Becoming Identified: Narrative construction of gendered identity through the life course

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ABSTRACT

Gender presentation currently proves a controversial conceptualisation within society. Those considered transgender aspire to obtain the gender identity alterative to that associated with their birth sex. The participant, Kate, would be termed a trans-woman due to her male-to-female status. She struggled with her gender identity until she decided to fully transition. The present study explores Kate's meaningful life-events through a series of photo-elicitation and semi-structured interviews. Insight was gleaned surrounding acceptance, discrimination and medical intervention. Kate's voice was analysed using narrative analytic methods. Three overarching themes were identified: identification as a woman, aesthetic perfection, and socioeconomic status. Such themes, and how they manifested in terms of tones and imagery, appear to have enabled Kate to construct her identity, whilst also proposing barriers to the external replication of it. The barriers relate to a fixation upon anatomic sex, class disadvantage, and the wait for surgical intervention. Little is known within gender research surrounding low-status marginalised groups, requiring further insight into class relations. Findings of this research therefore call for revision within feminist research to adopt an intersectional stance towards those who identify as transgender; understanding pressures upon trans-women to replicate feminine characteristics is likely to alleviate prejudice towards the marginalised cohort.

KEY WORDS:	GENDER	INTERSECTIONALITY	IDENTITY	MARGINALISED	TRANSITION

1 Introduction and Literature Review

The Exclusionary Confines of a Gender Binary

Historically, gender has been used to articulate the variant characteristics amid biologically determined sex, and socially perceived features of femininity and masculinity (Marecek, Crawford & Popp, 2004). Despite the frequent acknowledgment of sociological and environmental influences upon human behaviour, gender has been recurrently nuanced by a fixation upon the hereditary nature of sex. This mainstream perspective retains prevalence from the Enlightenment period whereupon the biological approach gained valence alongside publications that favoured rational explanations of behaviour via brain plasticity (Hebb, 1949). This realist stance nourished research motives to secure scientifically epistemological explanations for human behaviour (Popper, 1959; Popper, 1972). With respect to gender, a mainstream preoccupation surrounding chromosomal onset echoed values of scientific rationality as concentration upon phenotypic structures, gonadal development and consequential hormonal development dominated research (Hughes, 2001). This dictates that gender is purely dependent upon acquiring the SRY gene; this particular gene is indicative of a person's sex upon conception, and when dominant encourages the development of testes in males and subsequent hormonal changes that mediate müllerian duct regression (Mukherjee & Parsa, 1990; Malani, 2012). This conclusion surrounding gender development is likely to have arisen due to an obsession with presenting concrete facts, as opposed to more subjective accounts surrounding gender identification (Parker, 1989; Gergen, 2010). One may deduce that the gender binary appears indicative of scientific values, thus demonstrating the incidence of values becoming attached to particular categories (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003) of what constitutes to gender.

The gender binary therefore assumes that each human and their prospective sex is predisposed during development, and their gendered characteristics will develop in line with this (Rosenblum, 1999). This assumes that males would develop a masculine: appearance, traits, behaviours, and a heterosexual attraction to women (Summers, 2002). Gender binarism is therefore determined by whether an individual possesses either male or female internal and external genitalia (Lorber & Moore, 2007). Therefore, many people who feel detached from this initial binary seek gender reassignment surgery (GRS), which although allows many to identify securely within the opposite gender, further coerces them to believe that their gender is determinant upon physiognomies of genitals (Fausto-Sterling, 2000).

Traditional gender roles, influenced by the gender binaries, are continually reinforced by popular media representations, religion, and education (Johnson & Repta, 2012). This indicates that cultural and social systems maintain some responsibility in regurgitating the traditional concepts of gender. The limitation of this is that the arbitrary nature of the gender binary structures specific expectations for how men and women should act within society (Lorber, 1993). Whilst this scripts what socially constitutes being either male or female, one may argue that this dually works to regulate and impose a mainstream perspective upon gender; transgender individuals are therefore under extreme pressure to replicate ideals of masculinity or femininity (Good & Sanchez, 2010). This resonates with discussions formerly had amongst

academics (1960s) Derrida and Foucault (Campillo, 2000) whereupon it was alluded to that a focus upon marginal figures reinforces such norms that seek deconstruction. This is because the realist perspective demonstrates how research has been infiltrated by westernised norms in order to uphold positivist rationality and western ideals (Cushman, 1995), for example being distinctly either male or female. Contemporary work has therefore alluded to the notion that the cultural assumption of what constitutes to gender has been explained to merely represent naturally occurring qualities, when in fact this demonstrates persistent realist systems of male privilege and patriarchal heteronomy (Keith, 2017).

Incongruence within the Dictatorship of Biologically Assigned Gender

An individual constructs their identity by making conscious decisions towards how they invent and present themselves to the world (Plummer, 2001). However, identities are also implicated by how the world accepts such self-portrayals (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). Considering this, those who identify independently of the conventional gender twofold are classed as 'queer' within society. Queer is a broad term that encapsulates not only homosexuality, but also non-normative gender identifications. The term is used synonymously to refer to those whose gender expression operates outside of society's typical gender binary, thus representing those who are transgender within this cohort (Jackson, 2007; Stryker, 2008).

To be transgender is to experience discomfort within biologically predisposed gender expectations, aiming to produce an external reflection of the gender experienced internally (APA, 2018; Davis, 2009). This transcendence from traditional stereotypes highlights that expectations associated with the sex assigned to individuals at birth may differ significantly from their gender expression (Spade, 2006; Berg-Weger, 2016). The transgender individual, whether male-to-female (MTF) or female-to-male (FTM), appears positioned by theorists as subversions to the sex order (Bettcher, 2014; Davis, 2009).

The Social Construction of Gender

The existence of trans-identities has thus forced the idea that gender is socially constructed; opening the possibility that gender is dependent upon other factors opposed to chromosomal disposition. However, this only began to achieve potency within the 1970s whereupon Feminist literature dominated academia of the social sciences (Haigh, 2004). Such literature introduced the concept of a triarchial framework of gender formed by interplay between: biological sex, psychological gender, and subsequent gender roles (Yudkin, 1978). It is this recognition of socially situated factors, opposed to those solely confound by objective empiricism, which allows the social constructionist perspective to maintain acceptability (Berger & Luckman, 1991; Gergen, 1985). This angle began to separate sex and gender, suggesting that sex refers to biological physiognomies alone, and gender is a product of when an individual performs gender roles that are socially and culturally relative (Lindsey, 2015; WHO, 2002; 2014).

The recognition of socialised gender roles allows gender to be perceived as a learned construct rather than an instinctive predisposition (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Gender roles have been researched heavily, and have influenced the comprehension of developmental milestones in relation to gender acquisition; children typically categorise themselves with respect to gender by the age of three (Durkin, 1995; Lindsey, 2015). Children appear subjected to socialisation from birth, and thus adopt stereotypical gendered roles through interactions with the environment (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Social-constructionist inclinations therefore point towards gender being adopted in line with the reproductions of behaviours deemed culturally appropriate to represent men and women (Cahill, 1986; Galdas, Johnson, Percy & Ratner, 2010). Academic discourse has outlined the influence of culture within specific thinking-patterns and communications of gender roles (Hofstede, 1998; Wood, 2012). Culturally affirmed gender roles prescribe that men should demonstrate assertiveness and toughness, whilst women should prioritise exhibiting modesty and the maintenance of relationships (Hofstede & Soeters, 2002). One may recognise that it is this socially constructed reproduction of gender performances (Butler, 2011) that informs how individuals construct their identity. It must therefore be recognised that an individual constructs their self via conceptualisations within their own self-narrative (MacIntyre, 1984).

