DProf thesis

‘En femme…’: a phenomenological-hermeneutic enquiry into the lived experience of crossdressing for adult male-born subjects in the United Kingdom

Chear, I.

___

Full bibliographic citation: Chear, I. 2025. ‘En femme…’: a phenomenological-hermeneutic enquiry into the lived experience of crossdressing for adult male-born subjects in the United Kingdom. DProf thesis Middlesex University / New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling (NSPC)

Year: 2025

Publisher: Middlesex University Research Repository

Available online: https://repository.mdx.ac.uk/item/244xx5

___

New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling
Middlesex University

‘En femme…’

A phenomenological-hermeneutic enquiry into the lived experience of crossdressing for adult male-born subjects in the United Kingdom.

Chear Iulian
M00558139

Primary Supervisor: Professor Simon du Plock
Secondary Supervisor: Dr Neil Lamont

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Iulian Chear, confirm that the work presented in this research thesis has been performed and interpreted solely by myself. I confirm that this work is submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements of the Doctorate in Psychotherapy and Counselling by Professional Studies at the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and Middlesex University.

This dissertation has been granted ethical clearance from the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and Middlesex University and has not been submitted elsewhere in any other form for the fulfilment of any other degree or qualification.

The author reports no conflict of interest.

Word count: 59 910 words.

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

ABSTRACT

Crossdressing means wearing clothing, makeup and/or accessories not traditionally associated with the sex you were assigned at birth (Amnesty International, 2015). This study explores the lived experience of people who engage in crossdressing and how they make sense of it. Eight participants were recruited and interviewed face-to-face and online on Zoom, using a semi-structured, in-depth interview. The participants are adults who were assigned male at birth and are involved in regular crossdressing activities as part of their sexual or gender expression, or both, or they self-identify as crossdressers. The method for the study, which is grounded within an existential hermeneutical and phenomenological epistemology, is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). In the findings, twelve themes were generated and structured in four super-ordinate themes: From expression to identity through time; Milestones in acceptance and ownership; Tension, anxiety and struggle; Aspects of being-in-the-world. For the participants, crossdressing has been a meaningful and particular way of being: a way of being gendered, a way of being sexual and a way of being with your body, yourself and others. For them, expressing crossdressing has been an existential change in condition, which comes with different levels of freedom, visibility, power, vulnerability, privileges and threats. For each participant, living their lives as crossdressers meant navigating a complex map of temporalities, spaces and people with different degrees of visibility, social acceptance and self-acceptance, which involve different strategies, behaviours and decisions to come out and be out, or to remain closeted. Overall, crossdressing emerged as a concept at the intersection of gender and sexuality, practice and identity, the personal and the political, the social and the private, the internal and the external, the visible and the hidden.

Keywords: Crossdressing, Trans, Gender, Sexuality, Identity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

I begin to write this thesis by acknowledging the paradox at the heart of this research and, in a broader sense, at the centre of our understanding of sexuality, gender and identity, and their attached labels and categories. Magnus Hirschfeld, a pioneering sexologist and the inventor of the term '*transvestite*,' wrote that: '*there are hardly two humans who are exactly alike*' (1991 [1910], p.229). In this light, it seems difficult to capture the whole spectrum and richness of human experiences within a set number of totalising gender/sex categories or to express fluidity and spectrum within clearly defined gender/sex boundaries. Therefore, in the present study, the acceptance of the label '*crossdresser*' is primarily institutional, to place the research within a particular subject and to help me concentrate on the current debates on the subject. With this in mind, I set upon a journey to research what has been understood under different names throughout history: the '*transvestite*' or '*eonist*' of the past and the '*crossdresser*' of the present.

It seems that the story of the '*crossdresser*' starts earlier on, even before it had a name, a definition, a category or a pathology. All categories of human sexuality and gender expression have been classified through a series of historical discourses, according to different degrees of moral, political and social acceptance, characteristic of each epoch and culture (Foucault, 1990 [1976]). Negative aspects have included prejudice, hostility, ridicule, fear and pathology while, on the other hand, numerous cultures have developed sophisticated and complex gender systems which could serve to emphasise that the categories of male and female are, in a way, incomplete standing alone (Bullough & Bullough, 1993).

