



An interpretative phenomenological analysis of identity management and coping strategies of transsexuals in the workplace

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ABSTRACT

There is a distinct dearth of transgender research which focuses on workplace experiences. The present study aims to fill that gap by using qualitative methods to explore the strategies employed by transsexuals in terms of their identity management and coping strategies of gender transition in the workplace. Through purposive sampling from Gloucestershire and Wiltshire transgender support groups, participants chosen had a work history and self-identified as transsexual or gender variant. By drawing on four in-depth interviews this study illustrates the process of creating a new social gender identity and how that is managed within the workplace. Using interpretative phenomenological analysis, three major themes emerged: a) preparation, planning and process of transition in the workplace, b) the 'self' – challenges and coping strategies within the workplace, and c) negotiating the gender binary system and interaction in the workplace. These themes relate to the triggers of disclosure at work, interaction and how individuals manage their careers, and work with organisations in managing their transition process. For participants who had transitioned, open workplace transitions were a positive experience which helped to reduce stigma and add some stability to an emotional and physical transition.

KEY WORDS:	TRANSGENDER	GENDER	IDENTITY	DISCLOSURE	WORK
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*Different though the sexes are, they inter-mix.
In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the
other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that
keep the male or female likeness, while underneath
the sex is the very opposite of what it is above.*

- Virginia Woolf

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Introduction

For the majority of people conceptualisation of their biological sex fits in with traditional gender socialisation (Budge, Tebbe, & Howard, 2010). However, there is a distinct portion of the population who find that their biological sex does not crystallise with their gender identity; typically, this population is defined as being transgender (Budge et al., 2010; Cashore & Tuason, 2009). Groups of people who identify as transgender do not subscribe to the male/female binary system constructed and imposed by contemporary western society (Clarke, 2010). This binary thinking of male and female is reinforced within society by the activities and behaviours that we engage in, such as the use of toilet and changing facilities and self-presentation (Dietert & Dentice, 2009). Consequently, alternative identities and failing to engage in socially prescribed ways can be both challenging and problematic for the transgender community (Gagne, Tewksbury, & McGaughey, 1997).

The social construction of gender and sexuality has contributed to a history of discrimination and prejudice of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) minority groups (Breakwell, Hammond, Fife-Shaw, & Smith, 2006). This has made life difficult for some individuals in terms of family and friends, education and social life, with employment discrimination affecting work and career aspirations (Clarke, J.Elliss, Peel, & W.Riggs, 2010). Employment discrimination can be defined as individuals being treated less favourably due to their race, gender, religion, sexual orientation or other attribute (D. Miller & Higgins, 2006). One of the greatest concerns to transgender people is probably discrimination in the workplace (Whittle, 2002). In the face of such difficulties, the purpose of this study is to explore the experience of identity management and the coping strategies used by transsexuals in the workplace.

Definitions and terms

Trans or transgender are both used as umbrella terms to encompass a number of identities, some of which include transsexual, inter-sex and cross-dresser, drag queen (Cashore & Tuason, 2009). It is important to note that gender identity and transgender are separate and different to sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is how a person defines their sexual attraction, it is not linked to how one defines their internal sense of gender (Mitchell & Howarth, 2009). Hence, transgender people can identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or heterosexual. A transsexual can be defined as a person who has a sense of discomfort with their anatomical sex, accompanied with the desire to live and be accepted as a member of the opposite sex (Barrett, 2007). For the purpose of clarity within this research the terms trans and transgender are used to refer to a wide range of people with various gender identities, and more specific terminology such as male-to-female (MtF) and transsexual will be used when referring to particular sub-sections. Within the context of this study the term transition is the process by which individuals come to live full time in their preferred gender rather than their birth gender (Kirk & Belovics, 2008). A full glossary of terms and abbreviations can be found in Appendix B.

Transgender population

The England/Wales and Scottish Census's have not asked the population if they identify as transgender, therefore no official estimate exists for the number of transgender individuals in the United Kingdom (Mitchell & Howarth, 2009). Consequently there are a number of conflicting estimates within the research which range from 15,000 (Barrett, 2007) to 65,000 transsexual people in the UK (Johnson, 2001), with gender difference is expressed by 300,000-500,00 people (GIREs, 2010).

There is evidence to suggest a rise in transgender activity over the last 15 years (Beaumont-Vernon, 2004; Schilt & Connell, 2007). GIREs (2010) suggest that this growth is due to the greater knowledge and accessibility of information available via the internet and the media, less media hostility, the increased possibility of NHS treatment, legal safeguards, help-lines and groups. Hence the importance in understanding transgender needs is even more paramount within today's society.

The importance of work

A job or career is a necessity for most people, enabling them to support themselves and their families, have a sense of pride and purpose and use the financial rewards to enjoy goods and services (Argyle, 1992). Employment can determine one's socio-economic status and can be an imperative part of social interaction (Whittle, 2002). As part of the 'real-life experience' occupation is even more paramount for anybody going through gender transition, as gender identity clinics require patients to successfully live full-time, on a day-to-day basis, in their acquired gender role for a minimum of one to two years before gender reassignment surgery takes place (Bockting, 2008). In constituting 'success' within the occupational setting, this is when the individual is treated by others as if they are the assumed sex (Barrett, 2007). To do this they must feel comfortable and confident with their new role. For some transsexuals who are cut off from family and friends, the workplace provides a place where social contacts can be retained (Whittle, 2002). However, despite equalities legislation and government initiatives for under-represented groups to enter the workplace, transgender people continue to suffer from discrimination, harassment and restricted opportunities (Mitchell & Howarth, 2009).

The dilemma of workplace disclosure

Whilst both positive and negative post-transition experiences have been reported, fear of workplace discrimination can deter some people from disclosing their gender identity to their colleagues or employers (Hewitt, 2005; Law, Martinez, Ruggs, Hebl, & Akers, in press). Fear of being turned down for a position, dismissal, withheld promotion, hostility, harassment and other adverse reactions to transgender disclosure can lead to a person remaining in stealth or closeted at work (D. Miller & Higgins, 2006). *Stealth* is a term used by the post-transition transgender community who opt not to disclose their transgender history, and the term closeted is used by pre-transition transgender people who hide their identity (D. Miller & Higgins, 2006; Schilt, 2004; Zimman, 2009).

For most transgender adults declaration in the workplace is usually the last step in transitioning (Bockting, 2008). Prior disclosure and support from family and friends is usually in place before taking this step, which can help to buffer the negative impact of stigma. However, compared to LGB people, transgender people have the lowest level of support (Bockting, 2008). As such, the declaration of transgender identity can be one of the most challenging and personal announcements that a transgendered individual can share (Maguen, Shipherd, Harris, & Welch, 2007). It is a political, personal and social process that involves a willingness to combat legal, social and personal discrimination (Gartrell, 1981).

Transitioning threats in the workplace include the fear of disapproval, stigmatisation, discrimination, prejudice, rejection, ostracism, harassment and violence (Lombardi & van Servellen, 2000). Hence, Mitchell and Howarth (2009) emphasise that the psychosocial work environment can affect both physical and mental health. The nexus between discrimination against minority groups and societal oppression can create internalised stigma in the construction of one's self-concept (Fassinger, Shullman, & Stevenson, 2010). Internalised stigma refers to the personal acceptance of societies stigmatised responses as part of one's own value system (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2009), and self-concept is the set of beliefs about who we are (Taylor, Peplau, & Sears, 2006). The suggestion that stigmatised groups are viewed as inferior and discredited by the majority is upheld by stigma theory (D. Miller & Higgins, 2006). Consonant with the notion of internalised stigma is suppressed gender identity. Suppression of emotions and thoughts is difficult to maintain, and often results in rumination, with thoughts manifesting themselves and affecting the immune system (Taylor et al., 2006). This view was supported in a study of gay men and lesbians coming out at work, whereby Griffith and Hebl (2002) reported that rumination affects psychological well-being, life satisfaction and presents increased health risks.

Central to the present discussion are the psychological consequences of concealment, suppression, stigmatisation and fear, and how the transgender community cope with these constructs. Many transgender individuals have carried these psychological experiences with them since childhood, thus internalising the perception that they are a problem or are socially unacceptable (Kennedy & Hellen, 2010). The fear associated with this perception can lead to careful steps being taken to conceal their identity, and creates a high level of self-awareness about how they express themselves (Kennedy & Hellen, 2010). This fear is not unfounded; an American study by Minter and Daley (2003), reported that almost 50% of transgender individuals reported discrimination due to their trans-status in the workplace.

