> <p>"but not through choice"</p> <p>Unable to finish sentence-"I'm..." difficult to describe self succinctly.</p> <p>Repetition of embarrassing/uncomfortable/awkward</p>	<p>Reflection from diary about the ongoing struggle-this isn't resolved as this person still lives in a world where their experiences don't fit neatly and where multiple embarrassing and uncomfortable things happen all the time.</p> <p>Clear ideas about what it is to be "properly male"-societal messages about how to do gender</p>
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<p>not! And they're sort of, you know, kind of trying to work it out. [Nic: Yea] So how do i:::?: yeah, I don't think there's a...there's no easy way [Nic: No] for me to resolve it. [Nic: I'm definitely struck by that sense it is what it is and you face it daily, this. Ajax: Yeah. There are some things that make it easier but not through choice. So I have a male legal identity [Nic: M-hmm], and that's just easier for me. It's not a big issue but it's just easier. So in work, I err present as a male umm but most people know I'm...people who work closely with me know I'm not a male, not male in any proper sense and I don't want to be. But kind of, but you know I will meet with senior government officials, et cetera, and it's always a worry for me. And you know kind of pronouns can be quite difficult when people have never met me before, et cetera. So, I have had some very embarrassing moments. For me, sometimes, looking back on incredibly embarrassing at the time. But so kind of you know, I kind of know some tricks of the trades so if I have external meetings, I will always wear long-sleeved shirts. So if I wear short-sleeved shirts, technically people will be more likely to read me</p>	<p>Use of pronouns can be difficult-there is no pronoun for who I am!</p> <p>Lots of small stories to illustrate the day to day difficulties</p> <p>Coping with the expectations of gender that exist in the world-wearing cuffs=male etc. is it unavoidable to be gendered by others</p> <p>The imposition of the social expectations of belonging to a gender group</p>	<p>Language-like it's a fulltime job being me-I've learnt how to cope/adapt to minimise feeling uncomfortable</p> <p>Use of humour-contrast to more difficult experiences</p>	<p>Link here to earlier comment about not being "properly male".</p> <p>Referral to social makers of gender-clothing</p> <p>Ajax is funny-the interview was engaging and comical at times</p>
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<p>as female [Nic: Ok]. You know if I wear a kind of male cuffs, because generally the clothes I wear will be the male cut clothes, so I wear male cuff clothes and a tie, I will more likely be called "Sir." [Nic: Yes] So how I present will sometimes, sometimes lead to kind of...people, kind of in their mind, are formulating that I'm either male or a female [Nic: Ok]. One thing that does strike me, if I wear short-sleeved shirts, it's much more likely that I'm perceived as female. [Nic: Ok] I wear short-sleeved shirts almost all the time outside of the office, well except for winter, but outside the office simply because long-sleeved shirts can be too long ((Laughs)).</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> ((Laughs)) The perils of shortish arms!</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> There is no other, other real reason otherwise.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Okay. So that's something that's evolved over time?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Yes that has, because I know how to, I know how to er(..).react. I mean I was out, I was out with a number of quite senior people from my bank, and this has gone back seven or eight years and we were out after...and kind of we were in Dublin for some meetings and we were staying overnight so we met up for a</p>	<p>More real life examples of what it is to be them-ordinary situations aren't ordinary for Ajax</p> <p>Short sleeve theory in action</p> <p>Some situations are incredibly difficult-is it more acceptable to laugh it off when in the company of others?</p> <p>Its hard being in the middle-I'm not trying to get anywhere-I want to stay where I am but the world around me and people in make that hard!</p>	<p>Wearing a t-shirt conceptualised as a mistake-interesting language choice</p> <p>"most embarrassing evening of my life"-strong phrase-use of superlative-</p> <p>Use of</p> <p>Louder and emphasised-contrast to rest of the account which is quite steady in pace and tone</p>	<p>Small story</p> <p>Power/importance-male dominated environment-the senior bankers are most likely to be male</p> <p>Why was this story told-does it gain more impact because it was the "most embarrassing evening"-if it was just awkward or embarrassing would I understand what it was like? Would I dismiss it?</p> <p>I've joined the story here-I was very engaged at this point and really taken in to the reality that Ajax describes</p>
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<p>meal and I've made the mistake of coming down to the restaurant I mean, we were all staying in the same hotel. I made the mistake of coming down to the restaurant wearing a t-shirt. So the waiter kept calling me "Miss" whatever. And you know, kind of, and these were senior bankers who kind of, you know, had viewed me as male. [Nic: Yes] And so that was the most embarrassing evening of my life. And I was able sort of laugh and explain, err you know, but I didn't explain too much but I sort of was able to manage it, but incredibly embarrassing. And it's difficult for me because I'm not trying to pass I'm actually not, it's not as though I want to be viewed as male...actually I don't want to be viewed as male. I don't really want to be viewed as female either but kind of, so this sort of pronoun thing causes me massive problems.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Yeah, absolutely.</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Massive problems.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> So is it that you want to be perceived in the way that the other people around you see you- (<i>Overlapping Conversation</i>)</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Well to be honest, in an ideal world, I wouldn't need to worry how people, what gender people perceive me as, in an ideal world, there can be</p>	<p>Repetition of desire not to be male or female but to be something else that sits in between-BUT that is hard socially</p> <p>Why isn't there a third category? In an ideal world, there will be a name for me or a way to live that is not so problematic</p> <p>It doesn't matter when gender people perceive me as, it's the embarrassment of the process and the expectations of others and the confusion that is a problem</p> <p>Acceptance-it's not ideal and I have to make compromises and so it is what it is</p>		<p>Again back to the narrative that you can be either male or female</p> <p>Resisting gender positioning-moves the topic to make clear difficulties not related to gender but to politics etc.- more like peers?</p> <p>Invitation to talk about other things than gender-a wake up call that</p>
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<p>a third gender [Nic: Yea, yea] and, you know, kind of, I'm being referred to as 'it', or just no pronoun. So I don't really mind if people view me as kind of male or female. I just want to avoid that type of embarrassing situation which is why I wear a long-sleeved shirt at work, you know. It's not that I want...it's why I actually choose my legal identity to male, you know, just that it kind of makes things slight- slightly easier but it comes with some additional complications. [Nic: Yeah. There isn't-] Yeah, there isn't an easy solution. But i-i-it somehow sort of...at some point, it works and I make compromises and you know I kind of.... And over time, it becomes easier you know and so</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Okay. But it's quite a journey that you describe [Ajax: Yea I think so] without kind of bumps in the road, if you like.</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Yeah. There haven't been bumps in the road. I mean, my, to be quite honest kind of, if I look at my life, you know, my key, my key issue in life has probably been about politics rather than gender [Nic: Ok] So, you know, if I kind of, if I think of what keeps me awake at night, it's sort of...my issue, to be quite honest, you know, in terms of identity,</p>	<p>I am more than gender-gender hasn't been the main thing (especially in terms of difficulty) that has been present in my life</p> <p>Gender is not the biggest deal-place is-this was introduced earlier with the context of growing up in Belfast-but it wasn't followed up-this is a pattern that is repeated throughout the interview-many different cities and places are spoken about.</p> <p>Religion/politics also told as a journey over time</p>	<p>Voice of religion-dominant narrative around loyalty and power of religion</p> <p>The way this is told requires reading through the lines-----&gt;</p>	<p>gender is not the biggest deal for this person-</p> <p>Assumption that I will make sense of this-related to gender/sexuality and conflicting beliefs? Having said that, this was my assumption and possibly lead me not to asking more about it</p> <p>An assumption of insider knowledge that I will know what they are referring to</p>