Our cultural setting, the Western culture in general, and the Anglo-American culture in particular, has had a strong tradition of intolerance towards non-normative gender expressions (Bullough & Bullough, 1993; Lenihan et al., 2015). As such, it is no wonder that one way to encounter the crossdresser is as a mental health diagnosis within the DSM-V (2013). Fortunately, this is just one side of the story, and the way gender, sexuality and, implicitly, mental health are understood is much more complex and nuanced. For this reason alone, it seems the perfect timing to reflect upon crossdressing, how it is conceptualised and, more significantly, how we could work with crossdressing in the counselling room. As a psychotherapist, I am equally puzzled by the lack of literature in this area and intrigued by the

potential of existential therapy to engage with sexual and gender non-conforming minorities. A question, thus, arises: Is it possible to engage with the crossdressing client in a more authentic way, starting from the richness of their actual lived experience?

Clinical relevance

In the last decades, the perspectives on gender and sexuality have become much more nuanced, as the construction of gender and sexual identities are beginning to grow outside the traditional boundaries of hetero-reproductive lines and outside the fixed M/F gender binary system and categories (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Currently, there is a spark of interest in the transgender phenomena in a variety of academic disciplines, while a series of protective legislation – for example, *The Gender Recognition Act* (2004) and *The Equality Act* (2010) – have been introduced. Moreover, there is an ongoing debate for removing and/or reconceptualising categories such as '*transvestic fetishism*' and '*gender dysphoria*' from the diagnostic manuals (Reed et al., 2016; Wright, 2010). Quite recently, the ICD-11 (2018) classification of mental and behavioural disorders has removed the previous diagnosis associated with crossdressing (i.e., *fetishistic transvestism* and *dual-role transvestism*). Still, the question of how we, as psychotherapists, work with non-conforming gender individuals and unusual sex interests (Richards, 2016; Richards & Barker, 2015; Sheldon, 2018) remains open and largely unaddressed.

A 2014 study by the *European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights* found that the reasons why crossdressers (from the larger pool of transgender individuals) avoid medical or psychological help are as follows: not daring (30%), not knowing where to go (23%) and being afraid of care providers' prejudice and discrimination (23%). These concerns are justified because, for a long time, the crossdresser has received diagnosis and treatment from psychologists, social workers, nurse practitioners, physicians and psychiatrists alike (Bullough & Bullough, 1993; Bullough & Smith, 1983; Dzelme & Jones, 2001). In practice, this view of crossdressing as a mental health disorder might be responsible for why individuals who identify as crossdressers often fear being 'abnormal,' 'disordered' and/or 'unnatural' (Bolich, 2008; Shaffer & Barclay, 1989), or why they find it very hard to come out as crossdressers altogether (Tirohl, 2007). Other studies report that crossdressers can face ongoing fears of being outed by others and other potentially disturbing consequences such as abuse, discrimination, stigma,

marginalisation, loneliness, marital strain, family ostracisation, divorce, loss of friends and loss of employment (Delozier et al., 2020; Gallo, 2016b; Henderson et al., 2017; Krell, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2021; Scottish Trans Alliance, 2015; TransActual, 2021).

Following the pathology associated with crossdressing, the actual prevalence of the '*disorder*' is unknown. For example, the DSM-V classifies it as '*rare*' in males and '*extremely rare*' in females (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p.703). However, it was significant enough to be included in the DSM in every published edition (American Psychiatric Association, 1952, 1968, 1980, 1987, 1998, 2000, 2013). Within the literature, a significant part has focused on this '*pathological*' minority which was encountered within the clinical setting. And yet, data measuring the exact prevalence of crossdressing within the general population is hard to obtain or estimate. For example, the DSM-V (2013) estimates that less than 3% of males report having ever been sexually aroused by dressing in women's attire (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Another study, performed on the general population in Sweden, discovered that almost three per cent (2.8%) of men and 0.4% of women reported at least one episode of *transvestic fetishism* in the last six months prior to the study (Långström & Zucker, 2005). Within the UK, Reed et al. (2009) assert that 1% of British men cross-dress, with the amendment that these numbers could be highly underestimated.