Withholding gender identity at work can have negative consequences for both the individual and the organisation (Beatty & Kirby, 2006). Workers with poor support from colleagues and managers, and with high job demands or low job security have a greater risk of ill health (Smeaton, Hudson, Radu, & Vowden, 2010). The most common psychological conditions that develop from discriminatory behaviour are increasing levels of anxiety/stress, loss of confidence, depression and in some cases drug or alcohol dependency (Kirk & Belovics, 2008). Hence, in a hostile work environment it is possible that transphobia, hostility towards transgender people, could contribute to stress related problems and even suicide (Smeaton et al., 2010).

Another negative consequence of remaining in stealth is that the invisibility and defensive silence can lead to further disengagement and withdrawal from work (Bell, Özbilgin, Beauregard, & Sürgevil, 2011). Conversely, openness within an organisation, and a strong policy of rejecting discriminatory practices at work, can lead to higher levels of job satisfaction and employee commitment (Bell et al., 2011). Congruent with this, past research has demonstrated that disclosure was related to strong organisational commitment, lower conflict with co-workers, higher job satisfaction and lower role ambiguity and role conflict (Griffith & Hebl, 2002).

Identity formation in the workplace

How transsexual people choose to transition is dependent upon the individual, but it generally involves changing one's name, requesting a change of gender pronouns, wearing gendered clothing and taking hormones and in some cases gender reassignment surgery (Dietert & Dentice, 2009). The change in appearance can elicit hostile reactions from co-workers and impact on how gender identity is negotiated in the workplace (Chope & Strom, 2008; Dietert & Dentice, 2009).

Although sexual orientation and gender identity are different, both are stigmatised and can involve concealing an identity (Law et al., in press). As such, negative reactions contribute to building barriers of expression of the true-self (Mason-Schrock, 1996). Hence, transsexual people are faced with daily dilemmas relating to how they express and manage their gender identity.

Fear of disclosure can lead to a person hiding their identity for a number of years or even a lifetime. Some will take on hyper-masculine or hyper-feminine roles hoping to mask their true identity or cure themselves of transgendered thoughts and behaviour (Gagne et al., 1997). For example it is not uncommon for transsexual men to join the military or take high risk occupations to help portray a masculine image (Barrett, 2007). Brown (1988) argues that the timing of the hyper-masculinity flight coincides with the age of starting work or entering the military, where the prevalence of transsexuals is much higher than in the civilian population. With a history of classifying homosexuality, bisexuality and transgenderism as a criminal offence, by definition many transgender individuals will attempt to complete their service by suppressing their gender identity which can lead to psychological distress (Brown, 1988).

Disclosure of one's transsexual status may be inevitable within the workplace, and research has shown that this can present both challenges and acceptance by working colleagues (Schilt & Connell, 2007). Research on the disclosure of sexual orientation within the workplace has shown that it can be beneficial in improving attitudes, which may also be an effective strategy for transgender individuals (Bell et al., 2011; Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Huffman, Watrous-Rodriguez, & King, 2008; Law et al., in press). The visibility of an open workplace transition can bring potential benefits such as gaining wider legal rights and educating the general public on transgender lives, but may also help to break down the dichotomies that have been socially constructed by the gender binary system. As Cashore and Tuason (2009) imply, the dichotomies of male and female are usually the only gender options available within Western society. This binary view is reinforced by the imposition of masculine and feminine genders on male and female bodies, and arguably

perpetuates the construction of gender stereotypes (Gherovici, 2010). Such is the strength of the gender system and gender belief systems within the social infrastructure, that those who do not fall on the male/female dichotomy often redefine their identities to try and conform to traditional beliefs about sex and gender (Gagne et al., 1997). Thus, stereotyping with the workplace provides a dual complexity for transsexuals. Most cultures impose male and female stereotypes on the type of work (Chope & Strom, 2008). Despite anti-discrimination law and more liberated attitudes, many occupations remain sex-segregated, hence transitioning in a stereotypical job role may be problematic (Chope & Strom, 2008). In fact, many males and females aspire to gender-appropriate roles, which can add to the challenge of both changing identity and job role when transitioning in the workplace (L. Miller & Hayward, 2006).

Contradictory to the gender similarities hypothesis, that suggests males and females are similar on most psychological variables, transsexuals report experiencing very different gender dynamics and behaviour (Hyde, 2005; Schilt & Connell, 2007). As West and Zimmerman (1987, pg. 126) explain “doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micro-political activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine natures”. As such, many transgender individuals spend time practising their speech and movements, effectively re-training their bodies to correspond with their new gender role (Schrock, Reid, & Boyd, 2005). Not only do they have to learn new mannerisms but also new gender boundaries and interactional styles (Schilt & Connell, 2007). This involves constant self-monitoring which demonstrates the importance of passing in the new gender role, which is of concern due to fears of job loss or alienation from co-workers (Gary & Elliot, 2008). Self-monitoring refers to the level at which the individual regulates, controls and observes how they are fulfilling social expectations within a particular context (Clair, Beatty, & Maclean, 2005). Identity also becomes meaningful through the response of others, thus there is pressure for authentication and acceptance in the workplace (Mason-Schrock, 1996).

Gaining and retaining work

Many organisations recognise the need for diversity in the workforce; hence some progress with employment prospects have started to develop. However, despite experience and qualifications, discrimination still exists with many transgender individuals remaining severely under-employed or unemployed (Chope & Strom, 2008). In the United Kingdom it was reported in 2008 that the transgender group already suffered from high unemployment, with a rate of 14% as opposed to the national average of 5% (Smeaton et al., 2010). A further study outlines that 55% of transgender people had an HND/degree or postgraduate degree but for 50% of participants their annual income was less than £10,000 with only 30% of participants declaring over £20,000 as their gross annual income (Mitchell & Howarth, 2009). A study by the San Francisco Human Rights Commission indicated that approximately 70% of the respondent transsexual individuals were either unemployed or under-employed (Letellier, 2003). Furthermore, many post-transition individuals who had professional or high profile jobs were having to look at jobs below their ability, which could be disastrous in terms of financial stability and career prospects (Whittle, 2000a).

The interview process can be stressful for any person, but can be especially difficult and emotionally exhausting for those transitioning, because they may find that portraying an assertive and positive image challenging (Pepper & Lorah, 2008).

There are many reports of positive responses to resume's or telephone interviews only to find that interest is withdrawn upon meeting the potential employer (Minter & Daley, 2003). Consequently, when approaching transition at work some individuals may decide to transition in their current place of work rather than in a new place of employment (Pepper & Lorah, 2008).

Remaining in a current role can help financial stability and being surrounded with familiar co-workers and familiar duties can add some consistency to a difficult time (Pepper & Lorah, 2008). Conversely, problems may arise with some co-workers who may find it difficult to forget his/her former gender and therefore use improper pronouns (Berry, McGuffee, Rush, & Columbus, 2003). Other problems can arise such as verbal and physical abuse, work place sabotage and difficulties with access to toilet facilities (Berry et al., 2003; Pepper & Lorah, 2008). Subsequently, many transsexual employees are forced by their employers, or the result of conditions at work, to leave their employment (Berry et al., 2003).

When transitioning in a new place of work an individual may not have to disclose their gender identity if they pass easily in their acquired gender (Pepper & Lorah, 2008). However, anxiety about disclosing one's transgender status can lead to people delaying or terminating their job search (Minter & Daley, 2003). This is supported in a self-report study of employment discrimination in Australia which found that approximately 49% of participants decided on a career change at the time of transition (Irwin, 2002).

The present study

A strong argument has been made for exploring the psychological experience of gender transition in more detail and how this inter-relates within the workplace. Hence, the aim of this study is to explore the experience of the transition process and coping strategies of transgender individuals in relation to gender identity management in the workplace.

There is a notable lack of psychological research investigating various manifestations and attitudes of transgender issues within the workplace (Budge et al., 2010; Chung, 2003; Law et al., in press; Schilt & Connell, 2007). To the best of my knowledge no research exists on the coping strategies employed by transsexuals' in the workplace when transitioning. Transgender research is often grouped together with lesbian, gay and bisexual research (Cashore & Tuason, 2009; Chung, 2003; Law et al., in press). However, whilst it can be argued that they share common themes and discursive patterns, it could also be argued that by grouping together a minority within a sexual minority masks issues faced by the transgender community and implies an equity that does not exist. Whilst much progress has been made with LGB equality and fairness within the workplace, transgender people have largely been ignored (Mitchell & Howarth, 2009; Pepper & Lorah, 2008). The present research will address this gap.