A Derogatory Association between Gender and Sex

Literature suggests that the notion of gender has been inextricably inclusive of sex (Haig, 2004). This has had detrimental consequences for those who identify as transgender; feeding stigmatisms not only associated with the minority's identification as transgender, but furthermore their sexuality status (Timmins, Rimes and Rahman, 2017). Drescher (2010) and Halperin (2000) emphasise relations between homosexuality and the construction of transgenderism. Halperin (2000) suggests that effeminacy is associated with homosexuality, despite the contradiction that men can be effeminate without being homosexual, and vice versa (Halperin, 2000). Ultimately, it must be recognised that sexual orientation is independent of being transgender (APA, 2012).

However, homosexuality has influenced how society understands transgender individuals. We must acknowledge that, however reductionist it is to associate being gay with being trans, the history of homosexuality has informed and influenced how gender non-conformity has been understood. There has been a long-standing battle to diffuse the blend of gender and sexuality; this separation dates back to the early 1900s, with the classification of cross-dressing (Hirschfield, 1910), and an attempt to further separate transgenderism from homosexuality by disputing the correlation between same-sex desire and cross-dressing (Ellis, 1938). Today the distinction between sex and gender seems appeased within the context of the social sciences whereupon the social construction of gender has proposes legitimate explanations for why people behave and demonstrate attributes in line with what indicates being male or female (Lindsey, 2015).

Further Obstacles to Achieving One's True Self

Trans-sexuality has also been medically constructed, and this can be traced historically in terms of oppression towards homosexuals and effeminate men deemed insane and clinically abnormal (Hines, 2007; Tosh, 2014). One may infer that the acknowledgment of cross-dressing and cross-living traditionally as perverse is what has muddied the line between gender and sexuality; trans behaviours were considered sexually deviant, and automatically classed as tendencies to produce non-procreative sex (Tosh, 2014). Therefore, one can understand how being transgender, then positioned a 'sexually inverted' fetish, had been likened to homosexuality (Foucault, 1978; Ekins & King, 1996). However, one may argue that this default positioning of transgenderism alongside perversion is long from relinquished; within literature surrounding clinical and forensic abnormality (Holmes, 2010), not only has gender identity disorder (GID) been classed as a disorder, but also is positioned within a chapter devoted to sexual perversion such as paedophilia.

Pathologisation is apparent, classing transgenderism as an illness (Lev, 2005). This medical diagnosis has been present within psychiatry for decades, formerly labelled GID, referring to the incongruence between an individual's gender identity and assigned sex (Benjamin, 1966), automatically defining the phenomenon as mental disorder from 1980 onwards (Atienza-Macías, 2015; Ross, 2015). The recent revision of the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM) emphasises how the psychological distress associated with being transgender impedes important areas of functioning (Kraus, 2015), instead diagnosing transgenderism under the term "gender dysphoria" (GD) (DSM-5; APA, 2013). Although this loosens the positioning of transgenderism alongside perversion and mental instability, researchers have expressed anxieties surrounding GD becoming extinct from the DSM (Ross, 2015). It is dreaded that if GD is removed from the DSM, access to surgical interventions may become inaccessible for those who identify as transgender (Ross, 2015). This already poses problematic within the DSM's current form, as medical interventions such as hormone therapy and psychotherapy appear necessary yet unachievable for those attempting transition due to financial and medical reasons (Maizes & Dog, 2015).

Ekins and King (2006) position medical healthcare professionals as gatekeepers towards a successful transition; it is ultimately the decision of doctors to distribute hormone therapies, and furthermore permit surgical intervention and specifically GRS. This arguably presents a psycho-medical regulatory regime (Hausman, 2001). Case studies have isolated that medical intervention was historically dependent upon social class; Roberta Cowell was upperclass and successfully arranged GRS, whereas in contrast George Jamieson was working-class and denied surgery (Ekins & King, 1996). Class has thus been isolated as a potential factor that may have facilitated or denied access to health interventions (Hines, 2007), yet an abundance of psychological research neglects to acknowledge this evident intersection between gender and class (Rickett & Woolhouse, cited in Richards & Barker, 2015). One must acknowledge this barrier to reassignment surgery to be incredibly significant, as surgery has been the dominant treatment method in transitioning between genders since the 1970s (Cromwell, 1999).

Radical feminist discourse has also proven problematic towards those who identify as transgender. The bodies of trans-women have been subjected

to a rigidly clinical gaze “All transsexuals rape women’s bodies by reducing the real female form to an artefact. Rape… can also be accomplished by deception” (Raymond 1971, cited in Bettcher, 2014). It is fair to assume that this perspective - deemed trans-oppression - cannot be separated from sexist oppression (Bettcher, 2014) as it proposes radicalised fabrications of socially constructed gender. Such views work to constrain trans-women as imitators of ‘extreme examples of feminine behaviour’ that women replicate ‘in order to avoid punishment from the patriarchy’ (Jeffreys, 1990, cited in Lev, 2005). Such perspectives position transgender practices as a patriarchally sycophantic mechanism to reduce women down to subservient entities (Raymond, 1980). This perspective dictates than transgender women can never be real women, strongly adhering to the gender dichotomy stating that chromosomal sex is determinant of maleness and femaleness, and because men undergo alteration they will never achieve the truthful gender of a woman. This radical perspective is not confined to the work of Raymond; more recent academics such as Jeffreys (1997) reiterate that the transgendered exist solely as a constructed anti-feminist phenomenon by reinforcing patriarchal ideals of masculinity and femininity. These radical feminist perspectives have been stationed to position transgender individuals as aberrant intruders towards gender (Hines, 2007) and have thus highlighted hypocritical stances within radical feminist research. This view marginalises a particular cohort, maintaining problematic gender relations (Chodorow, 1996; Monro, 2000).

Previous Research Surrounding the Transgender Phenomenon using Narrative Interaction

Realist approaches appear problematic in their application to this field. Traditional methods are arguably flawed in nature, by likening descriptions of self-identification to that dissimilar from any inanimate object discoverable within the world (Crossley, 2007). Instead, when concerning oneself with an individual’s personal perceptions of their self, one must adopt a social-constructionist stance; this is because people actively immerse themselves within their world, constructing themselves through linguistic performances (Crossley, 2007). Considering this, one must assume that aspects of self-identity are fluid, and the only individual qualified to speak upon their gender identification being the participant in question whom is somewhat of an insider – an expert of their self (Lewis, 1952). It has been noted that narrative accounts, distinct to their narrator, are attempts at sense making surrounding important transitions within one’s life (Broyard, 1992).

It is therefore understandable that narrative accounts have been interpreted in relation to transgender experiences. Previous interpretations of narrative content have divulged how gender identities are formed within personal experiences, and are thus constructed in line with sociocultural understandings influencing the time-span of transition (Chavez-Korell & Johnson, 2010; Connell, 2010; Hines, 2006). Former narrative accounts have also disclosed that individuals appear to contemplate their gender incongruence in line with available resources, to assist with their gender transitions (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014). Many trans individuals seem to recognise their gender dysphoria at puberty, with frequent responses to this appearing

negative (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006). Narrative accounts therefore appear to commend the importance of trans-people being supported within their transitions by trusted individuals and support networks (Connell, 2010; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006). Despite acknowledgement within literature surrounding the discrimination experienced by those who identify as transgender (Girshick, 2008), there appears to be a gap in research surrounding the positive experiences surrounding those who have experienced gender transitioning (Chen, Granato, Shipherd, Simpson & Lehavot, 2017).

Rationale

Current literature appears to prescribe sex as static (Kim, 2009), with the "continuous nature of gender…reaffirmed through essentialist narratives" (Davis, 2008, p.124). Western societies therefore impose that gender is legitimised by biological discourse (Hird, 2002), with dichotomised gender upholding heteronormativity (Duke 2014; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). This particular discoursed perspective has fed a medical way of speaking, sustaining typical biological notions of gender (Garfinkel, 1967; Kessler and McKenna 1978). This is because gender incongruence is often articulated using medical and biological discourse that demonstrates masculine or feminine traits and characteristics (Hines, 2010). The present study consequently aims to retract from this essentialist scripture, and instead focus on how individuals specifically construct their own identities.