Many scholarly voices have argued that there are no pathological manifestations of crossdressing and, implicitly, no available means of '*curing*' the crossdresser (Benjamin, 1966; Frances & Wise, 1987; Peabody & Rowe, 1953). Also, they continue, behavioural therapies to stop them have failed, as most clients coming to counselling do not want to stop their crossdressing behaviour. They further argue that efforts must be concentrated on making crossdressers' lives easier, especially by supporting them to wear female clothing. In this vein, the attitudes towards them should change. Gallo (2016), for example, argues that it is important to be able to assist the crossdresser in integrating their choice to cross-dress as part of their identity. Richards and Barker (2013), in a discussion surrounding the whole spectrum of trans people, point out that the availability of therapy does include not only the actual members of the crossdressing community but also their family members and partners. The same idea is mirrored by Murjan and Bouman (2015) who argue for the importance of family and relationship therapy for crossdressers.

However, one of the difficulties in addressing these issues, especially in the ways suggested above, is represented by the shortcomings of the literature on crossdressing. For example, few researchers have pointed out that many of the studies done in the past utilised samples drawn from psychological clinics or patients which were then extrapolated to the whole population of crossdressing (Hogan-Finlay, 1995; Lentz, 2004; Wheeler et al., 2008). Furthermore, by reviewing the literature, I noticed that the actual lived experience of those who engage in crossdressing activities, or their biographies (Lentz, 2004), or their voices (Richards, 2016; Sheldon, 2018), are not well represented. For example, there is an abundance of studies where the accent is on theorisation and pathology and of case studies that are retold from the author's perspective. Returning to the issue of psychotherapy, the literature is very limited for transgender individuals (Lenihan et al., 2015; Richards, 2016) and even more scarce specifically for crossdressing (Sheldon, 2018).

Considering all these issues, I am left wondering who is the crossdresser, in their own words, and how can one work with them in the therapy room. This research would contribute to the literature gap on crossdressing within the broader spectrum of LGBTQIA+ issues. Moreover, by being a phenomenological study with a focus on the lived experience of crossdressing, it would seek to obtain rich descriptive accounts of their lives, which can ultimately be insightful to inform us how to work with these clients in the therapy room.

Terminology

The terminology surrounding gender, sex and sexuality is complex, evolving and contentious. It is important to highlight that, for a long time, the language used to define trans individuals was solely dictated by people outside the trans community. This has, in part, changed, and trans people are actively involved in shaping the language that people use to talk about them and their personal, social and political issues. While this is rightfully welcomed, it may also mean that there is no consensus on what counts and what does not count as acceptable terminology (Hakeem, 2018). Indeed, the trans community is not a homogeneous group, and the language we use to define ourselves is always in constant change and always dependent on the gender-sexual norms of our time (Eribon, 2004 [2000]; Webster, 2019). In the present day, there seems to be a growing consensus to use more inclusive and neutral language, such as '*crossdressing'* and *'trans*,*'* rather than some of the terminologies which are now considered

to have more negative connotations, such as '*transvestite*' and '*tranny*.' However, different members of the trans community will have different views on this matter, and this has become apparent while doing the fieldwork for the current thesis. For example, some voices argued against the use of the term '*crossdressing*' in favour of the more general term '*trans*,' while others felt quite comfortable using it to define themselves. In this thesis, I adhere to the idea that the most respectful approach is to allow people to self-identify (Scottish Trans Alliance, 2010), using whatever terminology they prefer, terminology which will be explored in each particular case.

Crossdressing: As a behaviour, it means the regular activity (but not constantly) of wearing clothing and/or makeup and accessories that are not traditionally associated with the sex you were assigned at birth (Amnesty International, 2015; Scottish Trans Alliance, 2015). It may be carried out to varying degrees, ranging from one item of clothing to dressing fully. It can include jewellery, footwear, gestures, mannerisms, speech and female/male pronouns. As a label or category, however, it describes a gender or a sexual identity or both: a crossdressing/ crossdresser person (Scottish Trans Alliance, 2015).

Trans or transgender is an inclusive term (umbrella term) describing those individuals whose identity falls outside typical gender norms (Reed et al., 2009); in other words, it refers to a multitude of gender minorities (Lev, 2004). Still, it is also possible to identify as a gender minority and not identify as trans (Scottish Trans Alliance, 2015).

Gender dysphoria or *gender incongruence* refers to the discomfort or distress caused by a mismatch between your gender identity and your biological sex assigned at birth. Nowadays, there is a general move towards using the term *gender variance* (AGE UK, 2017).