Drawing on four in-depth interviews, this qualitative study will give a rich insight into the interaction of the psychological experience and gender transition in the workplace. It will illustrate how gender transition is a proactive experience on the part of the individual, and how it has a major significance to their identity, how they think, feel and reflect on the meaning of their experience. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) provides a method of understanding of how transsexuals make sense of their experience within the workplace, by taking an idiographic phenomenological perspective and the subjective experience of the participant (Langdridge, 2007). IPA is a particularly useful analytical tool for this type of subjective and contextual study, where issues relating to identity management and the self are important (Jonathan A Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Willig, 2008). However, IPA does rely on the ability of participants to verbalise their experiences (Willig, 2008). Other approaches, such as discourse and thematic analysis, were considered, but because much of the lived experience of individuals is missing from mainstream psychology, due to quantitative emphasis on theory, the richness of IPA was deemed the most appropriate methodology (Breakwell et al., 2006).

This study will contribute to the work on discrimination in the workplace but more importantly will further understanding of this consistently marginalised group and how they experience the psychological effects of transitioning at work.

Researcher epistemological position

The importance of my own philosophical assumptions helped to determine IPA as a suitable form of methodology. In taking a phenomenological approach, interpretive research is dissimilar to the scientific tradition of an objective reality (Jonathan A Smith et al., 2009). The methodology that IPA employs is clear and follows a psychological paradigm, which provides qualitative information to inform theory (Willig, 2008). Hence my own contextual constructionist epistemological position stems from my ontological position and the belief that there are multiple realities, which are dependent upon time, place and context, and vary between different groups of people and social settings, (Madill, Jordan, & Shirley, 2000).

As the researcher, my own experience and interpretation is intertwined with that of the participants, hence a double hermeneutic which extracts subjective meanings from social interaction. Whilst I try to offer an objective account of participants' experiences, I also share my experience as part of a lesbian minority group and the experience of self-disclosure in the workplace. I therefore combine my own knowledge and interpretation in constructing the research findings by capturing the participants' experiences and reality of gender transition at work.

Method

Participants

Four participants were recruited from two separate transgender support groups following circulation of the research information on the group's websites (Appendix C), and a brief presentation by the researcher at the group meetings.

IPA typically seeks purposive and homogeneous sampling, with little variation across demographic characteristics (Langdrige, 2007). Hence, due to the rationale of investigating how transsexual people make sense of their experience within the workplace, only those considering, or those who have gone through gender reassignment, and with a work history or in current employment, were included in the study. The participant's ages were between 40 and 59, and all were in employment. Detailed participant profiles are included in Appendix D and demographics in Appendix E. To preserve anonymity, the participants were given pseudonyms and the name of the employer was removed where requested.

Guidelines presented by Smith (2010) suggest that a reasonable sample size of between three and six participants is necessary to capture the complexity of the human experience within a dissertation project. Other research suggests a minimum data of five hours (Gough, Lawton, Madill, & Stratton, 2003). Hence, the collective data in the current study of 4 hours, 44 minutes (table 1), should allow for sufficient content from which meaningful points and micro analysis can be conducted, with difference and homogeneity emerging without being problematic.

Table 1 Participant identity and interview length

Participant (pseudonym)	Gender Identity	Length of interview Hours/Mins
Sara	Male to female	1 hour & 05 minutes
Dani	Male to female	1 hour & 34 minutes
Claire	Gender variant	1 hour & 07 minutes
Liam	Female to male	58 minutes

Design

Data were collected through four, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews, which were used to elicit, record and report transsexuals' interpretations of their lives in the context of their experience in the workplace. Semi-structured interviews were deemed as an appropriate method of collecting consistent information, whilst allowing sufficient flexibility and freedom for participants to share their own experiences.

Materials

During the preliminary research stage, an information sheet outlining the purpose of the study was sent to each transgender support group, and a printed copy was given to each participant (Appendix C).

Due to the complexity of gender and individuals' transition status, much consideration and research was given to the design of the semi-structured interview schedule. The interview schedule (Appendix F) was designed to start by eliciting information about the participants' backgrounds, to enable the researcher to direct

appropriate questions. Questions included 'how did your job affect your decisions regarding gender reassignment?', 'how did you feel about coming out in the workplace?' and 'can you describe the process that you experienced when choosing an open workplace transition?' The aim was to make each participant feel comfortable and ask open ended questions to encourage the participants to give a detailed description of their experience. The middle section of the interview was specifically work related, with the closing section asking more general questions relating to social attitudes.

Each participant was given a consent form prior to the interview commencing (Appendix G). The consent form outlined the study aims, informed participants of their anonymity, recording of the interview, data protection, transcript availability, and explained their right to withdraw at any stage of the investigation. The interviews were recorded using an Olympus WS-650S, digital voice recorder. This allowed the researcher to focus on the discussion without having to write notes, and provided a means of producing a verbatim transcription of each interview. The digital recordings were backed up on a Samsung laptop. The transcriptions were carried out on the Samsung laptop, using Microsoft Office Word 2007.

A written debrief (Appendix H) was given to each participant. This restated the research objectives, and provided contact details of the researcher and further support within University of Gloucestershire.

Procedure

Participants from the transgender support groups were contacted to confirm their interest in taking part in the study. Following their agreement, interview dates, times and locations were mutually agreed (table 2). The interview schedule (Appendix F) was then emailed to each participant a week before their interview. This was done to allow participants time to consider the topic areas and to inform the researcher if there were any questions that they did not want to pursue before the start of the interview. None of the participants requested any changes to the schedule. A fully detailed description of each interview process is contained in Appendix D.

Table 2 Interview details

Participant	Interview Location	Date & Time	Time
Sara	Sara's home	09/10/2011	16:00
Dani	Dani's workplace, private conference room	12/10/2011	15:50
Claire	University of Gloucestershire, Francis Close Hall Campus – private study room	22/10/2011	12:00
Liam	University of Gloucestershire, Oxstalls Campus, private society room	03/11/2011	10:00

Before commencing each interview, I checked that each participant had received a copy of the research information sheet, explained the contents of the consent form (Appendix G), before obtaining informed consent. A digital voice recorder was used to record the interview, which was tested prior to starting each interview, afterwards was placed alongside the interview schedule, conveniently between the researcher and the participant to ensure that it picked up the narrative. I proceeded to ask the first question which then determined which other questions on the schedule applied to each individual. Once all the questions had been covered I asked the participant if they had any questions. A verbal and written debrief of the study including further contact details was given to each participant (Appendix H). They were then thanked for their participation and given two bottles of wine as a gesture of appreciation.

The recording of each interview was then transcribed verbatim, to a line numbered document (Appendix J). Because IPA aims to interpret the meaning of the content of the participant's account, unlike discourse analysis it works with a simple level of transcription (Langdridge, 2007; Jonathan A Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, IPA does not require the exact length of pauses or non-verbal utterances (Jonathan A Smith et al., 2009). However, a simple level of notation was applied (Appendix K).

As transcribing is already an interpretation of the interview (Langdridge, 2007), I felt it was important to stay as close to the speech of the participant as possible, therefore transcripts were not cleaned up by erasing or correcting any aspects of speech.

Ethical considerations

In the first instance, ethical approval of the study was granted by the University of Gloucestershire (Appendix A). The study was carried out in accordance with the University of Gloucestershire and BPS (August 2009), ethical guidelines. The four

key ethical principles, respect, competence, responsibility and integrity, were strongly adhered to during every stage of the study.

Participants volunteered to take part in the study. They were informed that all information provided would be confidential, although due to the nature of the study total anonymity could not be guaranteed. The participants names were replaced with pseudonyms and do not appear in any of the work or documentation produced for the study. All data was stored anonymously in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998), held on a password protected computer. The voice recordings will be destroyed once the results of the dissertation are confirmed.

Prior to commencing the interview, informed consent was gained from each participant. This was verbally reinforced, as was the right to stop the interview or withdraw at a later date. The consent forms are kept by the researcher in order to protect anonymity, and will be shredded upon completion of the study. Each interviewee was made fully aware of the purpose of the study without any deception.