One must also recognise the importance of encapsulating narrative accounts constructed externally to institutions of power (Connell, 2007). Furthermore, the dominance of such voices that sit comfortably within a celebrity domain has fed descriptions of transition greeted with amicable tolerance and neutral attitudes (Corinthios, 2015). Such celebrity voices appear indicative of a facilitated transition absent of the discrimination and barriers encountered by those who live outside of the public domain (Cavanaugh & Ladd, 2017). Despite prolifically neutral attitudes being recognised towards celebrity transitions, trans-identities interpret media representations as inherently negative (Trans Media Watch, 2010). Trans-identities therefore appear extremely misrepresented within the media (Humphrey, 2016). Considering this, it appears obligatory to conduct research surrounding how unprivileged voices construct meaning surrounding their normative experiences of gender transition. In accomplishing this, one aspires to articulate knowledge surrounding lived experiences of those who identify as transgender.

Gender appears a public spectacle seeking further understanding, especially with trans rights being a relatively new addition to LGB(T) community (Shankle, 2013; Stonewall, 2016). Controversy exists surrounding the tagging of those who are transgender within this all-encompassing term; qualms surrounding the dangerous stigmatisms associated with further categorisation of those who are transgender are evident (Finnegan & McNally, 2002). Furthermore, discussions presently exist surrounding the revision of the current Gender Recognition Act, established in 2004 (BBC News, 2017). Therefore, considerations of personal and relevant accounts surrounding gender transition are needed to suitably support those who are transgender.

Informative research involving the cohort is likely to provide the deviation needed from frequent interrogations surrounding a transgender individual's legitimacy as the opposite sex (McClearen, 2015), and may dually resist tarring the cohort as a clinical population (Kim, 2009; Smith, Shin & Officer, 2012). Understanding those who identify as trans could reduce the amount of transphobia in circulation, with 98% of it currently being directed towards trans-women alone (Church & Minter, 2000). Suicidal ideation is also common in relation to possessing a transgender identity (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Grant, Mottet, Tanis et al., 2011; James, Herman, Rankin et al., 2016). Such harrowing instances call for a global recognition of transgender individuals as normative people; taking such time to understand what transgender people need to facilitate their transition could improve their experiences of becoming who they aspire to be.

Research Aims

All things considered, the present study will adopt a social-constructionist approach in analysing the narrative account of a trans-woman (1). The study therefore aims to explore the meaningful life-events of a contemporary non-celebrity transgender voice that exists outside of the public domain (2). The study intends to provide insight into personal experiences of the process of gender transition itself, with specific reference to acceptance, discrimination and medical intervention (3).

2 Methodology

Owing to the deeply personal nature of this project, gaining initial ethical approval from 'Leeds Research Ethics Committee' was paramount. Transparent ethical applications were sent to the committee (See Appendices 1 and 2), obtaining approval (See Appendix 3). The participant was approached via email (See Appendix 4), and issued with an explicit participation sheet describing what the study would entail (See Appendix 5). This was done to avoid coercion, affording the participant a conscious decision surrounding participation. The participant was also asked to complete an informative consent form before each interview ensued (See Appendix 6). Destroying the recorded data as soon as it was sufficiently transcribed protected participant confidentiality and anonymity. No images used within the photo-elicitation session are attached to this paper to avoid outside recognition. Furthermore, all identifiable names and locations within the transcriptions have been altered in order to protect the participant's identity.

The present study aimed to conduct research within the realm of ethnography to 'make the strange familiar' (Banister, 2011), and encourage the abandonment of derogatory attitudes towards those who are transgender. In order to do this, one must study how trans-identities have been oppressed within society (Spradley, 1979). This research must therefore immerse itself within the transgender culture (Banister, 2011) by encouraging an ethnographical approach into an individual's life (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). Interviewing therefore appeared the most fitting methodology in exploring how an individual makes meaning of encountered life events (Hammersley, 1990). One may also argue this to be valid as familiarity with interviewing is indisputable within today's society (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997). An individual is likely to experience multiple interviews throughout their lifespan with respect to occupational opportunities. Interviews are also common methodologies associated with qualitative research (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009), with semi-structured interviews appearing the most dominant methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2013). By using such interviews, one would expect the participant to possess the ability to construct a personal account through their own words (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

However, one must appreciate the difficulty of recalling all influential events during one's life chronologically, especially whereupon struggles have been daily battles; therefore, structuring an interview using photo-elicitation was considered as a potential method. Photo-elicitation, termed by Harper (1986; 2002), refers to the utilisation of photographs within an interview, whereupon images are used to facilitate the participant's responses (Bates, McCann, Kaye & Taylor, 2017; Hogan & Warren 2012). Photo-elicitation was first used to encourage researchers to move away from previous assumptions surrounding mental health (Collier, 1957). Furthermore, visual stimulation has been found to prompt emotional connections to memories and provide additional dimensions to meaningful accounts (Kunimoto, 2004). This methodology has been used prevalently in exploring issues surrounding identity (Croghan, Griffin, Hunter & Pheonix, 2008), therefore seeming a necessary methodology for transgender research. Using photo-elicitation may therefore have the power to challenge traditional views

upon a phenomenon (Hurworth, 2004), thus retaining the potential to allow further understanding and demonstrate flaws within dominant transgender perspectives.

As contemporary phenomena is often visually recorded and presented on social media platforms (Bates et al., 2017), it appeared fitting to use photo-elicitation to divulge personal experiences surrounding a transgender woman's transition. The photo-elicitation session involved the participant bringing in a variety of significant photographs spanning their lifetime. With respect to the enduring friendship between the participant and myself, I was asked if I could also produce some photographs as they had deleted a lot of older images in order to facilitate their transition and manage what self-portrayals are shared with the world (Tortajada, 2013). In total, 32 images were used within the session, mainly consisting of the participant herself, and her family and friends. Such images ranged from early childhood, pre-transition, to presently post-transition, essentially encapsulating the participant's lifespan. In order to protect the participant's anonymity, the photographs used are not included within the appendix of this report. Particular images influenced the participant's feelings towards herself, allowing her to meaningfully reflect upon integral points of her transition. This allowed the visual exploration of different images to resurrect specific feelings and relevant memories of the participant's experiences (Bates et al., 2017) regarding her identity. Prompt questions were included to facilitate this discussion, such as: *a) How do these images make you feel? /b) Do any images make you feel sad? If so, why? /c) Do any of these images make you feel proud? If so, why?* (See Appendix 7 for full interview schedule). It was also decided to structure a series of semi-structured interviews providing the participant with the opportunity to answer directed questions, yet still have the ability to raise her own points without the danger of being shut down. Such interviews were structured in relation to reviewing pre-existing literature that highlighted issues surrounding acceptance, discrimination, and health interventions. Prompting questions were therefore designed in relation to these aspects, including questions such as: *Do you feel accepted by society? / Have you ever experienced anybody being hostile towards your gender identification? / Has health care proven beneficial to your transition?* (See Appendix 7 for full interview schedule). It was also planned to conduct an unstructured interview, however due to the scope of the project and the amount of data gathered the fifth interview was terminated. Responses during the interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone, and the acquired data was transcribed (See Appendix 8 for example transcription) and analysed using narrative analysis (See Appendix 9 for example analysis). The participant was given a debrief sheet at the end of each session with access to support if any distress was experienced following the study (See Appendix 10). Three interviews were conducted: the first a photo-elicitation that lasted 72 minutes, the second session involved the topics of acceptance and discrimination that lasted 71 minutes, and a third interview surrounding health-interventions was 54 minutes in length. As each interview concluded, the participant and myself summarized the acquired recording and discussed whether the participant desired any aspects of the dataset to be disregarded. The participant was also asked to discuss anything additionally if they wished.