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<p>gender isn't, gender is not my...the key way I identify. The most important thing for me is place, so I identify by place rather than by gender [Nic: Ok] So where I'm from [Nic: Ok] , who I am, kind of my background is very, very important to me.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Yeah. Can you tell me a bit about that?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> I-I-I yea fine, So I'm a Roman Catholic [Nic: Ok] by background and I'm quite strongly Roman Catholic. I went through 10 years, 15 years of kind of anti the church and so on, but I was very strongly catholic when I was growing up. And it um, I-I- It never left me albeit I would have said it did, but I was one of those people who "Once a catholic, always a catholic." [Nic: Ok] So when I'm waking up scared in the middle of the night, I would say catholic prayers and so on [Nic: Sure] So I am...I went back...very much over recent years, four years, five years, I've been very much into Catholicism again partly because when I went to the Philippines and I lived in the Philippines, the Philippines is obviously a very strongly catholic country, but they've celebrated Catholicism in a slightly more diverse way, [Nic: Ok] slightly more inclusive</p>	<p>Compromise of how the important things to me can work-an alternative/flexible approach to include me</p> <p>Friends are different to me but it still works</p> <p>I am defined by my religious and political beliefs-they are important to</p>	<p>Conflict between two things: is it like conflict between male and female for Ajax?</p>	<p>I had a strong reaction to this-almost frustrated that the church etc. was receiving praise for being inclusive-but this was out of attunement with Ajax. Here we both appear to be drawing on the narrative that religion and sexual/gender diversity is not an easy match</p> <p>Middle class roman catholic background-significant for context</p> <p>Identity work taking place-political activism and importance of this-leading a dangerous life-alluded to dangerous experiences in the past-does this contextualise their relationship with GV as less significant in some way?</p>
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<p>way and more flexible way which suited me so I got back into the church. And here in London, we have Catholic masses for the LGBT community [Nic: Sure] they're still part of Europe. You know that actually there was a Catholic mass for people like themselves. So that's been quite inclusive. But as well as being Roman Catholic and from the very middle class Roman Catholic background, I also from er...from being a teenager, I associated with, and Northern Ireland had troubles, Roman Catholics and Protestants etcetera. [Nic: Sure] So most of my friends were protestant and my political beliefs were very much on the protestant loyalist side. So I have a conflict in religion and politics. Which I and I was very politically active for much of my younger life. I got into quite dangerous situations [Nic: Ok] as a result, and I probably interacted with people that mostly other people wouldn't like, you know, people who were violent, you know, people in parliamentary organisations. So I wasn't in a parliamentary organisation but I was very close to some people who were [Nic: Ok] and some people who, you know, who just were not nice people. So kind of, that and that combination</p>	<p>me</p> <p>Literally spelling out the being gender queer is no the most organising factor in identity experience</p> <p>Introduces a further element of identity</p>	<p>Resisting gender positioning again by re-affirming that place is the most important</p> <p>Tells about self through what others would say-defined by what others say about us?</p>	<p>Explicit-place is the most important part of my identity-what does this say about the local context of the interview being about GV?</p> <p>Identity claim-gender queer-language is important-who in the audience would know what this means and who wouldn't</p>
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<p>of Roman Catholicism and effectively political loyalism, it's quite...it's a, there is a kind of massive conflict there in some aspects, but that isn't good. Both of those competing forces are incredibly important to me and Irish history, you know, Northern Irish history is very important. So place is, place and where I'm from is actually the most important part of my identity [Nic: Sure] So, if someone asked me, you know, how do I identify, it wouldn't be gender queer. It would be, I identify as someone from Belfast [Nic: Yea] And the gender queer comes maybe third-second or third in that list. The most important thing is being from Belfast.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Okay. And what are the other things that make up your identity? So there's...being from Belfast is kind of number one. A couple down is gender queer. What are the other things that make up who you are?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> So my kind of Catholicism [Nic: Yea] and my just kind of work strongly. You know, it's kind of...it's key to me. Umm that's probably...I mean, in terms of the key [Nic: Yes] sort of identity, I think that's probably, that's probably it.... I mean, I think kind of...if other people were to look at it and suggest, you know, people quite will, you know kind of,</p>	<p>Lots of stories about travelling-typical of young successful</p>	<p>Stepped out of first person narration-identity being described through what others see/think/assume-is this outside of preferred identity to narrate in this way</p>	<p>Use of humour-Ajax is laughing whilst they narrate this section-playing with the idea of being mysterious. It is engaging</p> <p>Co-construction here-Ajax</p> <p>My idea to bring the conversation back to gender-inexperience as researcher to allow the interview to go where it goes. Could influence what is shared in future</p>
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<p>about me, most people would probably say that...most people, most people would think that I've got kind of jet-setting life because I travel a lot. I don't see that I work hard you know. And most people also seem to think I'm slightly mysterious, but I just see that as kind of quite ((Laughs)) it's just the way I kind of, I --I --I sometimes don't say what I think. ((laughs)) [Nic: Okay ((Laughs))] It's actually not mystery at all!</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Okay. That's interesting. So lots of people perceive you as mysterious?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Well, see, people in the states will see me flying over, you know, for events or weekends [Nic: Yes] And you know-a-a-a-and people in the States don't really travel outside the States a lot. [Nic: Yea] I mean, most people I know in the States have never been outside the States. So when they see me kind of travelling over a few times a year [Nic: Yes] you know, and so on, you know people sort of...people jump to conclusions.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Okay. Specific conclusions or just...?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> No, just in general.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Just in general.</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> People come to assumptions, you know kind of, about money...or</p>	<p>Decisions about physical changes- never identified with the term transsexual or transgender-Is it ok to be somewhere in the middle?</p>	<p>Very definite use of language-different to notion of a journey or an evolutionary process</p> <p>Minimising?</p> <p>Doctors positioned as 'useless'- therefore self positioned as having to take control and make choices based on what was available</p> <p>Medical profession as making the experience sound debilitating vs. previous narration of 'jet-setter' lifestyle</p>	<p>I am keen to go back to the decision around not having surgery-how was that made-I have steered the conversation back to a topic that was introduced earlier.</p>
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<p>kind of, things like that.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Yeah, okay. And I guess I...in hearing that these other parts of your identity that are much more important to you, I guess I'm thinking about just checking that it's okay to go back to thinking a bit more about gender. Because I think there are a couple of things that...a couple of areas that would be kind of interesting to hear from you about. One of which was you said when you first...I think you said you're looking at what the options were in terms of gender, one option was surgery and then. How did you come to make those decisions? <i>(Overlapping Conversation)</i></p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Well, to be honest, when I said I was looking at options, I wasn't looking at options in the sense of thinking if I wanted surgery. That's never been on the agenda for me</p> <p><b>[Nic:</b> Yes] But just trying to explore gender and legal identity and....</p> <p>Firstly, I've never in any way identified with the term transsexual or transgender. It's not me. But kind of trying to...I guess my battle or issues always "Was it okay to be somewhere in the middle?" And th-the And I actually, you know, I met my doctor, you know met my doctor when I was 18...19 just to say I felt</p>	<p>Encounters with the medical profession</p> <p>I couldn't look things up/find out/explore in the same way you can today-thus positioned as having very few options</p> <p>Had to go and read up about this at age 18/19-this is many years after first noticing the 'disconnect'</p>	<p>Debilitating-language is medical-like illness or disease. Opposite to previous story about being a jet setter, successful etc.</p> <p>Self positioned as outside of the system-the system hasn't helped-it had nothing to offer me so what I am is not related to input or services available</p>	<p>Broader narrative of 'mental disorder'-how does this influence the telling of the stories about contact with services? Shame? Aware of what I think-am I viewed as part of the system that sees it this way? Does this shape the form that the narration can take</p> <p>Both of us drawing on the idea that there is an option of not being male or female...but what ideas will the rest of the audience have to draw on?</p> <p>Unsure whether it is ok to ask this</p>