Following completion of the interview, each participant was provided with an opportunity to ask questions, given a verbal and written debrief containing further contact details of the investigator, supervisor, Help Zone and student counselling services. The interviewee was also informed that he/she may request a copy of the final report if desired.

Regarding my own safety; interview dates, locations and times were mutually agreed with each participant. I notified my partner of my whereabouts prior to each meeting and the time expected to finish. When organising a mutual location for conducting each interview due consideration was given to the participants' safety and confidentiality. The researcher did not know any of the participants prior to embarking on the research study. However, I had met all participants during the preliminary research stage, at either a Pride event or at the transgender support group meetings. Having met the participants prior to the interview was helpful in purposive sampling and gaining rapport quickly at the interview stage.

Analysis

Analytical strategy

The analytical process of IPA requires deep engagement with the interview transcripts in order to identify emergent themes that arise from each participant's unique data. Therefore, each interview transcript (Appendix J) was analysed independently in accordance with guidelines set out by Smith and Osborn (2008), Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) and Langdridge (2007). The analytical process took a systematic approach as described in Appendix L, and involved listening to each recording, reading and re-reading each transcript to gain familiarisation with the narratives. Several stages of coding were used to focus on interpreting the meaning of the lived experience of each participant. Exploratory comments were then added in the right margin of each transcript. These were used to describe content, key words, phrases or explanations that the participant used to describe their experience and understanding (Jonathan A Smith et al., 2009). An analytic

shift was then taken to working with the exploratory comments rather than the transcripts themselves in order to identify emergent themes across the data corpus.

Connections across the emergent themes were made from a level of abstraction, which was used to form clusters of themes and identify recurrent themes. Then, checking for consistency between the identified themes, some themes were discarded and others that appeared to have the most salient connections across the participants were developed.

Analysis

The analytical process revealed three overarching super-ordinate themes and ten lower-level sub-ordinate themes which provide a coherent understanding of gender transition in the workplace (Figure 1 and Appendix M). The super-ordinate themes presented are those which the researcher feels are pertinent to the research question and will be discussed in turn with supporting quotes extracted from the transcripts within the analysis.

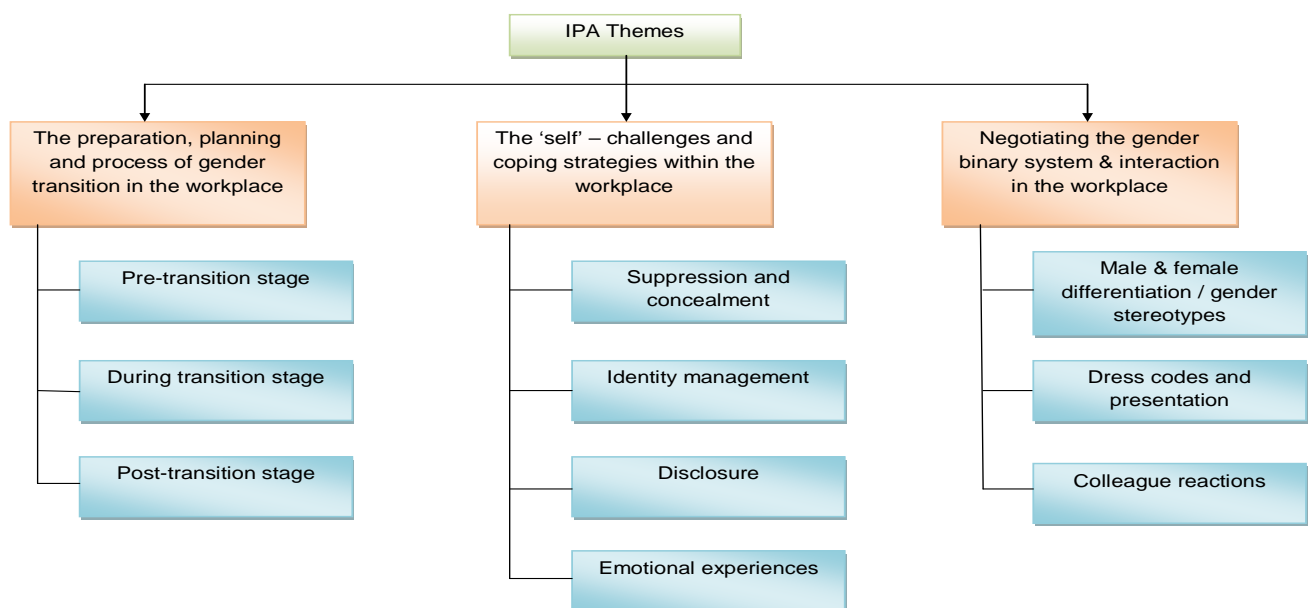


Figure 1. Thematic map showing super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes

Preparation, planning and process of gender transition in the workplace

It became clear during the analysis that participants were describing three phases to gender transition in the workplace: pre-transition, during transition and post-transition. Hence this was found to be a constant overarching theme throughout many of the participant's experiences.

In the pre-transition phase all participants shared the experience of gender anxiety from early childhood, with much of their working lives spent presenting as their

biological sex. In this study all participants had made the transition in their personal lives prior to the workplace, an approach supported within the literature (Bockting, 2008; Dietert & Dentice, 2009). How and when participants chose to transition in the workplace was dependent upon the individual.

For most participants timing of their transition was usually triggered by a major life event, such as a change in job, change in personal circumstances, or as Liam explains his transition was prompted by prejudiced comments and he subsequently felt the need to educate colleagues on the effects of transgender discrimination:

... to be honest I just at that time was to get a job and you know, stand on my feet and part of you know, then look at the transition and work around. I didn't think I'd be coming out so soon, even though after that training I didn't do a lot then, it was look guys, I am trans, I'm not doing anything about it, um, but what I want you to learn from this, and for me to say, not because, it hurts, what you guys say it hurts and makes my life and other people's lives harder and that's the message I wanted to get across. (Liam 167-178)

Here Liam highlights the importance of getting a job and independence prior to embarking on his gender transition. Consequently his trans identity is invisible in the workplace whilst he is presenting in his biological sex. As an invisible identity all participants challenged any prejudice or discrimination in the workplace. In Liam's case he found that hearing negative comments was hurtful, which triggered him to disclose his transgender status and explain the emotional consequences of prejudice in order to educate his colleagues. Here Liam is explicit in explaining the 'hurt', meaning the pain involved and how life is made difficult for transgender people, implying that they are not perceived equally in society. Liam chose to assert his identity at this stage instead of suppressing his emotions and feelings of hurt. As the next quote demonstrates colleagues were surprised, but educating colleagues on the hurt that discrimination can cause made them reflect upon their actions:

They couldn't believe it, couldn't believe it. Quite a few they came and apologised because they could see that how painful it could be to other people and how damaging it can be to other people, um (.) and that was it, and then it was quite forgotten. (Liam 180-185)

Some transgender individuals approach transitioning outside the workplace and re-enter in their new gender. For Sara two presenting factors helped her decision, a natural career break and the age of her daughter:

... that was a natural break in my career anyway. The other decision I made, I knew there was something that needed to be investigated, I knew it was Pandora's Box as well, so whilst my daughter was growing up I resolved not to open it up, because, actually she was 18 when I did, so she had completed school and stuff like that, so (.) it was ok to open Pandora's Box. But I think because I processed it subconsciously over the years it was like bang, as soon as I knew (.), I went to see, the first opportunity to see my GP. (Sara: lines 185-196)

Sara's is an interesting extract because she talks about the natural career break from the Navy and her daughter reaching 18 as being the determining factors of her transition. In discussing the effect of disclosure on others, Sara also talks about Pandora's Box, a metaphorical term from classical mythology meaning opening a box which contains all the evils and miseries in the world that will afflict mankind (Dictionary, 2005), thus anticipating the pain that disclosure may cause others. Anxiety about the consequences of revealing their trans status to family members had caused all participants to put their transitions on hold.