In line with the need to utilise social-constructionist approaches when studying aspects of the self and identity, in order to challenge mainstream traditionalist approaches (Potter and Wetherell, 1987), narrative analysis was used to interpret the language-based data within the present study. The narrative approach favours an individual's personal disclosure upon significant aspects of their life as meaningful (Taylor, 1989), allowing the participant to construct her self and identity (Crossley, 2007). This may inform understandings surrounding how individuals create meaning within their lives (Boje, 2002; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002). Upon asking the participant questions surrounding specific aspects of her transition using semi-structured interviews, one would hope to obtain responses providing relative information regarding how a trans-woman applies meaning to her life within today's societal context. An assumption of the methodology, therefore, alludes to the acquisition of knowledge surrounding an individual's personal narrative that in turn may shed light upon its situated societal context (Crossley, 2007). Therefore, it was decided to analyse collated data based upon the framework of narrative analysis developed by McAdams (1993) and Crossley (2000). This involved initially reading and familiarising oneself with the data in question. It was then necessary to explore the elements of 'personal narrative' dictated by McAdams (1993); in order to do this, the data was actively analysed in relation to the narrative tone, imagery and themes present (McAdams, 1993; Crossley, 2000) (See Appendices 11, 12 and 13 mapping the analytical process). Tones were isolated by how the participant constructed their language to reflect particular attitudes; imagery involved the discovery of certain phrases that conjured specific images; and themes were identified in relation to prevalent stances adopted by the participant (McAdams, 1993; Crossley, 2000). A further conceptualisation was involved within the analysis, by ordering the elements of personal narrative in relation to past experiences, present experiences and future intentions (Richmond, 2002)(See Appendix 11, 12 and 13 for evidence of this). This was introduced to organise deviant positions experienced throughout the participant's narrative, as one must assume fluidity associated with perspectives across the lifespan.

The participant within this study, Kate a second year student studying Fine Art at Chichester, is a white, MTF trans-woman who is 21 years old. Kate has been a huge part of my life – a best friend – for over 10 years; I have thus been at her side during the entirety of her gender transition. From my personal comprehension of Kate's life, and some of the difficulties she has experienced, I felt motivated to approach her and enquire as to whether she would be interested in collaboratively conducting some life-story research. Furthermore, as formerly introduced within this paper, there is a gap in research surrounding the normative voices of those who have experienced gender incongruence with their biologically ascribed sex, in specific relation to younger trans-women. Therefore, Kate's perception of her transition provided an angle whereupon a typical voice could be used to gather information surrounding gender transition absent of financial or celebrity facilitation. This piece of research thus aims to utilise an interview-based research process in order to allow the acquisition of information surrounding the life of the participant (Taylor & Littleton, 2006) who identifies as a woman, despite being born chromosomally male.

3 Analysis and Discussion

The Summation of Kate's Narrative

Kate's narrative initially appeared incredibly focused upon her appearance pre-transition, addressing that she couldn't believe that she looked that way. This inspired Kate to disclose her former anxieties surrounding clothes shopping, being photographed, and social media in general, providing information surrounding her concerns pre-and-post-transition. She then went on to discuss her close friends, acknowledging those who supported and facilitated her transition, as well as those who were detrimental with a friend disclosing how "she felt uncomfortable" around Kate.

This inspired memories of starting University, a pivotal time whereupon she worked towards a new identity as well as her degree. Despite this, Kate makes reference to her feminine tendencies pre-transition throughout the entire narrative; she references her effeminacy by maintaining her hair and nails longer than typical boys of her age, classed as one of the "gay ones" within educational environments. Kate also focuses upon an altered relationship with her father, a working-class ex-miner, and 'old-fashioned' in his ways. Kate reflects on how she concealed her identity from him due to apprehension surrounding how he would react, only to develop a stronger relationship built upon patience and understanding; she states that she "loves him to bits". Kate then introduced her relationship with boyfriend, Cameron, whom supports her indefinitely allowing her to "truly be myself around him".

Kate's self-image was a recurrent aspect of her narrative, demonstrating her passion for practising makeup and looking "perfect"; however, the narrative also demonstrated a progression within her self-confidence, as she is now capable in visiting the local shops barefaced with minimal concerns. Memories sporadically surfaced throughout the narrative whereupon Kate's gender came under scrutiny by members of the public. Tones of irritation became evident towards people who believed it acceptable to ask personal questions surrounding Kate's transition. Such attitudes make her paranoid surrounding how people will think of her, and she also feels that boyfriend Cameron replicates such concerns. Kate references how Cameron is open-minded, however feels like he experiences confusion surrounding his own sexuality (emphasising the problematic relations between gender and sexuality). She hopes that her future intentions of having GRS will alleviate this, and allow them both to be secure within their heterosexual relationship.

When discussing her family, Kate was always encouraged to be herself; she is proud to have an accepting family, and friends, within her support network; this demonstrates feelings of empowerment surrounding transgender narratives (Chen et al., 2017). However, Kate often retracted to the disbelief associated with her former appearance; she would battle with herself in the mirror questioning: "Is this me?" when her exterior failed to match "the different vision of how I looked" when walking down the street internalising being a woman. Kate also acknowledges the support of *Youtube*

and *Instagram*, finding more solace in those "real people" than celebrity trans-identities whose transitions appear "unrealistic".

Throughout her narrative, Kate references that she identifies solely as a "woman, not a trans-woman" thus emphasising how she aspires to live a normative life under the socialised ideals of what constitutes to "womanhood". Kate fears that the categorisation of trans-women produces further problems in terms of maintaining stigmatisms surrounding the cohort. Alongside this, Kate demonstrates disinterest towards activism, or lobbying for transgender rights because she does not feel presently affected by societal discrimination (such as persecution for using the bathroom pertaining to the identified sex because "I've *never ever* had an issue with that").

Kate stresses her desperation for appropriate surgical work to enhance features of femininity, such as breast enlargement, facial feminisation, and most crucially GRS. She frequently references an uncomfortable incident this Christmas, whereupon she couldn't find the appropriate padding to conceal her genitals. This experience was distressing, and left her irritated that she couldn't just "slip on a pair of jeans". Kate blames this on her socio-economic status; being "working-class" appears to implicate her access to the surgical intervention she requires. Kate acknowledges how financial stability has impeded the length of her transition, with her class limiting her to the types of intervention she presently receives. It is with this that Kate is heavily reliant upon the NHS, and thus appreciates the positive changes resulting from the health-service's interventions. However, with retraction to pessimism, Kate feels that such interventions provided free for those experiencing gender transitioning do not go far enough; the lack of surgical intervention presently is the main barrier to Kate's successful self-identification as a woman.

Finally, Kate drew her narrative to a close by stating that she "still has a lot of growing to do" and that she hasn't lived how she wants to be yet. This highlights that the overcoming of present surgical obstacles will allow the future to become a time whereupon she can truly be self-identified and comfortable with herself as a woman, achieving the aesthetic perfection she has always desired.

Becoming Identified: The Analytical Discoveries Surrounding Kate's Developed Identity

After familiarisation with the obtained data, the narrative analysis was conducted. This involved isolating themes spanning Kate's narrative account. The three transcriptions were annotated and analysed in relation to their content. Transcript 1 (T1) appeared significantly focused upon Kate's difficulty in visualising her former self-expression as male. Kate's present aesthetic appearance also dominates T1, alongside her self-identification as a woman. Transcript 2 (T2) also acknowledges Kate's identification as a woman, but furthermore her relationships, and the importance of those that are supportive and accepting. Finally, transcript 3 (T3) expresses how Kate considers health

intervention within her narrative; whilst she finds certain interventions to have positive influences upon her identification as female, the time constraints and financial concerns surrounding further interventions appear to inhibit her achievement of replicating a womanly exterior and therefore her aesthetic perfection.