Transsexual is a medical term that refers to individuals who have a gender expression and/or gender identity that differs from conventional expectations based on the physical sex they were assigned at birth and who wish to undergo, are in the process of undergoing or have undergone gender reassignment treatment (Amnesty International, 2015). It usually refers to people who experience gender variance to the degree that medical intervention is necessary to facilitate a permanent transition to a gender role that corresponds with their gender identity and, thus, to alleviate intense discomfort (Reed et al., 2009).

CHAPTER I. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Literature search method and aims.

The aim of this chapter is to undertake a systematic review of the existing literature on crossdressing. The literature on crossdressing reunites ideas from various fields, including medicine, psychology, psychiatry, social studies, history, cultural studies, literature, media and performing arts. Naturally, however, it is beyond the aim of this chapter to include all the voices, complexities and debates within this multidisciplinary literature spanning more than a century. For this reason alone, the focus will be on the literature that is relevant to the psychotherapeutic ethos of the research and on individuals who are involved in such activities as a part of their gender and/or sexual expression.

The main objective is to look at how crossdressing has been conceptualised, understood and described. This should include any material (i.e., study, case study, expert opinion, report) that describes either crossdressing in itself or any method of engaging clinically with it. On this note, I first looked at the clinical and psychological literature, and then, I extended the search to other social sciences, literature and culture. Particular attention was paid to anything that is relevant to the research's existential perspective on the phenomenon.

The main keywords used for the search were: *crossdressing, transvestism, transvestic fetishism, transvestic disorder* and *eonism.* Additional terms that were added to these were *existentialism, phenomenology*, *gender*, *sex* and *sexuality*. Further criteria for the search of these terms were: no time limitation, only results in the English language and only from published peer-reviewed sources. All these keywords and terms were, in turn, used in the following research databases: APA (PsycArticles, PsycINFO, PsychTests), British Nursing Index (BNI), Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS), Medline and Web of Science (see Table 1 below).

In terms of my search strategy, I started by doing a combined search for '*crossdressing*' and its different possible ways of spelling the word, including *'cross-dressing'* and '*gender-crossing*.' Obviously, this brought out numerous results which were further narrowed down by subject. I further performed different searches for each of the other search terms and I used a

combined search in order to exclude the results I had already noted for crossdressing. As expected, this returned fewer results.

Table 1. Keywords search results

Databases	*Keywords*				
	crossdressing	*transvestism*	*transvestic fetishism*	*transvestic disorder*	*eonism*
Medline	567	368	10	2	3
APA	494	387	39	9	-
BNI	105	64	13	15	1
CINAHIL	144	5	2	0	-
Cochrane	-	2	-	-	-
Ethos	12	9	-	1	-
IBSS	153	312	16	17	6
Web of Science	180	122	30	16	1

Further, I removed all the duplicates from the results and imported all these references into Zotero, where I grouped them into three categories depending on how relevant they are to the current research. The first category includes sources from psychology, clinical practice, psychotherapy and psychiatry, which were further split into studies, reports, theoretical articles and opinions. Here, I paid particular attention to research papers that discuss any method, or treatment, or ways of engaging with crossdressing. This category largely informs the source for the current Literature Review.

The second category includes historical, anthropological, social and cultural sources about crossdressing. This is by far the largest area, as crossdressing has been observed and studied in numerous cultures around the world, both in our contemporary times and throughout history. There are multiple examples of crossdressing expressions ranging from theatre and film to literature and music. Reviewing all these articles, however, is beyond the purpose of the current study, and perhaps they might make a good topic for further research. Nonetheless, some of the most important ideas coming from this area have been summarised in chapter *1.3.10. Crossdressing within (popular) culture*.

Lastly, the third category includes articles that I considered as not being directly relevant to this research. For example, many of these references did not have much connection with actual crossdressing. The rest were simply erroneous results from the search.