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<p>slightly different. And my doctor was of absolutely no use whatsoever [Nic: Ok] This is a local doctor in Belfast, you know, no big surprise. Um but you know, she referred me to a, to the XX hospital, and they had kind of you know.... But she referred me to a sexologist, er you know kind of some sort of...I forget the exact name, so effectively, a clinic for sexual disorder or something ((laughs)) [Nic: Ok]. That wasn't my type of issue at all. So, you know, there just was nothing for me. [Nic: Yea] And this was before the time of the internet really [Nic: Yes] So, kind of when I did read up literature, you know, kind of the choices people kind of had and the way it seemed to me, my conclusion was you lived as your birth gender or you kind transition. If you transition, you're going to need to see a psychologists or psychiatrists. I never knew the difference of the two. And you have to, you know...and you have surgery. And it's simply prescriptive [Nic: Yes] And it also sort of made it some days sort of kind of mental conditions which probably is, but I don't know. But I mean they made it sound kind of very debilitating and it was very...but it was just so prescriptive and one thing I'm not is prescriptive especially by gender. It</p>	<p>Importance of community and connection with others similar-this is a repeated theme-linked to acceptance?</p>	<p>Broken speech-difficult to narrate-not available as a public story-feels very private</p> <p>Positioned as not having a choice how others perceive? Can't control how other see me</p> <p>Story shifted from personal 1<sup>st</sup> person perspective-removed and less</p>	<p>question...hesitation-overal reflections noted a sense of there being a feeling that certain things were off limits-I wondered if this was one of them-however Ajax goes on to narrate at length about this</p>
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<p>just wasn't eer, so -so I ultimately how I kind of how I came to someone who I am today was very much outside of this system, you know.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Yeah. But that's where I think it's really interesting as it's kind of as a journey. So it's a kind of one visit that didn't go well and you didn't respond to that prescriptive kind of approach. And outside of that then took on your own.</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Over time, over time.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Do you know...? I mean, I don't know if you feel you have the say or do you kind of have a sense of what it was about kind of surgery and those things that just weren't for you? What...?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> It's not...I don't want to have a.... In very simple terms, I don't want to have a male body.[<b>Nic:</b> Okay] I've never felt the the the need or I've never felt the desire, you know. So I don't actually want that [<b>Nic:</b> Yea] And there are some things about my body I would probably like to change but I don't want umm...I don't want facial hair. I don't want umm male genitalia. I don't want, you know.... So surgery has never...it's never been...I've never considered... I have neve-it's never been on the agenda for me. I don't want it you know I-I-I. Some</p>	<p>Transition as more socially acceptable these days-including more improvement-is this an insiders perspective? Would it be different if Ajax wasn't in the community?</p> <p>Decisions about transition is difficult-should not be gone into lightly</p> <p>Trajectory for gender-inexplicably linked to sexuality-places self one place behind FTM-as far along the spectrum as one can be without medical transition</p> <p>Can't understand transitioning-referred to as "strange"</p>	<p>ownership-does not want to be/placing limitations or judgements on others, knows how this feels?</p> <p>Positions self as respectful of this other person's choice, but emphasis makes it obvious-is the implication that it is a conscious effort to do so?</p> <p>Difficult to say-personal? The whole interview is quite business like and formal-perhaps talking about binding is too personal</p> <p>Change of topic-though logical from body to clothing-this seems less personal-----&gt;</p> <p>"made to measure"-quite special-in keeping with the mysterious jet setter</p>	<p>Legitimises story-it was with a friend and only a couple of days ago-makes it real and relevant-also helps me to know that they are not the only person that thinks this. Able to express opinion with taking fully the "I" position and being the teller and owner of the story</p> <p>Ajax mentions earlier that there are probably things they would like to be different about their body</p>
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<p>people...I mean, I'm very close to the Butch-Femme community and so some people would see me as butch. I don't like the word Butch, but it's fine if people perceive me to be Butch.</p> <p>But I know...in so many people I know especially in the States who would've been butch have transitioned or undergone transition in recent years. Like it's- I don't know what the numbers are centrally, but it seems to have really...it seems to be a fashion these days. Clearly, surgery and hormonal treatment have come on significantly, and I'm sure some people are incredibly happy. But I kind of wonder...I sometimes wonder, especially younger Butches, you know, kind of 18, 19, 20, are they actually, do they actually know what they're doing, or is this what they want, or is it part of, you know((..)).you know I-I is there almost, I don't think peer pressure but is it almost seen-it's that kind of trajectory of soft Butch, Butch, kind of hard Butch, gender queer, FTM.</p> <p>And you know I-I certainly, I mean, err I-I-I kind of talking about this to a friend, just a day or two ago, you know, you know kind of like we know someone who kind of was lesbian and then, kind of you know, kind of within a year or two of having been a</p>	<p>Back to the notion of the difference between internal and external</p> <p>There is something about continuing to negotiate having a blurred gender. Having found a place where it is personally meaningful does not mean it is always easy</p> <p>GV stops from being able to go swimming comfortably-is this an example of the restrictions that being "in the middle" brings-if you are not trying to be either gender, it is impossible to fit it as there is no template to fit into</p>	<p>life style</p> <p>Unfinished story? Then shift to topic change-perhaps more comfortable to narrate there</p> <p>Repetition of the word</p>	<p>Perhaps pre-empting my thoughts/question: context of the interview to hear about Gvt experiences</p> <p>Perhaps more able to narrate confidently about this</p> <p>I am different to other people in some ways-I can't do what other people can do and this is an example of it. – During the interview there seemed to be to-ing and fro-ing between a sense of being the same as other people and gender not being important to being different to others and being unable to do certain things</p>
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<p>lesbian for a long time was Butch and within weeks was transitioning and I find some of that kind of like...I'm sure <u>he</u> thinks it's perfectly normal and it might be. It just seems strange, <u>it just seems strange to me.</u></p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Yeah. Okay. I mean, I guess in relation to some of what you're saying about not wanting that male body, how over time has your relationship with your body been affected by your relationship gender? Has it or has it been at all...?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Well, I-I-I it is to the extent, so I-I-I bind. So I bind when I'm outside. I almost always bind when I'm outside. So like almost always but when I'm inside, I don't, I don't at all...umm being more comfortable. I'm actually fine with shape, but outside I am not. So, why? I'm I'm, I'm not sure. So kind of, I wear male-fitted clothes [Nic: Yea] I mean, some of my clothes are would be made to measure um especially suits etcetera but in general, I can kind of get away with, with male clothes. It's, it's it's definitely...it's sometimes difficult around the chest, but in general it kind of, it kind of...it works. But I would never, I would never kind of <u>be...</u>so the diff-so where I would have difficulty is the difficulty is something at swimming [Nic: Sure].</p>	<p>Continuation of the story about restriction of GV-again centred around the role of other people-communal changing rooms are populated by strangers-feeling your gender is between male and female and then being seen physically as female is distressing</p> <p>The idea of compromise has come up a lot-finding an acceptability in various areas-it's not ideal but it is possible to find ways to cope</p>	<p>Four second pause-uncharacteristic for the interview</p> <p>Had no choice over the matter-positioned as change happened but not within their control</p> <p>Repetition of this point using same language-to emphasise</p> <p>Use of humour to 'opt out' of emotionally laden story of confusion-as this might be outside of preferred identity</p> <p>Within these stories there is no reference to choice or being able to choose which clothes or watch to wear-this positions the experience as almost</p>	<p>I was aware during the interview that there was very little conversation about early life-even though Ajax mentions first feeling a disconnect at the age of 4-If I hadn't have brought the conversation back would the next section have been narrated?</p> <p>Use of humour again-'banter' style-"that's unprofessional"-the use of jokes or banter like this is interesting</p>