Due to the abundance of data gathered, it became necessary to prioritise and combine recurrent themes as opposed to focusing upon more salient points within the narrative. From comparing the content within the working maps (See Appendices 11, 12 and 13), certain themes appeared to dominate the narrative in terms of enabling Kate to construct her identity. Three overarching themes became evident across the three interviews, where Kate recurrently referenced: 1) her sole-identification as a woman, 2) her continual striving for aesthetic perfection, and 3) her socioeconomic status. The three overarching themes interpreted from the narrative account demonstrate significant aspects of Kate's transition considered integral towards constructing her identity. Such themes intersect and manifest through various subthemes that are reinforced by specific tonal attitudes of the participant, and references to imagery. Each theme, and their prospective subthemes, will be presented and discussed in turn with reference to how they occur within Kate's past, present and future life course using relevant extracts. Please note that T1/T2/T3 refers to which transcript the extract was taken from.

5.1. 'I don't view myself as a trans-woman': Sole Identification as a Woman

The first, and arguably most dominant, theme discussed is that of Kate's sole identification as a woman. Throughout her narrative it becomes increasingly apparent that she cannot identify with her former self-expression as male. This is revealed through tones of embarrassment and detachment in response to viewing images of her past self. Despite this, Kate presently appears self-assured in the sense that she is a woman, demonstrating an optimistic tonal shift. It is recognised, within this subtheme of self-assurance that in order for her to truly be a woman Kate requires GRS. Furthermore, due to her sole identification as a woman, Kate exhibits her perspective surrounding activism and how she is presently disinterested as her singular aim is to live normatively as a woman.

5.1.1. Dismay at 'how I dressed': Embarrassment of Past Self

One must recognise how Kate initially structures her language to demonstrate tones of shock and embarrassment (See Fig. 1 for relevant extracts) towards images within the photo-elicitation session (T1). One may deduce that Kate constructs such tones of discomfort from her evident disbelief within the extracts below (See Fig. 1), stressing that she "cannot believe" her former identity as male.

Figure 1. Extracts depicting Kate's shocked and embarrassed tones towards her previous identity

(Extract from T1)	I cannot believe that I looked like that
(T1)	I cannot believe that that was me…it's like looking at a different person
(T1)	…oh my god, like how I dressed and that
(T1)	…on some more than others like, cause' some of them I think "Oh gosh"…
(T1)	Yeah. That's weird though when I look at that one because I think did I look like that when I was at [old workplace]?
(T1)	God look at my face on that bugger

Such tones of embarrassment highlight Kate's discontent towards her past gender presentation pre-transition, allowing her to replicate feelings of inappropriateness towards anatomic sex that are experienced by many trans-identities (Barišić et al., 2014). Such expressions of self-conscious emotions are viewed as "unmanly" (Fischer, 2000), and are thus indicative of feminine emotionality (Greenberger & Blake, 1996); the development of such attitudes appear to align with Kate's identified gender role, and are likely to be constructed products of her femininity.

5.1.2. Incongruence with Former Male Identity

As already noted, Kate's strong identification as a woman reflects the incongruence she experiences, evidencing the lack of a harmonious relationship between biological sex and internal gender (Sevelius, 2013). This emphasises how transsexuality has been constructed to represent centration upon a desire to become the opposing sex (Chiland, 2003). However, one must recognise that Kate presently feels accomplished within her female sex, categorising her difficulties as issues with self-confidence experienced "Like every woman" and as inescapable as "every woman goes through it" (See Fig. 2). The tones formerly discussed, that emphasise Kate's discontent towards her former male self, seem to dissolve when she reflects upon her present gender expression as a woman. Connell (2010) also recognises this difference in narratives when the participant is reflecting upon their previous gender, as opposed to when speaking about experiences post-transition.

Figure 2. Extracts demonstrating Kate's identification as a woman

(T1)	…but you just have good days and bad days, don't you? Like every woman, do you know what I mean?
(T1)	And sometimes I think it's oh me and it's because of me and who I am, but it's not, it's just a *thing* and every woman goes through it

(T1)	Kate: I don't view myself as like [whispers:] a trans-woman; do you know what I mean? *I:* Just as a woman? *Kate:* Yeah, and that's weird-

This specific identification as a woman, and prior tones of embarrassment, appear to construct a theme of uncertainty surrounding Kate's previous masculine exterior that dominates past, present and future accounts within her narrative. This also appears evident alongside constant visions of self-identity as a woman, prior to transitioning, that insight imagery surrounding an uncomfortable experience in front of the mirror.

> I'd look in the mirror and I'd be like: "*I'm Kieran*", like, do you know what I mean? It sounds so weird but I'd be like, like when I was like that, I'd be like: "*I'm Kieran, is this me? Am I me?*" Do you know what I mean? And it would be weird. That sounds so weird, it's just – it was one of those weird things it'd be like when you look in the mirror and I'm like– I'd look in the mirror and I'd be like "*This is who I am. I'm Kieran. This is who I've got to-*" it was weird. (T1)

Uncertainty within male status is not uncommon within literature, with many transgender individuals reporting experiences of extreme confusion surrounding who they were (Sevelius, 2013). The constant repetition of "weird" stresses the discomfort Kate experienced when inhabiting her past identity, and her tone encourages one to understand her contention in pretending to be someone she was not. This is apparent within recollections of her childhood whereupon she experienced a "different kind of view" of how she looked when "walking up the street". The confusion evident within this extract may also be interpreted to demonstrate that Kate, in the past, was unable to successfully perform her adopted gender role as a woman; this difficulty surrounding gender conformity was likely to be detrimental towards Kate's self-worth (Good & Sanchez, 2010).

Kate recalls how she would find herself feeling like she was "wearing heels", despite that not literally being the case. This resonates with certain narratives of the field, also demonstrating the necessity for identification as a woman (Connell, 2010). However, it is also apparent that certain trans-women have demonstrated content within their former male identity (Connell, 2010), thus providing attitudes of placation absent within Kate's narrative. Furthermore, Kate's stable identification as a woman also appears distinct to her particular life-story, as other narratives have demonstrated the opposite. It has been argued that, due to the absence of female experiences such as pregnancy and menstruation, it is unlikely that a trans-woman could ever know what it is like to be a woman (Goldberg, 2006).

5.1.3. 'I know how I'm going to be': A Self-Assured Woman

Within her narrative, Kate makes multiple references to the fact that she has always been focused on becoming a woman. She recalls memories of

wearing dresses during her childhood (See Fig. 3), demonstrating how she has always been inclined to conform to the physical expression of women.

Figure 3. Extracts demonstrating Kate's preference for women's clothing

(T1)	…old video camera footage and me like with a little push chair, with a little dress on and my mum's shoes and that on the drive
(T1)	I used to have a little Dorothy dress that I used to wear
(T1)	And it was like a dress, it was like a silver one to the floor, it was like a halter-neck [*I: wow*] and I remember putting that on… And I used to think I was like a *Dream-girl* in it, *Dreamgirls*

One may deduce that from a young age Kate demonstrated a preference for performing a female gender role by imitating the way in which women dress, and furthermore maternal behaviour (Yeo, 1999). The investment in gender ideals suggests a concentration upon femininity, and the reproduction of appropriate behaviours associated with a woman's gender role (Alters & Schiff, 2009; Good & Sanchez, 2010).

Kate: -like even when – if people would say or call me gay and stuff I knew I wasn't so I wasn't bothered [*I:* yeah] and I was like I know, I know that I'm not. *I* know what's going off in my head, I know what; do you know what I mean? I used to think like well I know…how I'm going to be (T2)

It appears that Kate began to comprehend this inclination from childhood as she approached adolescence, definitively stating that she would eventually become a woman. One may infer that Kate's gender identification was motivated by her socially situated knowledge (Alsop, Fitzsimons & Lennon, 2002) surrounding the separation between gender and sexuality, allowing her to understand her self-identification as a woman.