1.2 Introduction and context

Before engaging with the actual Literature Review, it is essential to present the context and the history of crossdressing for the mental health disciplines. This is particularly important because it would be difficult to understand the theories that I will present further on without the context and the time in which they have appeared and developed. More specifically, as crossdressing has been described either as an unusual sex interest (i.e., fetish) or as a gender issue and deviance, theories regarding both 'normal' and 'abnormal' sex, gender and sexuality development will be explored. Perhaps one of the most challenging parts in understanding crossdressing comes from the fact that it further relies upon additional considerations on concepts such as gender, sex, sexuality, identity and time. This is, indeed, a complex enterprise, not least because our understanding of these very concepts has changed significantly over time, there being no single way of explaining them.

The earliest accounts of what we now understand as crossdressing date back to 1400 BC (Buhrich, 1977). Since then, crossdressing has been present throughout history and in a variety of cultures and societies (Bullough, 1974, 1976a, 1976b, 1987, Bullough & Bullough, 1993; Green, 1969; Suthrell, 2004). To some extent, the history of crossdressing follows up quite closely the history of sex, gender and sexuality, alongside its embedded traditions, norms, myths, markers of power and domination, identity expressions and transgressions. Wherever there are norms and identity categories, there are also transgressions and questions regarding the limits and the flexibility of these categories. As expected, these complex issues have been negotiated differently throughout history by every culture and society with different degrees of flexibility and inflexibility, each supported by their own art, traditions, rituals, mythologies and stories. This has led to a variety of categories, terms, labels and gender/sex systems across the world, many of them being quite difficult to translate into the English language and within our contemporary socio, cultural and linguistically recognisable climate. The reader should be mindful that when it comes to cultures from other geographical areas and/or from different times, the meanings, the concepts and the connotations attached to words may be quite different

to the present-day culture we may find ourselves in. A good example in this sense is represented by the *two-spirit* people who are indigenous to the American continent. The *two-spirit* people are usually considered those who dress partially or completely as the other gender, adopt publicly the demeanours associated with their chosen gender (or a blended combination between the two genders) and, in some specific cultures, may choose a partner of the same physiological sex (Bolin, 1996). There are various terms for this tradition used by First Nation people, such as *wíŋkte* by the Lakota, *hwame* by the Mohave, *nádleehé* by the Navajo or *ilhamana* by the Zuni. Other examples across the globe include the *Pokot* in Kenya, the *fa'afāfine* in Samoa, the *hijras* in India, the *Xanith* in Oman, the *mahu* in Tahiti, the *sekrata* in Madagascar, the *bayot* in the Philippines and the *acault* in Myanmar. Elsewhere, within pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabian societies, the term *mukhannathun* was used to describe gender-variant people, mostly in reference to effeminate males. Other terms used in Muslim societies include the *khasi* (eunuch), the *hijra*, the *mukhannath*, the *mamsuh* and the *khuntha*.

In this chapter, I will start with a short history of crossdressing from Antiquity until the 19th century (*Section 1.3 Early History of Crossdressing*). I decided to include a brief history of crossdressing because the emerging theories from the 19th century onwards arguably continue along the lines of this existing historical knowledge. More specifically, some of the past (negative) connotations associated with crossdressing (e.g., stigma, shame, loss of status, atypical sexuality and homosexuality), alongside particular biased ways of seeing sex, sexuality and gender, carry on into the newly emerged scientific endeavours of the late 19th century and early 20th century. On this note, it may be useful to remind the contemporary reader that while inequality and patriarchy were even more severe in the past (Kerchove, 2001), the norms that guarded sexual behaviour and gender roles expression were very different. For example, during a good part of the Middle Ages, not only crossdressing was condemned and frowned upon but also any form of sexual activity, be it homosexual, heterosexual or otherwise. Back then, only moderation, balance and sexual abstinence were praised and embraced (Bullough & Bullough, 1993; Tin, 2012 [2008]).

After this, I will continue with the late 19th century because this is the moment when, under the backdrop of the Enlightenment and the technological and medical discoveries which intensified in the 18th and 19th centuries, aspects of human sexuality and gender have come under the gaze of scientific reasoning. This was the period when religion's regulatory,