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<p>love to swim but I cannot go and...I do not feel I can go into leisure centres for example and you know communal changing rooms. The last time I went to a leisure centre was seven or eight years ago and kind of...I just felt so uncomfortable. I mean I:: I mean, I don't want kind of... so like I just don't want people to see me in that way [Nic: Yea] you know, people who don't know me well. People kind of, people, kind of partners, and even [Nic: Yea] partners I've not been that close to, I've generally been fine being say being naked with those people. I'm not on about late at night, kind of sexual activity, but I've sort of kind of been fine. I don't sort of wrap up. I'm absolutely fine being kind of...people see my body in a, in context, people I actually know. But communal sort of changing rooms. [Nic: Yeah. That's a no.] Yeah. So my relationship with my body is, is, it's sort of manageable as a compromise. So I don't do everything, so I don't do everything I would like to but it kind of works. [Nic: Yeah. It works for you. Has it changed over time, has there been a-? (4) Ajax: I honestly don't think so.</p>	<p>Early experiences as hard to understand-</p> <p>Importance of clothing for identity-related to early experience-easier/more likely to e remembered of explained in terms of clothing than emotions?</p> <p>Gender defined socially by clothes-story of feeling/being different in recalling wanting to wear 'different' clothes</p> <p>Wanting traditionally boys toys-recalls wanting action man-this is in</p>	<p>unquestionable-leaving Ajax as the passive recipient of-but also use of the terms "desire and fantasy" make it sound quite exotic-perhaps this is linked to the notion of going against gender norms</p>	<p>in the interview context-also part of identity performance</p> <p>This made me wonder about whether life would have been different if Ajax was a child now? How has society moved on? Or not moved on and how does this link back in and shape the experience of the individual</p> <p>Need to be aware of limitations of introducing a topic-although sharing their experience with others may have come up-it may not-</p>
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<p><b>Nic:</b> No.</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Yeah. At least, not...it hasn't changed over time voluntarily. So when I was younger, I would've been in communal changing rooms because of school [<b>Nic:</b> Yess] But voluntarily, it hasn't really changed.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Okay. Because you mentioned kind of earlier in our conversation that you had the sense kind of younger than 4, the disconnection, which I think is a really good way of describing it. Was that then...did you have a sense then that your body was not...you weren't comfortable in kind of a communal setting or do you think it was different then?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> I don't know, I don't know but it's difficult, it's difficult to...sometimes it's difficult to even understand what those feelings [<b>Nic:</b> Yeah] Because it's quite long ago (laughing).</p> <p>[<b>Nic:</b> (laughing)<b>Ajax:</b> That's unprofessional that! (Laughing) ]</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> It's um, I think much of it at that time was wanting to wear certain types of clothes [<b>Nic:</b> Sure] that probably didn't fit with the stereotype and we're kind of talking some years ago when...I mean, it wasn't long ago but things actually changed quite a lot just in terms of presentation of children, et cetera</p>	<p>line with dominant narrative</p> <p>Not possible to talk about when younger to parents-did not feel comfortable-</p> <p>Role of societal acceptance linked to personal acceptance and being able to talk to parents etc.</p>	<p>Thought "I was mad"-who's idea is this? Speech of another? Content is related to parents but is this the voice of society?</p> <p>Hesitation in speech-uncertain or unsure what to say-emotional content-not within preferred narrative.</p> <p>Is this used to counter the idea madness/debilitation that is referred to</p>	<p>There were times during the interview when it felt like certain things were not comfortable to talk about-it was interesting to hear that this was Ajax's experience in early in life too. Much more confident narration in the here and now context</p> <p>Support of position that Ajax takes</p>
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<p>[Nic: Sure yea yea]. So I wo- I had a kind of <b>desire or fantasy</b> to wear different types of clothes. I mean, I remember being very young and wanting to wear different type of watch, because you had kind of boys' watches and girls' watches. These days, ok I'm sure you do, but unisex is much more normal I guess [Nic: Yes], whereas back then, it kind of wasn't [Nic: Yes], you know, boys' watches or girls' watches. So I always kind of wanted to wear the other and I kind of like have new toys, you know, kind of play with action man. I wish I still had them! <b>(laughing)</b> [Nic: <b>laughing</b>] I'd be wealthy! So it was, so:: it was from a very early age, there was this <b>disconnect</b> [Nic: Ok] but it was a disconnect. It wasn't err, it wasn't a like a clear-cut wanting to be someone else [Nic: Yea yea yea It was blurred.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Blurred. That's interesting. Was it possible for you as a not kind of very, very young, that didn't make a lot of sense, but as you kind of got older to talk and think about your experiences with those around you?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Not at all, not at all. I mean, it might have been possible but I certainly <b>didn't feel comfortable</b> [Nic: Yea]. I mean, I think um that's why you know, at the stort when you</p>	<p>Reference to society changing-reference to role of internet for information and resources that could help to make sense of experiences</p> <p>Feared response of parents who would have thought Ajax was "mad"</p> <p>Desire to share experiences with parents/others-suggestion that it would have been helpful to do so?</p> <p>Context-if telling parents would destroy them-this is not a viable option especially in the context of having a good relationship with them</p> <p>Telling parents about GV/experiences-</p>	<p>earlier</p> <p>"destroyed"-repetition of this term-powerful and convincing</p> <p>Use of speech-makes it more believable-Light-hearted-but making the point-How do you tell someone about this?</p> <p>Softens delivery-use of qualifiers-makes it more everyday</p>	<p>Referring to narrative that there is an expectation that you have to 'disclose' status to family etc. But also resists this by having not done so</p>
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<p>talked about demographics, I do think demographics are quite important because I do think where someone's from and their age, their experiences will change because if I was...if I was 20 years younger, maybe I would... you know kind of today, if I was 16 coming 17, I might be...and if I was sort of, you know, 9, 10, or 11, I might be much more open about this to my parents or:: [Nic: Yes] because there is an awful long way to go in terms of understanding and acceptance of these types of issues. But there generally is more openness than there have been. I think the internet is a great resource for this [Nic: Yes] just in terms of understanding. There are a lot more people who maybe think like me to a certain extent that it's not totally weird. And there, and there, there are ways of communicating to parents. If I kind of told this to my parents when I was 4 or 5 or even 15, it just...they generally would've thought I was mad [Nic: Ok, yea yea]. They would have....</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Yeah. So it was like an impossibility. It just couldn't....</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Well yea, to be quite honest I... Sometimes, I wanted to tell them so much, but I was so worried that it would destroy them. And my my</p>	<p>Progression over time-never <i>told</i> my parents I'm gay but over time, it has been understood by them via actions- so taking partners home etc.-the action has done the talking</p> <p>There is a lot of acceptance from parents-demonstrated by their regard for Ajax's ex-partner-back up claim of acceptance by use of small story</p> <p>Mum is comfortable with gay bars-by implication she is comfortable with Ajax-again use of real life example</p> <p>Mum has talked to me about gender (as opposed to I have talked to Mum)-over time there is a sense that a natural process of things becoming easier-from it having the possibility of "destroying" them to Mum going to gay bars and loving ex wife to bits</p> <p>Relationship with Mum has changed</p>	<p>Repetition-more convincing</p> <p>"actually"-didn't need to say the words- as with gender-over time it has been possible to find a way to make it work</p>	
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<p>parents and I-I-I...maybe it would've been easier if I didn't get on with my parents [Nic: Sure]. I get on with my parents so well that I was always on top in school. And I was kind of model you know, you know, kind of model pupil in some respects and they were kind of proud of me. So to kind of tell my parents something like that which would be so out of left field, would would I just think at the time, it would've destroyed them. As it happened, kind of, how I've told them. I didn't, I never told them in...I never kind of sat them down and sort of said, "Hi, mum and dad. It's a good day at work. I'm a gender queer." So I never told them of that. I never even kind of told my parents I'm gay. I never said to my parents I'm gay, but over time, they know and like, you know kind of, when I come back to Belfast, I've often brought partners with me who stay at my parents' house, and they've been happy with that [Nic: Yes]. They're actually fine. Andy, my ex-partner, my ex-wife, lives in San Diego and she's flying back to Belfast at Christmas and she will stay with my parents and my parents love her to bits more than they get on better with her than with me. They all tease me a lot. So and my parents really</p>	<p>over time-very close as child-then rocky patch-now "fantastic" ...again there is a theme of things evolving</p> <p>'Coming out'-example of friend coming out to father and being accepted and then back to self who has never come out-</p>	<p>Repeated idea about never coming out-use of the word "genuinely"-wants to be believed-is there something about this that is unbelievable?</p> <p>Again use of the term "destroyed"-does this position GV as powerful</p>	<p>Small story</p> <p>positions self as resisting dominant expectations</p>