Kate: I'm not at that stage yet I *need* to get it done – I'm not one hundred percent happy I'm only twenty-one (T3)

However, one must recognise from the extract above that Kate considers her authenticity of a woman to be contingent upon her genitals stating that she "needs" to undergo sexual reassignment. This resonates with literature denoting that gender appears determinant upon physiognomies of genitals (Fausto-Sterling, 2000), highlighting future intentions to securely identify as a woman once she has received GRS. Kate also emphasises surgical intervention as an imperative need; this replicates other narratives in the sense that surgery is a necessity for gender identification (Connell, 2010).

5.1.4. I don't want to "parade about with a fucking rainbow hat": Disinterest Towards Activism

Kate's present identification as a woman appears conceptualised by her disinterest towards activism, with no desire to "parade about with a fucking rainbow hat". Former research has observed increased activism within those who identify as transgender (Riggle, Rostosky, McCants & Pascale-Hague, 2011), however this is not the case within Kate's narrative.

> I didn't transition to be like "*yeah I'm trans"* ***I*** transitioned to be a woman and that's how I live my life, as a *woman.* Not as a trans-woman, just a *woman* (T2)

> She's been in *Big Brother*, and was like "*I am a woman"* do you know what I mean? You don't need to keep saying it like if you're black you don't need to keep saying, "*I'm black, I'm black"* do you know what I mean? … every conversation she had was about trans rights and it's just *too* much for even *me.* Even *I* like I get fucking sick of *that* shit. (T2)

One may attribute Kate's tiredness of activism to be due to the construction of her identity as a woman, and not a trans-woman. She acknowledges that positive trans-activists exist within her narrative, but Kate doesn't resonate with them. She just wants to live her life as a woman. One may argue that due to the daily struggles that Kate faces, she has minimal drive towards any additional stressors; former research has acknowledged how transsexuals are likely to appreciate a quiet life (Connell, 2010) that is obtained once the self is adequately constructed. A further conceptualisation within Kate's narrative is how she distances herself from being termed a trans-woman; she demonstrates pride in being a woman (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992), possibly accounting for her disinterest in being categorised as transgender.

5.2. Striving for Aesthetic Perfection

The second theme dominating Kate's narrative is a fixation upon obtaining aesthetic perfection. Her past consisted of practising make-up and how to dress; and acquiring knowledge from *Youtuber's* accounts on social media. One must recognise the tones of embarrassment already discussed surrounding her former male exterior, and how she presently engages within an exhaustive process that bears emotional and physical labour on her part to maintain this ideal of what a woman should look like. It appeared evident that the imagery incorporated within Kate's narrative was heavily focused upon specific clothes and garments. It is with this that one must recognise that Kate is constructing her identity from a very aesthetic perspective. Kate believes that GRS appears paramount in achieving the aesthetic perfection she strives towards.

5.2.1. Oscillation Between Male and Female Clothing: An Experimental Learning Process

Kate was specifically drawn to images that depicted her infancy in experimentation with wearing women's clothing and makeup. Kate expresses how she used to frequently wear a "woman's top" before her transition and wear her mother's clothes; the act of borrowing clothes is often articulated within transgender narratives (Cummings, 2007). Kate also emphasised images where she "started putting makeup on" (See Fig. 4 for relevant extracts).

Figure 4. Extracts demonstrating Kate's prior experimentation with women's clothing and makeup

(T1)	Cause' when I was at school I used to wear my mum's clothes and stuff (.) put my mum's dresses on
(T1)	I'd obviously dress up and stuff listen to music and that and pretend in different ways in my head
(T1)	because I'd not fully gone through stuff it was like, it was like a, kind of, like a "*Ooh yeah I can - I'm wearing makeup, ooh this is like a step"* Do you know what I mean?
(T1)	my friend Annie … says: "*I feel like when you were first at Uni and stuff you did it like really over the – like just so much.*
(T2)	with makeup and stuff like … I've had a *lot* of practice with it … so when I was like going to Uni and stuff I was, kind of, already steps ahead in a way

Her continual reflections upon self-presentation induce further imagery surrounding how different Kate looks now, from then during her teenage years pre-transition. Such imagery is present within other trans-women's narratives, depicting a progression where women undergoing transition become fully dressed (Connell, 2010).

However, this process whereby MTF women experiment is highly regulated; radical feminist perspectives feel judge trans-women as being exemplified exaggerations of femininity (Jeffreys, 1990, cited in Lev, 2005). This delegitmises the efforts of trans-women seeking comfort within their skin, despite gender being recognised as a learned construct (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Radical perspectives that convolute the experiences of others are not the only perpetrators of judgment towards trans-women. Kate is no stranger to this; she references a specific memory communicating public opinion surrounding her gender, furthermore highlighting stress associated with disruption to the social identity process (Burke, 1991).

I always, *always* remember this memory. I had like my red skinny jeans on [*I:* yeah] erm and then – I was only young – and I can't remember what top I had on. And I remember someone saying to me: "*Are you a boy or a girl?"* and that *really* upset me. I remember it *really* upsetting me when someone said are you a boy or a girl … Like before I'd transitioned and stuff it was like a compliment. (T1)

From the extract above, one can see how Kate has set the scene making multiple references to the fact that she remembers every detail to the vivid colour of her 'red skinny jeans'. One can deduce public reflection upon the social nature of feminine characteristics, and how people socially construct gendered roles (Lindsey, 2015). This may explain the confusion towards Kate's gender, her gender expression appeared ambiguous. However, it appears that Kate acknowledges now, in hindsight, that fluidity surrounding her gender was actually a "compliment".

5.2.2. Practise makes perfect: Concerns Surrounding Body Image

Body satisfaction appears vitally important amongst those who experience incongruence between their physical sex and internal gender identity (de Vries et al., 2014; McGuire, Doty, Catalpa & Ola, 2016). With this in mind, one can understand why Kate makes concessions to control how she is presented to the world (Plummer, 2001). Kate references how she made specific efforts to enhance her feminine image by imitating large breasts and a curvaceous figure. Kate describes creating the illusion of feminine hips using padding; vivid descriptions of this exist within her narrative enabling one to envision how she would assemble dust-cloths "it was like a square one like that, then a thin one". She acknowledges that she learnt how to do this from *Youtube* emphasising it's worth as an educational tool for transgender audiences; literature has dually acknowledged the guidance properties of social media for trans-identities (Hill, 2005; Miller, 2017).

> *YouTube* like that I feel like that helped me *so* much because it was like seeing people who were like me, do you know what I mean? And then I knew in my head this is me- that's what *I* want to do (T1)

> I grew up watching *YouTubers* and watching them go through it, and that's more *real* [*I:* was that- was that more?] it's more real, realistic (T1)

Kate appears to respect the opportunity of self-verification that *Youtube* has afforded her, as the platform allowed her to self-identify and feel that transitioning was achievable (Miller, 2017) recognising her contextual access to others like her (Shapiro, 2004). This manifests in the way that she perceives *Youtubers* as "real people", as she could follow their transitions and developments that didn't happen "overnight", deeming celebrity trans-identities "unrealistic".

However, despite the positive gratification Kate received from *Youtube*, Kate's narrative suggests that she feels a world away from being content with her body image. The extracts below demonstrate Kate's fixation with replicating an authentic female exterior, with the future intent to alter her physique and facial appearance (Jackson, Sullivan & Hymes, 1987). Such idealised views of womanhood appear to constrain Kate, pressuring her to construct feminine perfection (McAlister & Neill, 2007) therefore upholding heteronomy (Keith, 2017) by conforming to socialised expectations of femininity.