The anxiety about discrimination and job loss was evident with all participants. Indeed bigoted attitudes still exist against the transgender population, but legislation has helped to provide an element of job security (Smeaton et al., 2010). This was illustrated by Sara, whose extract demonstrates the planning involved around the timing of her transition to ensure that she was not discriminated against in the workplace:

I'd started it when I was working in the call centre, and then, I'd been with [REDACTED] a year before I went for my op, I made sure I'd been in employment for a year. Those things go through your mind, you actually have to plan round those, just in case they want to try and get rid of you. You've got the employment rights, so but no they were very supportive actually. But I think that's because they are a big company. (Sara : 257-266)

Like some other participant's Sara chose to ensure that her employment rights were in place by completing a year's service in order to provide job security. This exemplifies that although Sara perceives her organisation as supportive, there is an element of anxiety and fear about losing her position due to transitioning at work without the support of legislation. Sara's experience was good; however she considers this due to the size of the company, and compares her situation with that of others "people who are working at smaller outfits, particularly in the manual areas, are really struggling" (lines 270-272). Sara felt confident of her own skills and had the financial security of a Navy pension so did not have to rely totally on the security of a job.

The importance of legislation and organisational support was imperative to all participants. Recent legislation (Appendix N) has been put in place to help combat discrimination in the workplace and install confidence of job security in some transgender people who choose to disclose at work (Mitchell & Howarth, 2009). All participants had involvement in company policy or legislation:

... I was instrumental in making sure that the Governments and the use of, if you like, the Gender Recognition Act and the, back in 2006, but it was quite useful because I was a very incisive researcher in whatever I wanted to do, so I worked on the gender recognition bill, as it was then, which was 137 pages plus 55 pages of amendments, by the way @, and I went through all of that, so I am very concerned with the fact that they watered it down, a little bit, to say the least, but not just ourselves but other individuals who have got one of the protector characteristics, if you like. (Dani : lines 461-483)

It could be argued that whilst Dani is conscious about reducing risk of discrimination against minority groups, her involvement in legislation also enabled her to gain a level of control and ensure protective rights were in place for her future transitioning plans. The fact that she is concerned with the amendments to the policy, leading to the inability to measure outcomes, demonstrates that organisations still need to be accountable in order to reduce discrimination.

All participants were extremely proactive in ensuring that company policy included legislation and found it an imperative tool in their disclosure. Likewise, all participants had input into their company policy to ensure that the transition was handled fairly and in accordance with the legislation. This was further demonstrated by Dani when asked if she was involved in writing company policy:-

Yes, oh yes, basically although I didn't (.) specially deal with gender reassignment, I was dealing with gender and also sexual equality within the office. I made absolutely certain, when we were going through the policies here and were revising them, that they could be used for the purpose of transgender side as well as the gender and bullying and harassment and all the other things we were dealing with as well. (Dani : lines 501-510)

This statement explains how other forms of discrimination in the workplace are prevalent and highlights that transgender issues may not be visible but need to be included in the equality policies. Dani's involvement in policy was prior to her transition and at that stage she wanted to ensure that she and other transgender people were included, thus preparing a level of protection for her transition at a later date. This again demonstrates that without legislation there is a real fear of discrimination and job loss in the transgender community.

During transition usually involved the cooperation of management and human resource (HR) personnel, who would help to design a step by step approach to transitioning in the workplace. All participants took a top-down approach in their disclosure, seeking the support of upper-management before their co-workers. However, many employers were relatively inexperienced in handling gender transition in the workplace and looked to the employee for advice:

... every stage (.) they've asked me how I wanted and how I felt and then they, my HR was amazing, she then, like, took on all the work that she could do at work, she did it, like writing the letters and before she told anyone else, because sometimes you have to tell people like changing my name in the systems, she had to go to IT, so she would talk to those people and she would tell me, look I'm going to talk to this and this person are you ok Liam? So she makes me aware of all the people she talks to, everything, *everything*, every single step that she made, we had meetings once a month and if I need more then we would have two meeting, you know. (Liam : lines 791-805)

Liam is clearly satisfied with how his employer helped with his transition, and although his employer did have some experience the HR person was very considerate and caring about his disclosure. A trans-liaison officer worked alongside him and HR to ensure that his transition went as smoothly as possible. They adopted an approach from a previous transgender person, and as Liam explained "when things didn't feel right to me we changed them" (255-256). This demonstrates the need for flexibility, and taking an ideographic approach with the employer and company policy to ensure that the transition process is suited to the individual.

It was important for participants in the post-transition stage to be recognised in their new gender role and to fit in. Once transitioned, a dilemma can present itself when changing jobs as to whether or not to disclose their transgender history to a new employer. Some participants were concerned whether they passed well enough in their gender and were self-conscious of their appearance or voice.

I didn't have any success initially, so what I did then, and that was part of Plan B anyway, for transition, was go and work in a call centre, so you can work on your voice. Quite a few people said that's a good strategy. So I went to work in a call centre in Bristol Road for nine months, just as a temp, you know, £10 an hour, by doing a bit of light work kind of thing. No great shakes @. (Sara : lines 82-90)

Sara, who started her transition after leaving a 20 year career in the Royal Navy, initially struggled to find suitable employment, thus taking a temporary job in a call centre. As supported by statistics many transgender individuals take positions below their qualified level and are underemployed (Smeaton et al., 2010). However, whilst underemployed for her skill level, Sara felt that the call centre was a good experience. She was determined to prove herself as a woman, in a business environment which is often perceived as masculine (L. Miller & Hayward, 2006). This helped her to gain confidence for future interviews, which subsequently led her to her current role of choice.

For those who have transitioned, it is important to them that they are allowed to get on with their lives without their trans status taking over their lives:

... we are not an accessory and trans isn't something by choice it is something that I had to go through, but I don't want it to be my life, I don't want to wear a label and yes it's an experience and I don't mind sharing the experience because we learn from it because we are all, but I don't want to be introduced or known as the trans person, and sadly it does happen, a lot. (Liam : lines 480-488)

Whilst it was a liberating experience for those who had transitioned at work, challenges regarding identity and gender presented themselves. Here Liam is expressing his feelings at being categorised and labelled as transgender. He and other participants want to be recognised as their new gender identity, but this extract demonstrates that is not always the case, which can leave the transgender person feeling like an object.

The 'self' – identity challenges and coping strategies within the workplace

For all participants there was a mismatch between their anatomy and sense of self from an early age. The result of not meeting societal gender expectations meant concealing their transgender identities for a number of years by taking on hyper-masculine or hyper-feminine roles. This was strongly exemplified by all participants. Participants who were born biologically male all experienced pressures to adhere to the masculine stereotype, and many tried to conform by taking roles in the Ministry of Defence/Armed Services. In Claire's case she experienced much negativity in her early years, which instead of disclosing her trans identity led to her hiding her true self over a long period of time by taking a position in the Royal Air Force:

I've learnt from a very early age that (.) because I'm a freak, to quote, that nobody likes me and they called me sissy and usual beatings up and things like that, ostracisation, um, you tend to hide it, and I think over the years I've actually hidden it for so long, I even joined the military, joined the air-force, and I did a short period of time in the air-force of 27 years. I was actually an aircraft engineer, working on proportion systems. But because of trying to attain the image, the macho image, um, I was an all arms/small arms instructor, I did a sniper course and things like that, so really took to all the things that the average man should be doing. (Claire : lines 55-71)

Later ...

In fact I was known as a ruffy-tuffy, real hard-nut sort of thing, um, but again it's playing that role, it's terrible, because you are constantly pushing everything, hiding it, making sure that nobody can see it and then you get home from being at work, because we used to although it's the military you tend to work from 8 'till 5, um, but in times after that then I'd be dressed, and would be frightened to death that somebody would knock on the door. (Claire : lines 79-88)

Claire perceives the activities in the armed forces as those which the average man should be doing, and constructs a hyper-masculine identity to fit with this image. However, with only 173,020 in the regular armed forces (DASA, 2012), her perception of the average man only serves to enforce a masculine stereotype and purge any femininity. This concept of purging all aspects of the femme-self for a masculine image is a strategy supported within the literature (Brown, 1988). The pressure to act like 'men' creates confusion about identity and complex identities are formed with an internalised sense of stigma and fear of being found out (Brown, 1988). The following two extracts from Liam, a female to male transsexual, demonstrate how he tried to purge his transgender feelings through religion:

I decided to become a practising Muslim @, so it wasn't the best of things to do, but at that time for me it was (.), I believed I was normal and I believed that I wanted some guidance and I wanted to be normal and becoming a practising Muslim would help me, so being a practising woman, as a woman, was merely covering up and getting married and having children. (Liam : lines 98-106)

... the Quran, it tells you exactly how to lead your life, it tells you how to eat, how you sit, how you sleep, how you have sex with your partner, it tells you everything, so you don't think for yourself, you just follow, and from that time, if I follow this at least I will get to heaven, so there was kind of a reward, I didn't have to think about my gender identity, I just wanted to be normal. (Liam : lines 114-123).