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<p>like this lady a lot and so kind of there is a lot of acceptance and you know, my mother will, when my mum comes to London, I will take my mum to gay bars, not deliberately because it's a gay bar, but if we're going to like a musical and somewhere over there are gay bars, she's very comfortable. She's very comfortable with that. [Nic: Yea] So kind of I've never actually said to my parents I'm gay or.... Sometimes, my mother has talked to me about gender [Nic: Yes] You know and she doesn't understand but she knows that it's what makes me tick and although she doesn't understand, she understands that I'm comfortable with it. So it works. [Nic: Yea it works] You know we went, I went through a rocky patch with my mother as a sort of teenager, early 20s, which was very much to do with my interest in politics but we are incredible close, [Nic: Yea] incredibly close.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Yeah. I mean, it's not just...I was just thinking as you're saying that, it sounds like that, kind of the way, that's gone with in terms of your mum. It's also an evolutionary thing, over time, it's not that it being a one single and then done. It's kind of a bit just changing when it comes and then it begins to fit.</p>	<p>not coming out as protective to family</p> <p>This is again about a steady process over time, where there wasn't a singular event or coming out-too "black and white"-it takes time, to do things slowly and gradually</p> <p>Connecting with others-sense of community-link to seeing similar others and making sense of own experiences</p>	<p>Not traditional-language used to help to let audience know it's different</p> <p>Unfinished sentence-not in line with preferred identity?</p> <p>Humour!</p>	<p>This reminds of the feeling of the interview-where it felt as though committing anything fully didn't happen-nothing was definite-nothing was fixed-things change-things could change again-this is like the journey that Ajax describes where there has been a gradual development and acceptance of their own experiences over time-</p> <p>Wondering about life in the States-the importance of place and relevance of living abroad-Reflective journal notes about wondering about</p>
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<p><b>Ajax:</b> Exactly. But it is the strange cos I have never looked, because I actually kind of saw someone on Facebook yesterday. There's an issue in the States, some chicken. It's not Kentucky fried chicken but it's an equivalent. And the owner of it has kind of come out with ((<i>laugh</i>)) anti-gay comments, and it's caused a big issue [Nic: Ok], you know, as everything does in the States. So one of my friends in the States was in her Facebook post yesterday was mentioning she came out to her father 13 years ago, and it's been great. He's never judged to her. But I've never come out. I've actually...genuinely, I've never actually come out.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Do you think that was a conscious decision?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> It was much easier, you know, for me not to come out. I-d-m My parents would never...why I think it might have destroyed my parents and it might have at the time, to come out is in some respects a black and white thing, but an evolutionary kind of process over the days and weeks, you know, where they sort of get the kind of hints almost. Umm it it worked for me. So it was probably a long dry process, but it worked. So was it conscious? I'm not certain.</p>	<p>Fitting in-importance of finding similar others-friendships and partners-importance of connecting with similar others</p> <p>Importance of friends-</p> <p>Not many Butch friends-is this a movement on the journey from living in San Diego in the midst of the Butch-femme community</p>	<p>Dress to impress</p>	<p>"normal friends"-is this work against dominant idea of what is normal and GV not being "normal"-identity-wants to be seen as "normal"-like everyone else</p> <p>Varied identity- The ideas of metrosexuality-what does this mean? Challenging the heteronormativity-to be a natal female, blurred preferred gender identity and metrosexual. Also metrosexual is used relative to maleness and specifically male heterosexuality</p> <p>Identity claims-about looking fashionable-which narratives is this drawn from?</p>
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<p>But whatever it was, it kind of produced kind of a good result</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Yeah. Well, it sounds something about you, kind of just feel way through things rather than [<b>Ajax:</b> I think so, yeah.] kind of decisions that you see, black/white, do/don't. It's kind of just something that happens for you.</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Yea I think so, I certainly don't think it was a...it wasn't an explicitly conscious decision, you know.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Yeah, cool. Okay. So you mentioned kind of your time in the States and that there being kind of a group or a certain group of people over there that.... -</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Not so much a group, but I was based in San Diego. So, it was based on a specific group, but that San Diego and Southern California and obviously very close to San Francisco which is kind of the, a LGBT mecca...so when in San Diego I, you know over there, there is a much stronger Butch-Femme community than in the UK. And by Butch-Femme, it's not only traditional kind of old-school Butch-Femme. It's much more diverse. So kind of...there, I kind of do very much...fit in and made a lot of friends and you know kinda partners. It's just a very good real network of people in San</p>	<p>Importance of clothing to signify gender-also resisting being like "other" "butch" people by not dressing like them in oversized</p>	<p>The description of the jeans mirrors Ajax's description of themselves- "They're not really masculine. They kind of, they kind of blur"</p> <p>"queeny"-this requires insider knowledge to make sense of</p>	<p>Ajax giving me fashion advice-"look it up on the web"! Use of humour.</p> <p>This is an e.g of Bamberg's idea of small story-what is the identity work here in the interaction-it's about fashion-what claims are being made-in asking me if I've heard of-taking an expert position! This is an important part of the identity-the story is that Ajax is into fashion (expensive fashion) but this is claimed relative to me not knowing this designer-the story is told by.</p> <p>Again drawing on ideas about traditional ideas of what it is to be a gender/what it is to be a man</p> <p>Opposite to metrosexual</p> <p>Funny engagement-almost asking-"are we on the same page?" "do you get me?"-time to have some more fun with this-talk about fashion-play around with gender a bit</p>
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<p>Diego and Los Angeles area, and I'm next over in September. So, you know and kind of you know we always meet up and you know although I don't live there anymore these are people who are just good practical friends. And you know they don't these are people who live normal lives and you know most of the friends I've got are probably kind of femme. I don't actually have that...I don't have that many kind of Butch or gender queer friends which works for me. I mean I kind of love discussing fashion!</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Yeah (Laughter).</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> I'm metrosexual.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Yeah (Laughter).</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> I am very metrosexual, so....</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Yeah. And you said earlier, you're into fashion.</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Yeah.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> What do you like about clothes? Why they are your thing?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Why are they my thing? Ooh hmm, I like to look fashionable. In the evening so like during the day, especially when I'm at home, tracksuits. I'm a total chav so but in the evenings, I like to dress. I like to dress to impress. I probably make a statement when, when when I dress. Most recently, I bought a jacket by Ermenegildo Zegna.</p>	<p>clothes. Fashion is important. I wonder how ideas about fashion being gendered are drawn on? Female thing? Gay male thing? Importance of drawing on these ideas to describe 'who I am'</p>	<p>This phrase "I don't want to transition" is repeated several time throughout the account-is the expectation that people this Ajax wants to transition?</p>	<p>So is the claim about confidence in masculinity?</p> <p>Challenge of expectations-my expectations-the person in front of me is smartly dressed-suit-city worker-male looking-then use of "</p> <p>Ideas related to being a gay man-interesting how sexuality is contingent on gender</p> <p>Positioned as able to draw on identity constructions from many different groups of people-gay men, straight men, is this part of Ajax's experience of blurring gender?</p> <p>This is me moving the conversation on-where would the conversation have gone had I not said this</p>