> But because of me and stuff and *my* situation I feel like sometimes like I always have to look – not perfect, but it has to be *my* – in my head how I – obviously I don't think perfect – but in my head it's got to be perfect (T1)

… on good days … I still think like oh I need like a nose job, I need – I wish my jaw was reduced [*I:* mm] like I want my boobs done and like my figure it's not womanly enough. Like I've not got big enough curves like, do you know what I mean? (T2)

I feel like I'm not where I want to be *now*, do you know what I mean? I've been on the tablets for over a year and I'm not where I want to be (T3)

Although the extracts above recognise the pressure Kate feels to look "perfect", her tone is still dissatisfied. This is exemplified through her references to still looking "manly in the mirror", and having "ugly patches". It is also important to note that her aspirations for security within her self-presentation as a woman appear contingent upon future interventions, as she demonstrates the need for alterations to her exterior through surgeries. Her tone is pessimistic towards the wait associated with transitional surgeries, however this resonates with findings that self-actualisation is halted by a lack of consolidation with the individual's gender identity, often developing after GRS has been achieved (McGuire et al., 2016).

5.3. Socioeconomic Status: Facilitator vs. Perpetrator

The final theme relates to Kate's socioeconomic status and how her transition appears bound by time. She makes multiple references to the fact that she must remain on hormone replacement therapy (HRT) for a long time before she has access to certain treatments. Kate recognises, with admiration, that "without hormone tablets I wouldn't be where I am today", however she retracts to pessimism stating that despite being on the tablets for over a year the changes were "tiny". This suggests that health-interventions, mediated by her access to financial stability, appear insufficient in enabling Kate to successfully replicate her constructed identity as a woman. Kate's irritation becomes evident within her narrative, as she describes enduring a "long, frustrating process" before she can eventually receive GRS in the future. The wait for GRS, a surgery that Kate considers crucial, appears to impose further psychological distress surrounding her transition as she just wants her male genitals gone, as they are "an annoyance".

5.3.1. Time As a Barrier to Required Health Interventions

Within Kate's narrative she demonstrates appreciation towards the NHS as she has been provided with HRT and voice therapy to make positive changes to her physical appearance. This attitude of gratitude appears reciprocated within many transgender patients whom mutually consider this form of intervention beneficial towards their self-esteem (Unger, 2016). However, Kate's attitude towards health-care appears mixed due to the length between appointments, and the changes from HRT being minimal.

Figure 5. Extracts demonstrating Kate's frustration towards the time implicating her transition

(T3)	It *is* a little bit mixed obviously because it's just – it's like as great as it is and they give you tablets and stuff and all that (erm) it's kind of – it's just a really long, frustrating process
(T3)	I've had hormone tablets and stuff which obviously I needed, but it took *ages* for me to get them and such a long wait
(T3)	like I've been offered like getting laser hair like removal … but you have to be on the tablets for *so* long before you can get that
(T3)	It's just a known fact between people that are trans that the waiting list for that surgery is like (.) so much

As seen within the above extracts, Kate emphasises her present irritation with the prolonged nature of health interventions, having to wait "three months" in between appointments at the transgender clinic. Kate repeatedly states how "it takes such a long time to get the ball rolling", inferring desperation surrounding progression within her transition. The emphasis placed upon this metaphor, a form of imagery, demonstrates the difficulties surrounding securing access to the appropriate interventions. Kate stresses within her narrative how, presently, each form of intervention is mediated by the time she has been on HRT. This encourages her to reflect on her own personal anticipation prior to receiving the tablets, reciting memories from the past of considering buying do-it-yourself HRT from illegitimate websites online. This emphasises the dangers associated with the current health system, as many trans-women may seek self-medication from unknown sources due to their desperation surrounding medical intervention. This could prove detrimental to many transgender individual's health, as HRT is only safe when monitored by knowledgeable health providers (Weinand & Safer, 2015).

> when I was younger I *did* look at them but I don't think I'd ever do it. I looked at them and I thought – I considered it (T3)

One may assume the time associated with the gender transitioning process upholds the psycho-regulatory regime (Hausman, 2001) dictating that it is at the hands of others to authenticate an individual's gender (Westbrook & Schilt, 2004). This is because medical professionals appear to regulate the access that trans-identities retain in undergoing medical interventions to facilitate their self-presentation as their desired gender (Ekins & King, 2006). This is done by imposing regulations surrounding the authenticity of an individual's gender dysphoria, requiring them to commit to attending psychological counseling and live without intervention for a dictated period of time (Meyer et al., 2002). Other transgender narratives have also isolated the problems with medical regulation, and furthermore how the eligibility for intervention imposes further barriers to obtaining GRS (Connell, 2010).

> You *need* the treatment in order to live your life. You need *their* treatment and *their* help (T3)

Despite her evident frustration towards the wait associated with receiving support via the NHS, Kate acknowledges that the treatment is necessary and safe when administered by professionals. However, the fact that she considered this alone suggests that some form of revision should be made to the regulation associated with health-care; such deficiencies in addressing the needs of trans-identities could prove to be societal negligence (Snelgtove, Jasudavisius, Rowe, Head & Bauer, 2012).

5.3.2. "I am working class. It's just a fact": Financial Disadvantage Prolonging Kate's Gender Transition

The final subtheme to discuss is that of financial disadvantage; Kate believes that her societal class presently implicates the progress within her gender transition. She feels that her former tones of frustration surrounding time are linked to her class status. This is because, she recognises that if she was middle-class she could possibly access private health-care that could bridge the wait between now, and the eventual achievement of GRS. In the past this caused a lot of distress for Kate, as the financial barriers to additional surgeries felt gargantuan and unachievable. This can be observed from the extract below.

> I'm from a working-class background, I've not got the money to be – do you know like all these people that you see that are like trans and they look gorgeous like [*I:* mm] like they've all had loads of work done and money and I just thought I'd never be able to afford stuff like that (T3)

Many trans-identities have acknowledged how class appears to implicate access to health-interventions (Hines, 2007), more specifically due to monetary concerns (Maizes & Dog, 2015). Kate appears to understand the sociocultural barrier of class imposed upon her transition; it is recognised within literature that class status appears to implicate access to health interventions (Charez, Karell & Johnson, 2010). This resonates with how working-class individuals appear to position themselves as controlled largely by social and environmental factors (Lemyre, Lee, Mercier, Bouchard & Krewski, 2006).

> it's like you have to find someone, then a fucking sperm bank, and then you have to do this and pay thousands of pounds of your own money like how the *fuck* do you expect people to do that? And many people…say that they regret rushing into getting the hormone tablets but…the tablets are going to help you and make you appear more feminine so course you're going to do it (T3)

The above extract demonstrates how desperate Kate was to begin her treatment. Kate's tone becomes irritated as she references an instance of regulation whereupon not only was she expected to pay thousands of pounds, but also how she had to choose between starting her therapy or maintaining her fertility. She reflects upon how she is presently in no situation to store her sperm, and this raises implications surrounding class disadvantage as such decisions are likely to have a long-term psychological impact. Kate's lack of financial stability prevented her from doing this, and now the therapy has begun she "won't be able to have my old children now". This emphasises how

social class imposes widespread limitations surrounding many aspects of life mediating an individual's access to money (Bullock & Limbert, 2009); Kate emphasises how if she had the money, she would have made such concessions to reserve her ability to have children.

One may infer that the wait associated with obtaining intervention, alongside the pressure Kate felt to "appear more feminine" is what motivated her to make such a difficult decision. From this specific memory within Kate's narrative, it must be acknowledged that trans-women have to make huge sacrifices to achieve self-actualisation within their appearance, especially when their transitions appear implicated by class (Hines, 2007).