Liam's emphasis on wanting to be normal demonstrates the struggle with his own feelings about his true-self and the social comparison of gender expectations. At this time, prior to transition, he was fighting with his inner-feelings and sought distraction through the guidance and rules of the Quran to help him live his life in accordance to societal expectations.

Gender expectations are embedded in organisational structures and interactions (Acker, 1990). Not meeting these expectations can result in discrimination, harassment and ostracisation (Schilt & Connell, 2007). Thus, it can be argued that concealment of transgender status to avoid stigma interferes with one's ability to live life in one's true identity, which can adversely affect social interaction. The literature review illustrated that individuals with stigmatised invisible social identities can make one of two choices regarding social interactions at work, to hide or to disclose their invisible identity (Clair et al., 2005). This choice was a major decision for all participants, with the timing and execution carefully planned for those who had transitioned. The consequences of revealing or hiding one's true identity can cause much anxiety and stress in the individual, and the fear of rejection was prevalent in all participants:

My fear was that of being rejected as a woman in the workplace. Huge fears around that. Also I wanted to succeed, I wanted to prove that I could do it (Sara : lines 424-427)

This extract illustrates Sara's determination of wanting to succeed in her new identity, almost overriding the fear of rejection. Other participants also experienced the fear of rejection, but by choosing an open workplace transition felt that their positive experiences helped to reduce stigma. The theory of open workplace transitions contributing to reducing stigma and increasing positive interaction at work is well supported in the literature (Clair et al., 2005).

As with Sara and Liam, Dani, who works as a scientist internationally, approached her transition from the top-down within the organisation. However, due to the large number of people she was involved with, managing her identity was going to be a challenge. Dani chose to complete her transition during time off on sick leave, and subsequently after discussions with her management chose to disclose to small individual groups of colleagues, meeting outside the working environment before returning to work:

I had a huge list of people, absolutely unbelievable the number of people that I invited to come and meet me for a meal, or whatever, that I gradually sort of infiltrated to the knowledge that something different was going to happen when I came back, so I had, um, colleagues that I'd worked with for twenty odd years, that I said something's going to happen when I come back, they said well what is it, and I said well I'm going to have a change of life, or rather a change of presentation, I said, and what's that, well I think you'd better come and meet me one time @@ in my social life, so I even planned where, for each the groups that I was going to do this with, we're talking here about 30 or 40 different groups that I met over a period of time, and actually engineered to take them to a local restaurant or whatever. I sat there waiting for them to come in, and there I was in my finery and they said 'oh,@ is this what you came to talk about' and I said, well it's not life threatening or anything like that I'll be called Dani from now on, you know, and I've always been called Dani outside the office. (Dani : lines 552-583)

Here Dani chose to pre-warn colleagues that she had a change of presentation and invited them out to join her socially rather than re-enter the workplace in her new gender identity. Having transitioned in her social life for many years, this less formal approach probably added an element of comfort and confidence about disclosing. She talks about engineering the experience, thus taking a structured approach to her disclosure and plays it down by reminding colleagues that it's not life threatening. She is direct in how she wishes to be known, emphasising that her biological male identity is only used at work. Although this is an example of a very direct and confident approach it served to help with a positive experience and paved the way for entry back into organisation without direct initial confrontation at work. This strategy allowed both Dani and her colleagues to react outside the work environment and demonstrates the benefits of positive interaction. However there are many people who do not have such a positive experience and Dani recognises that she is perhaps one of few exceptions.

A positive outlook was important to all participants:

I'm not short on self confidence, at least openly. I can believe in myself and abilities, I know they haven't changed. I guess I have things going for me (.), I think there's a big difference there. One going for a professional occupation is one, and secondly (.), a lot of the issues that people face going through transition I'd already addressed, so I didn't have those kind of distractions. Yes, there are emotional distractions as you're going onto hormone replacement therapy, going through a second puberty, so that focuses your behaviours at work as well.

(Sara : lines 242-254)

Sara constructs herself as a confident person socially, but may have some insecurity which she hides. Her transition is helped by her self-determination, skill level and having a professional occupation. Sara compares herself with others who are not in the same position. She suggests that she has addressed the issues faced with the transition process, yet the complexity of identity change is exemplified by Sara talking about emotional distractions and the self-regulation of behaviour required at work. All participants shared the experience of their gender being a distraction to their work. However for Claire, who has not transitioned at work, her gender suppression was particularly difficult:

I can be doing something and I will start to break down within side, and it's a case of, I shouldn't be like this, why can't I just (.).

Interviewer : How often do you feel like that?

Two or three times a day. There's a few times when I've thought it easier to take the extra pills, and just not bother with it, and get rid of it completely and then you think well (wife's name) will be left on her own and all, so back into that male role of looking after other people.

(Claire : lines 815-825).

The constant psychological conflict of gender identity is emotionally discussed. Because Claire has not disclosed her gender identity at work it causes internal anguish that she feels that she is in the wrong body. She talks about gender as 'it', as if it is the enemy within which she wants rid of, to the extent of considering taking her life, but then the masculine role of being a husband and obligations to her wife provide a sense of responsibility. However, it could be argued that her sense of duty to her family also acts as a barrier to her transition. To disclose her identity at work is not considered an option.

Dani spent a large number of years working as a male, in answering whether or not her gender transition has restricted her career in any way, she explains how her gender was a distraction, but also how it was quite liberating once she disclosed her trans identity at work:

... has it restricted my career? Quite the opposite, it's unfettered me a bit @, I don't have to worry about it, I don't have to worry about having to hide myself @. I've been able to concentrate on other things, so, not worrying about that is a big relief, um, and I don't have to think about my gestures and things like that. (Dani : lines 1093-1099)

As well as being a liberating experience, Dani's extract demonstrates the distraction of hiding her identity together with the anxiety about being found out and the self-monitoring required to meet behavioural expectations. Self-monitoring, the degree an individual controls and regulates their behaviour in the context of fulfilling social expectations (Clair et al., 2005), was common in all participants during all stages of transition, but more so for those who wanted to pass well in the workplace and to fit into another social identity group.

Liam explained the anxiety he felt upon returning to work after taking two months off for transition surgery:

I was a little bit nervous, no doubt about it, because you know people will be looking at you and you don't know how people would react, so there was a big part that you know what, I'm just going to be myself, so I'm just being myself and (.), it was fine. People will say, oh this change about you, you know, and you've got, I think it's ok to be open, at that stage it was important to be open. (Liam : lines 444-452)

Here Liam expresses the anxiety about colleague's reactions which comes from a stigmatised identity. He also demonstrates how his openness helped the acceptance of his presentation and trans status. He wants to make himself approachable so that people can talk to him and have positive interaction. However, for Claire suppressing her gender identity at work is difficult:

The big thing about this transitioning at work and in the workplace, it really is a (.) it's a horrible place to be in the fact that you want to scream it from the roof tops and present exactly as I am, this is me, never mind that I've got a deep voice, or horrible legs or whatever, it's me, I'm here, treat me as Claire rather than him, because it's horrible being him. (Claire : lines 579-580)

The sense of frustration is evident in the above extract. Clair constructs two identities, that of the male persona which she perceives negatively as one she wants to reject, and that of Claire, and wants to be treated differently from her male identity. This mismatch of identities portrays a strong sense of melancholy and stems from her presentation and interaction which she feels does not represent her gender.

All participants had shared the experience of discrimination or derogatory comments in some shape or form, and all had tackled them directly. This strategy would appear to have an effect on the perpetrators by making them reflect on their

words or actions. However, as evident from all participants, the on-going process of educating and informing people takes a lot of emotional work, and fighting for advocacy can be a lonely, stressful experience, and dealing with acceptance and rejection can be physically and emotionally exhausting (Cashore & Tuason, 2009).