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<p><b>Nic:</b> Okay.</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> I'm sure you never heard.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> No, I haven't.</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Yeah. Look it up in the web. <i>(laughing)</i></p> <p><b>Nic:</b> <i>(Laughter).</i></p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> My main thing is from this Cavalli. Do you know?</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> I've heard, I've heard.</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Okay.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Is it Roberto?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Yeah, Roberto Cavalli. Yeah, yeah. I buy a lot of Cavalli jeans.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Ok nice(..). And what is it about the jeans that you like?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Um they're not traditional male, they're not traditional male jeans usually. If I look at the typical for XX and old-school Butch group. Is something that a man would've worn in the 1930s, '40s, '50s. It's kind of very traditional, very conservative, and quite out dated. And also, you know kind of often, people kind of look like they're wearing their Father's clothes because they're not well...they don't fit well. But Cavalli, certainly Cavalli jeans would be much more colourful. They're not, they're not, they're not masc- they're not really masculine. They kind of, they kind of, they blur. Typically, in man, this is the stereotype, a man who wasn't confident in his masculinity</p>	<p>Personal and intimate relationships- described in terms of groups of people- "women" and "gay women"</p> <p>Personal relationships not effected negatively as choose partners who "get it"</p> <p>Technology-social networking makes</p>	<p>Humour-this was funny-makes it clear that this is ok with them straight away- avoids it being anything other than ok</p>	
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<p>probably wouldn't [Nic: Ok], actually wear most Cavalli jeans.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Okay. But you like to?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Oh, yeah, very much. Yeah, yeah. I will wear kind of tops which are quite sparkly sometimes. [Nic: Ok], Not in a kind of nasty, well maybe nasty in a way, but yes. To be honest, you know quite a lot of my own personal...so outside of work, you know, quite a lot of my fashion sense and probably be more kind of what people say is kind of gay man, [Nic: Ok!], on the queeny side [Nic: Sure, okay] Which I'm so much not like it, but my fashion sense is kind of quite like that I think.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Yeah. That's...it's quite cool. It sounds out of work, you want to dress nicely. You want to decorate your kind of body in the way that</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Yea yea aeactly.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Yeah, it's cool. So do you think...you were talking a bit about evolutionary kind of way that you seem to have about you. I'm just wondering how that's, whether that's the same in terms of kind of personal relationships with partners and whether that...how that's been kind of over time.</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Hmm I don't, I don't(..)MmmI'm not sure. First of all, my partners have always been</p>	<p>it easier to meet/connect with similar others</p> <p>The reality of being me-there aren't lots of women that I can date-it's not the same as usual dating-e.g see someone you like then approach them</p> <p>I'm used to it-this is normal for me</p> <p>Future talk-priorities at the moment</p>		<p>Resists my summary and again resists being positioned by gender/GV</p> <p>Future talk-introduced by Ajax-what does thi</p>
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<p>women. And my partners have always been feminine type of women, and they've always been...they've been women who would view themselves as gay. And you you know, kind of my ideal woman identifies as femme [Nic: Ok], So I've had a number of long-term relationships um my ex-partner who I referred to umm, we split up a number of years ago [Nic: Mmm],. My relationships have, my relationships ...none of my relationships have been negatively impacted my gender identity because they are women who get it [Nic: Sure] And it's not...and I'm not transitioning. I don't want to transition. So so so , you know it's not like I meet someone that I want to go on and journey [Nic: Yea] And these are typically women who have an attraction towards the kind of Butch or gender queer dynamic [Nic: Yes] And I guess, with social networking, it makes it probably easier than it did many years ago[Nic: Yea] But I guess, in practice, the you know, kind of pool of women probably is not as high as it was...well, it definitely isn't as high as it would before a man, you know [Nic: Sure] So I cannot kind of go out, kind of drink, kind of coffee shop, you</p>	<p>are about retiring</p> <p>Personally meaningful</p> <p>Retirement will mean time being myself-having more time-BUT this will not change my gender presentation-that will stay the same even when my life changes</p>	<p>Positioned as not having a choice about GV-there was no point at which Ajax made a choice to be this way-it was as it was and then it was a case of finding a way to manage that and the difficulties it brings</p>	<p>Importance of work-even in the interview there is work to be done-identity of being professional-possibly way of exiting the interview?</p> <p>Introduced by me-wondering what has made the evolutionary process as it was-what meant it wasn't instantly ok to have a blurred gender?</p>
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<p>know, kind of look at the lady and think, 'Oh, she looks nice. She's reading 50 shades of grey I'll go and give her my phone number.' I mean, you know. ((Laughs)). [Nic: ((laughs))] I can't really do that you know that's fine. I don't have an envy of that because I've never had that expectation [Nic: Sure] . And I'm kind of used to... So meeting women who like people such as myself, you know that pool is kind of narrower(..)yea, so(..).</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Yeah. That's what's for you.</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Yeah, it kind of works for me.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Many of the things we talked about kind of...comes kind of around to a sense of you saying to me, "It kind of works to me. And I find a way to make that work for me." I don't know whether that would be your experience of those things.</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> I mean, kind of...I guess, I haven't tried to analyse it in that sense. I don't try to analyse it.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Yeah, fair enough.</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> It kinda works. I mean, my key priorities at the moment are kind of work, retirement ((laughs))</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Yeah ((laughs))</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> You know kinda get out of the office life, not this year or next year, but kind of quite soon. And then, have more time to at least use it...I'm</p>	<p>The context of era is important-</p> <p>Interface of different context factors- conservative background impacts on acceptability of experiences</p> <p>Difficulty of liking background despite what it might say about GV experiences</p> <p>Background meant gender identity was kept hidden-made experiences more difficult</p>	<p>Family positioned loving but conservative-positioned as constrained by their own background?</p> <p>Context positioned as important but hasn't changed life course-so GV in context positioned as not totally powerful. Ajax as able to have some agency against GV</p> <p>Hesitation-again in the context of talking about how to cope etc. with difficulties- this topic certainly seems more difficult to narrate</p>	<p>Reference to narrative of GV as mental problem-restricted option of being either male, female or having a mental problem</p>
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<p>going to use the term “personal development.” I don’t think that, but just live to have more time to kind of just kind of be myself [Nic: Yea], but being myself won’t changing presentational or gender identity, but just have more time for myself. At the moment, my work life balance is difficult. I work long hours. Even at the moment, you know, while we’re talking, I’m thinking about something for a lending scheme, and the fact that I need to get four or five urgent things done before 7 o’clock tomorrow morning. (Overlapping Conversation).</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Constantly, yeah, kind of on your mind. Have you always been like that?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> (Overlapping Conversation). Work wise, I’m not a workaholic, but I work long hours and work is kind of(..). and I’m always doing about five or six things at once.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Sure. You’re kind of a busy brain.</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Unfortunately. I wish I didn’t. Caffeine doesn’t help, but I like my caffeine.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Sure, yes. Okay. Can I just kind of take you back...something you mentioned kind of earlier which was about...it was difficult to give a sense of what have made the kind of...the</p>	<p>Is liberal linked to acceptance by others? This is important when thinking about cultural context-IS this liked to Ajax travelling a lot and living in many different cities?</p> <p>Although context is important-a more liberal context wouldn’t mean that I would be different today-the context meant that it took longer to find my own acceptance, to feel more comfortable-it hasn’t meant that I am different to how I would be in anyway</p>	<p>“silver bullet”-language use</p>	<p>Thinking about coping-what would Ajax have needed during the more angst times-what can this tell us about</p> <p>Although not preferred-surgery is positioned as being powerful enough to “make things easier”. Also this telling demonstrates Ajax’s resistance of</p> <p>I bring it back to the future-what made me go away from the topic earlier and then back to it?</p> <p>Preferred identity of being financially independent/successful etc.</p>