4 General Discussion

In satisfaction of the research aims, the present study explored the narrative account of a working-class trans-woman experiencing her gender transition. Her normative voice satisfies an evident research gap, moving away from high-profile celebrity personalities dominating recognition (Cavanaugh & Ladd, 2017). This allowed Kate to provide a meaningful account surrounding her experiences of acceptance, discrimination and health-interventions. The findings, in line with the main themes identified, indicated that Kate distances herself from the transgender label, and instead specifically identifies as a woman putting tremendous amounts of pressure on herself to replicate an aesthetically “perfect” exterior. In order to successfully construct her identity as a woman and be accepted, Kate seeks perfection through GRS (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). This suggests that one’s gender identity appears constrained by genetalia (Lorber & Moore, 2007) and consequential expectations surrounding how men and women should present themselves (Lorber, 1993).

Kate’s assigned sex differs significantly from her present gender expression as a woman (Spade, 2006; Berg-Weger, 2016) suggesting that her identification as a woman is socially constructed. Such norms associated with traditional gender roles (Johnson & Repta, 2012) appear to oppress Kate. From this, one may assert that traditionalist expectations surrounding gender identification therefore seek deconstruction.

This research has also highlighted how health interventions appear to present a psycho-medical regulatory regime (Hausman, 2001) as their distribution appears dependent upon the decisions of medical professionals. This replicates former literature surrounding transgender regulation (Ekins & King, 2006). The implications associated with medical gatekeeping, surrounding a fixation upon criteria, appear problematic for those who are transgender as many have sought therapeutic interventions distributed online. The prevalence of trans-identities taking illicit medications to facilitate the acquisition of secondary characteristics associated with the desired sex is incredibly dangerous (Weinand & Safer, 2015).

Working-class status also appears to regulate her access to such health interventions (Hines, 2007). Kate identifies as working class and believes that her transition has been lengthened due to her lack of disposable income. This therefore insinuates that money is extremely indicative of the duration of the transitioning process, as working-class individuals are distanced from middle and upper class individuals who experience facilitated transitions due to financial stability (Cavanaugh & Ladd, 2017). Such disparities between class calls for further research surrounding the intersections between gender and class within society (Day, Rickett & Woolhouse, 2014).

6.1. Three Reflexive Components of Qualitative Study (Wilkinson, 1988)

6.1.1. Personal Reflections

During my undergraduate degree I conducted a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis that investigated how trans-women were positioned within society. I found that micro-aggressions were presented through the media, especially in relation the pathologisation of transgenderism being perverted, criminalised and a behavioural disorder. Within my analysis, I isolated that such micro-aggressions are likely to act oppressively towards non-dominant transgender women (Sue, 2010).

Such oppressive attitudes motivated me to approach Kate to conduct research absent of such prejudice. Due to growing up alongside Kate, I developed a personal interest into understanding the transgender phenomenon having accompanied her transition to present date. It is with conviction, therefore, that I believe to have conducted a truly collaborative piece of research, built upon the foundations of a trusting relationship absent of oppression (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) as Kate has openly afforded me the honour of articulating her narrative. We have been best friends for over 10 years so there wasn't much grafting on my part to encourage her to open up. The conversation was almost always fluid, with minimal pauses and silences despite explanations of personal memories.

However, I must reflect upon the gruelling nature of some aspects associated with this research process. Listening to certain experiences surrounding discrimination became quite difficult for me to hear. Due to such reactions, certain things could arguably be missing from Kate's account – i.e. fear/ discrimination/depression usually afflicted within trans-identities (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006). There is thus a possibility Kate was concealing stories or feelings due to our friendship as she didn't want to upset me. Furthermore, I experienced what one may term 'writer's block' when constructing this research report; I struggled to engage with the analysis at first due to the possibility of offending or discrediting Kate in any way. However, I believe I overcame this by making suitable concessions tailored to the research findings. An example of this is the title change; after conducting the analysis it became clear that Kate didn't identify as a trans-woman so I therefore felt uncomfortable using this label within the title of this paper. I believe it imperative to acknowledge Kate as a woman, empowering her gender identification, as further categorisation appears problematic for her (Finnegan & McNally, 2002; McLemore, 2015).

6.1.2. Functional Reflections

Photo-elicitation remains under-utilised within psychological research (Bates et al., 2017); this may well be due to a preoccupation with reduction to universal laws and statistical relationships (Howitt, 2010). However, the method has demonstrated its ability to stimulate memories in a way that standardised questions are incapable of doing so (Bates et al., 2017). One may conclude the acquisition of richer data due to facilitating participant-led dialogue (Meo, 2010). It is also worth noting that the semi-structured

interviews facilitated the collection of rich data (Hugh-Jones & Gibson, 2012) relating to Kate's experience of her gender transition. I felt it to be a strategic decision to use the photo-elicitation method primarily, in order to avoid the imposition of my researcher's stance. As the participant is a close friend, one must recognise the risk that our relationship could have affected my interpretations surrounding; I must consider the possibility of indexicality, and therefore social desirability bias; these are often problematic occurrences when using the traditional interviewing method (Holloway & Galvin, 2016).

Braun & Clarke (2006) propose that methodologies of a thematic nature are less confined to grounded theory and thus pose less risk of construing data. Therefore, one may argue that the social-constructionist principles that are drawn from the present data analysis are at risk of being limited by its theoretical framework. It is therefore necessary to acknowledge that interpretations may differentiate amongst deviant perspectives.

Despite this, the participant told me what she believed to be the most important aspects of her transition and thus narrated what is meaningful to her. I feel that this has been articulated sufficiently through the social-constructionist nature of narrative analysis. To demonstrate this, future research should adopt 'member-checking', allowing participants to engage with interpretations surrounding their accounts months after the initial interviews (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell & Walter, 2016). Unfortunately, this was unachievable within the time constraints imposed by the present study.

I would also like to acknowledge that, due to constraints surrounding the scope of this project, I was unable to address every significant point within Kate's narrative. The process of selection improved incredibly difficult, as everything she said was of importance. I hope to analyse Kate's narrative further, allowing affordance to the entirety of insight that she has provided surrounding her life experiences. From this, one must recognise the usefulness associated with this research due to the vast quantity, and quality, of data obtained.

6.1.3. Disciplinary Reflections

In terms of applicability to the field of enquiry, this study moves away from mainstream explanations of essentialism and determinism are a world away from the holistic and contextualised approach to understanding gender that is required (Walkerdine, 1996). Instead, this research moves towards feminist psychology that is explicitly concerned with deconstructing unattainable standards, goals and norms surrounding womanhood. This will hopefully divulge into the social and political constraints imposed by society (Worell & Johnson, 1997). However, in order to accomplish this it appears that feminist interpretations need to relinquish radicalised views that oppress trans-women, and instead work against the norms trans-identities are pressured to conform to. Feminist literature thus needs to approach trans-women with intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989).

Furthermore, this research taps into the social and material structures associated with social class (Lott, 2012) with trans-women facing financial barriers to health-interventions (Hines, 2007; Maizes & Dog, 2015). This demonstrates insight into societal barriers imposed upon low-status marginalised groups, which is often absent within transgender research

(McLemore, 2015). Taking such time to understand what transgender people need to facilitate their transition could improve health professionals' understandings of the cohort, providing a platform for further research exploration (Levitt & Ippolito, 2013).

6.2. Concluding Statement

In conclusion, future research into the experiences of gender transitioning appears essential, as this study has highlighted difficulties faced by a trans-woman in achieving her desired identity. The findings of this study require future feminist research to concern itself with intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). Upon adopting this agenda, one would expect alleviation in the oppressive pressure experienced by trans-women to uphold traditionalist-gendered presentation (Keith, 2017). More research with working-class trans-women is also necessary to accommodate their existence appropriately within society (Day, Rickett & Woolhouse, 2014), and to further understand how class proposes prominent hurdles towards becoming successfully self-identified. This is likely to offer reflections upon health-care interventions that could positively influence practice (Levitt & Ippolito, 2013; Munro, 2003).

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