Negotiating the gender binary and interaction within the workplace

All participants found that formulating an alternative identity outside the gender binary system is virtually impossible, and therefore crossed from one gender to the only other gender legitimately available, thus subscribing to the binary system. As such, it can be argued that the social and dynamic role of gender construction is learned and enacted (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

In negotiating the crossing from one gender to another, participants had first-hand experience, and made interesting observations of societies expectations of how gender is undertaken by men and women. For all participants the social resources of everyday interaction meant learning what it was to be the opposite sex:

... you get doors opening for you and deferential to you going into cars or normally when going into a meeting people stand up for you. (Dani : lines 1025-1028)

... all the guys it was their duty to tell me how to shave @@. So I had so many long lectures of how you should be shaving and things like that @@ so that was quite nice. I thought that was their way of showing acceptance. (Liam : lines 412-417)

Whilst Dani learnt that courtesy or arguably sexist behaviour is applied to women in the workplace, Liam perceived acceptance of his trans status by his male colleagues when they felt it their duty to teach him to shave. These extracts demonstrate how participants had to analyse and work out how to act within socially structured circumstances in order to accomplish passing in an alternative gender. However, differentiating male and female behaviour can reinforce gendered behaviour and stereotypes, and create sexism in the workplace:

I think when I first transitioned and started looking for work, I assumed that everything that was directed at me was about being trans, it's not, most of it actually is about being a woman. So that was an eye opener. I actually understand what women go through @. And you can't be that direct if you want to challenge it, because that's seen as being aggressive, never mind that men do it all the time, that's ok, but not for a women to do it. I was described, no not as difficult (.), abrasive @, I'll tell it as it is @, it's ok when a man but not a woman. (Sara : lines 343-354)

Here Sara perceives the discrimination that she has received in the past as being sexist rather than transphobic. As a biological male she had not considered the marginalisation of women in the workplace, and therefore found that negotiating inequality challenging, extrapolating this difficulty to women in general. As with

other participants in this study, Sara learnt that socially acceptable behaviour and attributes are differentiated between men and women and felt the need to conform accordingly. This process of categorisation and living up to the gender prototypes demonstrates how if a person can live up to the categorisation they can be seen as members of that category, which for a transsexual person may equate to a level of acceptance and authentication of their identity (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

The on-going task to taking on a new gender identity involves more than portraying expected masculine or feminine decorum. It requires interaction with others in order to feel accepted (Nuttbrock et al., 2009). Participants who had fully transitioned at work wanted to be known as their current gender rather than transgender, or being in *stealth* as the term is known in the transgender community (Budge et al., 2010). Two key concerns in negotiating gender arose consistently within the literature; 1) pronoun usage and 2) bathroom issues (Acker, 1990; Cashore & Tuason, 2009; Law et al., in press; Schilt & Connell, 2007).

Part of the transitioning process involves a change of appearance and name to reflect one's new gender status. Participants who had transitioned fully had requested that colleagues use their chosen name, which involved a change in use of pronouns such as 'he' or 'she'. Whilst this is an important issue, demonstrating acceptance and respect of the person's chosen gender identity, it was not an overriding concern to participants. They tended to understand that colleagues would make the occasional slip-up, especially when they had been known to their colleagues in their former gender. Liam recalls how co-workers occasionally acknowledged him as female at the start of his transition:

... people sometimes, not as much now, but will still make mistake about he or she. It did happen quite a lot at the beginning, a lot less now, very rarely it happens but you know people beat themselves up when they do.

Interviewer: Did you correct them or let it pass?

I let it pass over, the only reason because I could see they were beating themselves up over it and there was a lot of, so they were already feeling guilty and I think, I kind of noticed that if people really think about it that's when they start to make the mistake, (.), it's what you see in front of you, you know, people start thinking about it and they are so worried about making the mistake. (Liam : lines 452-467)

Whilst the misuse of pronouns could be perceived as rude, Liam's explanation shows that he was willing to let it pass and empathised with the mistakes made by his co-workers in their choice of language. It is also evident from Liam, and other participants, that in the post-transition stage pronoun use has been an issue in the workplace, but one that is dealt with effectively by either a polite correction or letting it pass over, with less frequent errors occurring with increased interaction. This empathetic approach has worked positively for participants in reducing anxiety about pronoun use. It is worth noting that the bathroom issue that arises in much of the literature was not a large concern across the participants, who had not experienced many problems. This may have been helped by recent legislation

making the requirements of toilet facilities in organisations clear, in stating that the person can use the bathroom of their presenting sex (Smeaton et al., 2010).

From birth, male and female babies are treated differently, thus establishing and reinforcing behavioural differences (Carrie, 2003). Children learn how their sex is practised in the community and position themselves and their behaviour accordingly (Carrie, 2003). Consequently occupational sex-role stereotypes are formed early in life with males and females preferring and aspiring to roles that they perceive as being gender-appropriate (L. Miller & Hayward, 2006). Despite the fight for gender equality in the workplace most organisations remain dominated by men, with the gender segregation of work partly created by organisational practices and supported by gender stereotypes (Acker, 1990). Hence many occupations in the United Kingdom remain sex segregated (L. Miller & Hayward, 2006). These practices have led to inequality of income and status between men and women (Acker, 1990). For one participant in this study transition in the workplace was largely prevented due to the gendered type of work. Claire explains the problem with transitioning in her current role:

... that's the problem, primarily at work, but there again because I'm up ladders and down holes I'd be in trousers anyway, and because I'm the age I've got the standard roundabout @, so the only thing I'd be going to work with, because I can't wear makeup where we work, because of what we work with, because it could cause explosions and things like that, so I would just be purely and simply presenting as Claire, with a hairpiece on, which really is making yourself look even more stupid.
(Claire : lines 263-274)

Because of the dress-code required in Claire's nature of work, transitioning at work presents a dilemma. Claire views her sense of being a woman with the style of clothing, hair and make-up. She would appear to have an internalised sense of stigma regarding her presentation, in which she would understandably feel self-conscious.

All other participants felt self-conscious about their presentation in their new gender, but for Liam, who had to negotiate a uniform, this was more of a challenge:

When you are transitioning you, the first year you have to live without any hormones, without any proper support, live as the role you believe to be and you are still looking, not looking right, so I had to wear, so I was wearing a male uniform and the people around me really didn't understand yet, so one person kind of said, why are you wearing that silly hat for, because I was wearing the male uniform, instead of the female uniform and he kind of picked up on, but that was compared to a lot of other things, and that person was quickly was explained, well the team I was working with we should start explaining why I was wearing the male uniform. (Liam : lines 278-292)

Here Liam is explaining part of the real-life experience, required by gender clinics, where it is a necessity to live full-time in your acquired gender role (Barrett, 2007).

However, the gendered uniform presented a mismatch between his appearance and his gender, which his colleagues found confusing. Consequently, the gendered uniform formed part of his disclosure to colleagues.

Certain behavioural expectations and stereotypical interactions within organisations became apparent with all participants. For example how men talk about sports and cars, and women may talk about romantic relationships, fashion and so on. This can present either a challenge or a relief for transmen and transwomen in negotiating new interactional styles and in authenticating their destination gender (Schilt & Connell, 2007). A good example of the change in interactional styles comes from Liam:

People treat you differently and I think that you really understand it because in some ways I never identified as a female but people treated me as a female and now being a man people do treat you differently. However much we say we are not sexist and people love to treat you differently, it happens. I mean yes, the job, people try and treat people equally but they are still different. (Liam : lines 555-563)

And later...

... I definitely see the change, I feel I get a bit more respect @, I don't get the help, it's quite weird because I always feel I've been the same person, but yes I realise the people saw me differently and people behave differently with me and it's the same people that I've known before, a lot of people don't open the door for me @, I don't know, silly little things but you can see the difference. (Liam : lines 585-594)

Liam feels that his internal identity has not changed but the interactional styles with colleagues have changed. There does not appear to be any discomfort with the interaction. This supports how the gender binary system is constructed and enacted within society. Thus it could be argued that for those transitioning enlisting to the binary system provides a sense of social validation.

Conclusion

The aim of the present research was to explore the experience of gender transition in the workplace and the coping strategies of transgender individuals in relation to gender identity management in the workplace. The analysis found three overarching super-ordinate themes which were analysed and discussed in depth: 1) preparation, planning and process of gender transition in the workplace, 2) the self – challenges and coping strategies within the workplace and 3) negotiating the gender binary system and interaction in the workplace.

The findings elucidate that there is a careful process of planning and preparation involved in participant's approach to transitioning in the workplace, which results in the management of complex identities. Participants were driven by social expectations to conform to masculine or feminine roles, and subsequently engaged in hyper-masculine/feminine activities, in their biological sex, at the start of their

careers. However, the need to express a 'true self' was overwhelming in all participants, and eventually most felt the need to be themselves by disclosing their transgender identities at work.