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<p>evolutionary process for your work in terms of your gender identity. But that just makes me think about whether there are any kind of obvious things, whether in your kind of personal context in terms of friends, family, kind of social groups, or wider in terms of societies, that have really gotten in a way of you being able to express yourself in the way that it's meaningful to you.</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Well...I mean, we've kind of touched on it already, but growing up in a slightly different era where things were more closed [Nic: Yea] and kind of gender identity wasn't...I mean, where I grew up, you were male or a female, or you were or you had a mental problem. That's more or less the way it would have been perceived [Nic: Yea] And just growing up in a very loving but conservative background and the conservative society, [Nic: Mm-hmm] it's part of what has made me who I am. And ironically, I love that background. [Nic: Yes, yea] It's very important to me. But there's no doubt that it's made my...it did make my gender identity progression more difficult because I kept it hidden or you know I just felt it wasn't a good environment to be myself. I think that if I liv- if I was growing today,</p>	<p>Future-wants financial independence- drawing on narratives of western expectations?</p> <p>Demonstrates financial success- resists narrative of GV making it difficult to be successful-loneliness narratives etc.</p> <p>Future talk-hopes for future are centered around career and work-not relative to gender identity-this is in</p>	<p>Asks self question-does this re-focus?</p> <p>Emphasises word-not done often during this account</p> <p>Use of humour</p>	
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<p>things might be different. Or if I'd grown up in a much more liberal part of the western world, things may have been different. So just th-th-tha-soci- growing up in a conservative society and a loving but conservative family probably did hinder things.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Does that hinder in a sense of kind of slow things down?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Yeah. Slow, yes. It didn't, I don't think genuinely don't think that if I'd grown up in a much more liberal environment, I would be different today [<b>Nic:</b> Yes] Maybe I would be but I don't think so. But I do think I would have been... think that when I say I've been generally happier with kind of my gender identity over the past 6-8 years, that would probably be over the last 20 years if I'm in a different environment.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Yes, okay. And in the periods you said when it was more angst for you, do you have a sense of what would have made that better during your time? Is there anything?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> I honestly don't think so. I mean, part of it, much of it was...it-it-it's, there's no easy solution for someone like myself because it's not the way I want to go down to surgery to have transition. So I don't think there would have been a silver bullet</p>	<p>line with the repetition of "I do not want to transition"-so is the implication with this that Ajax hope/plan for the future is for their gender identity to remain as it is now</p> <p>Revisiting the role of place in Ajax's life-the future is organised around where to live/not live</p> <p>Future talk-there is a real sense of past, present and future throughout the account</p>	<p>"tick the right box"-repetition of this phrase</p>	<p>Does this require inside info to understand-who has the knowledge</p> <p>Preferred identity relative to place/context of where to live-Philippines described earlier as more liberal...</p> <p>Does the living in between places represent living between genders...the freedom of not being constrained...</p>
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<p>[<b>Nic:</b> Sure] So no easy answer to that type of thing.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Yeah. That makes kind of sense in kind of relation to what you said and the journey you described. I guess, you began to touch it and jumped in a different direction, but I want to come back to, if that's okay, and that is about kind of your future. I guess, I wonder what your hopes and plans for your immediate future and then the longer-term future are.</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> You know, to be honest, I don't really have any other than I want, I want financial independence, and by financial independence, that effectively means to me the, an ability or a flexibility not to need to work again. It's not that I don't want to work and it's not that I want to do nothing, but I want total financial independence [<b>Nic:</b> Sure] sooner rather than later. Certainly by the mid-40s and maybe earlier. Um, so at the moment, in relation to that, I have a number of investments in the Philippines, and these are investment made a number of years ago, 2007 and 2008, that will kind of come to fruition over the next 12 months um and which and um which gives me a certain amount of financial security [<b>Nic:</b> Yea] But I do see myself, although I have worked in</p>	<p>Again re-iterating the importance of place and not being positioned by gender or GV as most important part of identity</p>		<p>Identity claims about the fluctuating nature of things-sometimes important and sometimes not-laid back and flexible attitude</p> <p>Less chunks of Ajax's speech here- much more back and forth</p>
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<p>office environments all my life, I definitely don't want to do that more than say in my mid-40s. So I would probably continue to work in an office environment but certainly have more flexibility from most of my mid-40s onwards. Um prob- um <b>What are my hopes?</b> Well, so not to work in an office environment too much longer, you know, max-<b>maximum</b> another decade, potentially less. And I probably...I certainly don't see myself staying in <b>London</b>. I'm in <b>London</b> for work and work only umm I've been in <b>London</b> for three and a half years which is three years longer than I wanted. But the reality is I work in banking. And in the UK, it's <b>London</b> or nothing these days [<b>Nic: Sure</b>] So I used to work in <b>Belfast</b>. There's nothing for me in <b>Belfast</b> anymore. <b>It's like trying to be like a...working in banking in Belfast is like being a Christian minister in Saudi Arabia. There's not much demand ((laughs))</b> [<b>Nic: ((laughs))</b>] So kind of I will work in an office environment probably for up to a decade. um but I'm working on financial independence <b>and do my thing</b>. And I see myself...longer term, I see myself in a dual location, one to live half my life or thereabouts in <b>Belfast</b>. And I used to always own houses in <b>Belfast</b> and I sold those and</p>	<p>Relationships vary in terms of importance-sometimes are-sometimes aren't</p> <p>-relative to same as gender typical peers-quite usual to think about the future and be aware of finances etc.</p> <p>"I want to die in Belfast"</p>		
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<p>at the moment I'm looking to buy again. Buy a very nice house in certain part of the <b>Belfast</b>, front view, overlooking the <b>Belfast</b> Lock, back view <b>If you're not from Belfast, you won't know that.</b></p> <p><b>Nic:</b> It's sounds important to you.</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> It is, place is very important, so especially somewhere in <b>London</b> where I don't see myself as living in <b>London</b>. I, it's I see <b>London</b>, I view myself almost as a visitor here. <b>So place is exceptionally important.</b> So I see myself living part of my life in <b>Belfast</b> and part of my life overseas, whether that's the <b>Philippines</b> or the States, I'm not quite sure yet. And I'm not in the position to make that decision. <b>Relationship wise</b>, I, so as I said I've had a number of long-term relationships, since my kind of last relationship broke up three years ago, almost three- just over three years ago, I've had a number of relationships in <b>London</b> which haven't really worked. And you know I've met some people who in theory <b>tick the right boxes</b>, but I just don't feel any, any::: umm real emotion other than best as friends, and even then, sometimes not. So kind of I've gone through a reasonable number of relationships, of short-term relationships that don't work for me.</p>	<p>This is normal for me-living in between genders cannot e described as anything other that "It's me"-</p>	<p>Claims of sameness- "if you ask someone who is very definitely male and a man or someone's who's very definitely female"-gender identity is not just a feature of the lives of Gvt people- it's everyone's business</p> <p>Does this mean that the stories are well rehearsed- "people ask me those same</p>	<p>My introduction to asking about what it is like to be interviewed about gender identity</p> <p>-My prompting to allow for any answer, as I was unsure how Ajax found being interviewed.</p> <p>-A sense that their own journey is</p>
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<p>And to be quite honest, at times in my life, relationship is important. At times, it isn't [Nic: Yes] And just at the moment, it isn't. It will be again, but whether that's in a year or five years or a decade, I just honestly don't know. But just at the moment, relationship is not just not, it's kind of, it just not a thing. I can't answer why that is.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Yeah, no. Are you somebody that thinks a lot about the future or would you say you're somebody who thinks more about kind of right now?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> I think about the future, yeah. I think about the future certainly in the financial sense. [Nic: Yea] Yeah. And I think about places where I want to be. So kind of, I can't tell you where I will be in 10 years. I do know I want to die in Ireland, I want to die in Belfast. I can tell you that.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> So you like that already. Yeah.</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Genuinely</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> I don't doubt you. And I see that that's you and that's what you kind of do.</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> So I think I would be living in certain places but I want to die in Belfast. Yeah.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> What do you think is important about you dying in Belfast?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Place is important. I can't articulate exactly why place is</p>	<p>-Don't try to analyse it-its so normal for me</p> <p>-Reference always made against feeling of masculinity rather than femininity-"sometimes feel masculine, sometimes don't"</p> <p>-Gender in relation to how seen by others</p> <p>-Places conversation into context of gender typicality-asking-how do people that are definitely male/female describe themselves, other than to say "it feels right"</p> <p>-It presents some external challenges-challenges relative to being in the world</p>	<p>types of questions"- "I'm used to talking about this"</p>	<p>different-is there an expectation within the GVt experience that there is an expected journey</p> <p>-What is the impact of being asked questions over and over again about experiences? What does this mean for how Ajax has come to relate to their own experiences. Does the very process of this being a research project give a message that the experience is unusual in some way?</p> <p>People more likely to ask partner about Ajax's gender identity-relative to social acceptability of asking questions-dominant narratives about experience being unusual</p>
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<p>important to me. Place is the most important thing to me.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> What does it feel like for you to be in Belfast? How do you feel kind of in yourself?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> The same as I do here.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> It doesn't feel different?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> I don't think it necessarily feels different, no, but it's just important to be there.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Yeah. Is there a loyalty? Is there a sense of loyalty or is it different from that?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> A sense of loyalty, a sense of memory, and just a sense of being home. Just a sense of "This is my place." I think for some people, that's important.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Yeah, absolutely. And for you, too. Yeah, that makes sense. Okay. I guess, it's just kind of one other thing. It was one of the things you first said as we began our conversation today, and it was about kind of being happy living in that place in between. So, it's not male and it's not female but it's somewhere in between. And I don't know if you have any more words or ideas about what that place in between is.</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Umm, well, for me, it's me. So I don't really try to define it. I don't try to analyse it. It just feels right for</p>			<p>Is this relative to the comment earlier-you're male or female or you're mad?</p>
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<p>me. As i said, sometimes, externally it doesn't work. But for me, it's what I am, it's the kind of blurring of gender. It's not, it's genuinely not black and white. In some days, I can feel more masculine. In some days, I don't. Sometimes, people who know me will...sometimes, they will kind of say they kind of see me more masculine and sometimes more feminine. So it's...I'm not really sure what that place is other than I'm in it[Nic: Yea] It's probably the same as if you ask someone who is very definitely male and a man or someone's who's very definitely female and a woman, what their gender identity is, I'm not sure that they can necessarily describe it other than it just feels right. For me, it feels right. It presents some external challenges, but it just feels right for me.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Yeah, cool. Okay. So, I guess, as we come to the end of the interview, it's just a few kind of post-interview questions, if that sort of make sense. And I just wonder what your experience of having an interview about your gender identity has been like? Is it...was it unusual? Different? Difficult?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> No, well, it wasn't...certainly, it wasn't difficult. I don't think it was</p>	<p>Gender isn't important to me-again resisting gender positioning</p> <p>Gender and gender identity is not that important to me-I don't have a burning desire to talk/think etc. about it</p>		
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<p>difficult. I probably think it's of less use to your work because my story is slightly different than others so I don't have the same challenges. My challenges, my challenges, you know kind of, my journey is kind of very different to most people you probably interviewed. I won't say it's difficult simply because over time, people ask me those same types of questions. They don't ask me the questions in a controlled way and they don't ask the same number of questions. Someone will ask me one question one day and someone will ask me a question the other day. So I'm kind of used to talking [Nic: Yea, you're used to talking about it]So it's not my sort of conversation everyday but over...in the past 15 years, I don't know how long, but you know people have asked me a lot of questions about gender identity and kind of what do I have and kind of...yeah. Actually, they don't ask me, they ask my partners. Very few people have asked me that, but they actually do ask my partners which I find bizarre [Nic: Yea] But they...yeah, so people ask me questions about gender and my identity. I'm kind of quite used to talking about it, not difficult. I mean, not difficult I guess. Just some of my, some of my perspectives are quite</p>			
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<p>limited because I don't have that same type of journey as some people do.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Okay. And are there any questions that you expected to be asked today that you weren't?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> To be honest, I don't think so, to be honest I-I-I Obviously, we spoke beforehand and you suggested kind of how the interview would go and types of things. So I don't think there was anything you didn't ask that I thought would be asked.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Okay. Is there anything that you kind of think is missing or that you would want to add, yeah, just about kind of related to anything we've spoken about or not spoken about today?</p> <p><b>Ajax:</b> Umm, I don't think so. Why my story is slightly limited is I don't have a burning passion about gender or gender identity [Nic: Yea] Maybe I should have. Maybe intellectually, it's a kind of control mechanism. I'm sure there's some sort of theory behind it. But I just don't feel as passionate about some of these things and about the need for the gender justice as some of the people do.</p> <p><b>Nic:</b> Yeah. Fair enough. Okay. So I guess that comes to the end. I suppose my kind of final things to</p>			
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say, do you have any questions or...? <b>Ajax:</b> Nope. <b>Nic:</b> Great. Okay. Thank you very much.			
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### Third Stage of the Analysis: Global Impression

#### Ajax's Global Impression

Ajax's narrative told the story of having different internal and external experiences of their GV. Internally, Ajax told of having found a way with GV that *"works for me"* but *"externally it is more difficult"* living as someone who was neither male nor female, but has a *"blurred gender"*. The account was coherently narrated and there was a clear sense of Ajax's journey over time in relation to their gender identity. Ajax recounted stories from their earliest experiences of a *"disconnect gender wise"* through to their adolescence and early adulthood during which time they considered medical intervention. The pace of the account was steady and the events that have contributed to Ajax's GVt experiences were narrated confidently and linked to describe their progression of an internal achievement of being *"much more comfortable"* than in their earlier life.

In terms of the narrative of their external experiences of their gender, Ajax's account told of their preference of having a *"blurred gender"* but that they had learned from experience that this leads to both them and others feeling *"awkward"*. For example, when having their gender confused whilst eating out with colleagues. Ajax goes on to tell of how they had learned to manage: *"I just want to avoid that type of embarrassing situation which is why I wear a long-sleeved shirt at work, you know."* On the one hand this appeared to position Ajax as having agency in managing social situations. However, this agency was also limited as Ajax's stories showed how they were unable to achieve their preferred *"blurred"* identity in their social world. The contrast of these stories made the narrative of different internal and external experiences convincing to the audience.

Another thread of the account was Ajax's attempts to resist being positioned by their gender and the invitation to the audience to know other parts of themselves (aside from their gender). This was achieved during the account by reminding the audience that place, politics and religion was more central to their identity definition and, thus, gender was told as being less relevant:

*"(..).to be quite honest, you know, in terms of identity, gender isn't, gender is not my...the key way I identify. The most important thing for me is place, so I identify by place rather than gender."* Stories about these elements of Ajax's identity were told with greater volume, intonation and richly described events that were engaging to listen to.