A key factor in prompting disclosure at work was a major life trigger, such as a natural career break, a change in family circumstances or the experience of prejudice. Disclosure has also been helped by the recent introduction of protective legislation for the transgender community, thus installing some confidence of support within organisations. However, an individual level of discrimination remains a threat to transitioning due to underlying cultural attitudes at the root of prejudice.

Educating people about transgender matters and challenges served as a method of reducing stigmatisation and discrimination, which was important to all participants. The use of company emails, company meetings and presentations were used, by employers of participants, to present co-workers with information regarding transgender individuals. This highlights the need for more organisations to be aware of the challenges faced by transgender individuals and how disclosure and information is managed. Supportive management and policies demonstrate an open culture, which is fed down to all employees. Increasing awareness of people with invisible identities is an important step in changing sociological attitudes and perceptions.

The emotional weight of threats of prejudice, discrimination, stigmatised identities and gender stereotypes are all factors that affected career decisions. Not only is gender embedded and reinforced within organisational structures and sex-segregated job roles, but also in our everyday interactions. Thus participants had to learn to re-negotiate the gender binary and construct their identities to meet societal expectations of their acquired gender. Hence, the notion of the 'self' emerged in this study as an important aspect of coping with the psychological aspects of transition. Participants sometimes felt that they had to prove themselves in their new gender role, thus subscribing to gender polarisation. West and Zimmerman (1987, pg. 145) asked the question "can we avoid doing gender?", and from the participants experiences it would appear not. Using this polarisation helped participants to authenticate their new gender and to fit in with the gender expectations within the workplace by adhering to conceptualisations of feminine women and masculine men. It can therefore be argued that one of the major coping strategies is actually *doing* gender; categorising oneself in order to fit into the binary system and avoiding the social consequences of challenging the binary system. The dominance of men and subordination of women was also noted by participants. Hence, transitioning in the workplace required careful observational skills and self-regulation to comply with the shift in power. Thus in agreement with West and Zimmerman (1987) gender binary furnishes an interactional system, a social structure and a method of social control (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

There are several potential limitations to this study which should be highlighted. Firstly, participants were all European and located in the South West of England, which may mean that the results are not applicable to wider populations. The recruitment of participants came from support groups, and therefore represents individuals who may have been more comfortable to disclose their stories, whilst there may be others who were reluctant to share their experiences within the

context of this research. Therefore, this small, fairly homogenous participant group cannot claim to be representative of the transgender community on the whole. All participants made me aware that there were poor experiences of workplace transition and that theirs were unusually positive. There are likely to be a number of transsexuals who have either not disclosed or disclosed their identity with negative experiences and negative psychological outcomes (Law et al., in press). However, it can be argued that drawing on the positive experiences provides a model for demonstrating how transitioning can be approached for others. The other limitations involved the acquisition and interpretation of the data. As a qualitative study, using a semi-structured interview schedule may have influenced the rapport between the interviewee and interviewer, and participants may not have always relayed their true thoughts. However, I considered the research design was appropriate for this study and the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis allowed experiences to be explored. IPA is a reflexive practice whereby the researcher is trying to understand how the participant makes sense of their world, which may have influenced the data collected and analysed. Hence, the subjectivity of interpretation can also be considered a limitation within this qualitative research.

Whilst this research focused on identity management and coping strategies, the youngest participant in this study was born in 1970. Visibility of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities has increased considerably within the social, political and entertainment sectors in the last decade (Hospital & Rose, 2008). Hence, it could be argued that society's attitudes regarding equality and diversity has evolved considerably. However, whilst the diversity of some groups has become more accepting and tolerant within Western society, transgender individuals still experience some bigoted attitudes from the general public (Chung, 2003). Therefore future research could target the younger generation in view of how their social attitudes and perceptions of societal expectations may have changed over the past decade. Management and co-worker attitudes could also be explored, and could be used to help design educational tools to assist organisations in understanding the needs of individuals with invisible identities, whilst helping to reduce stigmatisation and discrimination. However, whilst employers have a duty of care and responsibility to protect employees against discrimination, stigma and discrimination are sociological processes that cannot be legislated away (Irwin, 2002).

For those who choose an open-workplace transition, it can add stability to an emotional and physical transition stage, thus helping to make life more liveable (Schilt & Connell, 2007). The visibility can bring potential benefits such as gaining wider legal rights and educating the general public on transgender lives. It will also help to break down the dichotomies that have been socially constructed and break down the gender binary system. Transgender workers are a vulnerable population, who have to weigh up their political, personal, social and economic circumstances and willingness to combat discrimination before transitioning (Gartrell, 1981). Given that little empirical research exists with regard to gender transition at work, this is an important study, and not only helps to provide an understanding of identity management and coping strategies in the workplace but also how masculinity and femininity is constructed and enacted.

Reflexive Analysis

Reflexivity forms an important part of qualitative research in that it allows the researcher to be reflective about their own subject position and how the methodologies applied are used to produce psychological knowledge (Langdrige, 2007). Thus it relates to the degree of influence that the researcher exerts either unintentionally or intentionally, on the findings (Jootun, McGhee, & Marland, 2009).

Unlike quantitative methods, qualitative approaches follow an inductive paradigm, focusing on the qualities of the phenomenon (Jonathan A Smith et al., 2009). IPA captures how when a person is experiencing something major in their lives it provokes some reflection regarding what is happening, and aims to engage in this reflection by looking in detail at how a person makes sense of a major transition in their life (Jonathan A Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2008). Through reflection the researcher can critique their own work and improve on the quality of future work (S. Smith, 2006). In relation to the present study three issues arise: i) that I, the researcher, am not a member of the transgender community and ii) that I am a lesbian, and therefore identify as one of the invisible minorities in the workplace and iii) I have the shared experience of disclosure in the workplace.

My interest in embarking upon the research of transgender individuals in the workplace stemmed from my on-going interest in sex and gender studies and workplace interaction. Whilst sexual orientation has been widely studied within psychology, research of the transgender community is relatively new, with most studies emerging from the 1980s. Of those studies many are dominated by positivist-empiricism and based on the medical model. Therefore, by engaging in discussion and this qualitative study, I wanted to further the knowledge with a rich and varied understanding of life experiences within a diverse and complex minority group.

I have endeavoured to offer an unbiased and non-judgmental view. However, it is impossible to do so without an element of subjectivity; as the researcher I have interpreted the experiences and have been selective regarding the elements of the transcripts used in the report to meet the aims of the research question. As a lesbian, I share the experience of being part of a minority group, and also share the experience of disclosing my own sexuality within the workplace. However, I had no preconceived knowledge of how transsexuals approach disclosure within the workplace and presentation of their new gender identity, or the emotional issues that affect their decision making process. I felt it was important to gain credibility with the transgender groups, thus allowing them to trust me with their stories and experiences. I did this by carrying out extensive research of both qualitative and quantitative transgender research to gain an understanding of the complexities faced by much of the transgender community prior to introducing myself and attending group meetings.

I was very much aware of my inexperience conducting qualitative research, and in particular using IPA as a form of methodology. I used multiple methods of research to help with the process, with much help from book and journal publications. Whilst following the methodological framework primarily recommended by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), an element of freedom was used to suit this research, a tactic

supported in the literature. This resulted in categories and themes constantly evolving and clusters being moved around within the themes until they were finalised. During this process my confidence level was mixed, however I eventually felt that the final most salient themes were adequately identified and discussed within the study. I recognise that this process is deliberately subjective and necessary in order to focus on how meanings are constructed by participants in a social context.

It is my belief that knowledge is constructed, that the social world is in a constant state of flux in which individuals continually change in accordance with their own biological, environmental, social and cultural contexts. The unique experience that each participant shared was dependent upon these factors, as was my own position. Hence, whilst the findings in this study are necessary and socially important to the wider population, they are relative within the context of individual's lives. Results are therefore shaped by gender, class, culture, age, and the political and social environment, which may have influenced my interaction with participants.

The process of research and writing this dissertation was extremely interesting and enjoyable, although not without its anxieties. I felt that within the constraints of an undergraduate dissertation I was unable to do complete justice to the subject matter. Saying that, I feel satisfied that the study is a contribution to the existing literature and has served to answer the research question.

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