disciplinary and administrative powers started to decrease under the principles of scientific understanding and reasoning (Hergenhahn, 1997). Within this climate, those who were previously labelled as 'sinners' and 'evil' were now considered 'sick,' 'insane' and 'criminals' (Bullough & Bullough, 1993). This is also the period when crossdressing receives its first scientific label of '*transvestism*,' a label coined by Hirschfeld in 1910. Transvestism itself comes from the Latin *trans,* meaning 'across' or 'beyond,' and *vestitus*, meaning 'clothed' or 'dressed' (Garber, 1992). Hirschfeld (1991 [1910]) described transvestism as the expression of an inner drive that is not only part of the individual personality but also a reflection of natural diversity. However, with the exception of Hirschfeld, the early scientific efforts on transvestism were largely pathologising rather than accommodating with anything that diverged from the social norm. An example in this sense is von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis: The Classic Study of Deviant Sex* (2011 [1886]), one of the first textbooks on sexual pathology and deviant sex. The dominant social norm of that time was heteronormative and heterosexist. For this reason alone, sex and erotic preference was equated with gender, sexuality was collapsed into gender, while 'normal' sexuality itself was strictly confined to reproduction (for an overview, see Fremi, 2014; Rich, 1980; Warner, 1993). All sexual and gender diversions from the norm were, in turn, labelled 'inversions,' and all were considered to be indicative of some mental and/or physical anomaly. Taken together, these 'inversions' formed a class of '*illegitimate sexualities*' (Ekins & King, 2006). On this background, crossdressing started to capture the attention of professionals, especially from the medical and the psychiatric field, as an example of a 'mental illness.' Both psychiatrists and physicians began to diagnose crossdressing as a 'perversion' and a 'psychosis.' Still, the longstanding association between crossdressing and (effeminate male) homosexuality from the Middle Ages continued, with the addition that homosexuality started to be considered a mental illness as well (Bristow, 1997).

The first set of theories to be reviewed comes from the psychoanalytical perspectives (*Section 1.4 Psychoanalysis and crossdressing*), primarily due to their importance on how issues surrounding sexuality and atypical sexuality have been understood and discussed. The psychoanalytical thought had widespread influence over the psychological and psychiatric world, particularly during the early decades of the 20th century up until the end of the Second World War (Kerchove, 2001). An example of an influential theory that builds on psychoanalysis is the psychological perspective on how nurture may influence gender and

sexual development. This will be discussed in *Section 1.5. Nurture and crossdressing.* Despite the early efforts of Hirschfeld (1991 [1910] and Ellis (2004 [1900]), crossdressing remained a comparatively unexplored subject for many decades. It was only after the Second World War when a new surge of interest in crossdressing arose, mainly due to the advancements in surgery procedures that allowed new 'treatment' options, including gender reassignment surgery, to take place (Bullough & Bullough, 1993). Even though 'sex-reassignment' procedures have been attempted and made since the 18th century, it was the particular case of Christine Jorgensen, an American trans woman who underwent sex reassignment surgery in Denmark, in 1952, that attracted unprecedented public interest and media exposure (Stryker & Whittle, 2006). Following the impact of this case on the work of the endocrinologist and sexologist Harry Benjamin (1966), who worked and collaborated with Jorgensen, a new condition and category for scientific knowledge was created: '*the transsexual*.' Both '*the transsexual*' and '*the transvestite*' are, to some extent, medically constructed identity categories which aim to separate those who would seek further medical assistance from those who would not (Bolin, 1994; Ekins & King, 1997). However, seeing crossdressing as continuous with transsexualism, or as distinct from it, is quite complex, and this fuelled a debate that has endured over decades. *Section 1.7. Transsexualism, Transgenderism and Crossdressing* will look at this debate and try to position crossdressing in our contemporary view on gender, sex and sexuality.

And yet, while transsexualism was beginning to be a clearly defined identity category in the mid-20th century, crossdressing did not; instead, it was solely linked to different forms of 'sexual disorder' such as fetishism and homosexuality (Allen, 1962; Baker, 1968; Benjamin, 1966; Bieber et al., 1962; Blanchard, 1989; Docter, 1988; Randell, 1959; Stoller, 1968). The uncertainty around how these categories fit together is also mirrored in the diagnosis that was attributed to crossdressing. For example, '*dual-role transvestism*' was considered a gender disorder next to transsexualism, while '*transvestic fetishism*' was considered a sexual paraphilia. *Section 1.6 Psychopathology and crossdressing* offers a short review of the complicated history of crossdressing within the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM) and *International Classification of Diseases* (ICD).

It is worth pointing out that most of the research in the field was done by clinical professionals who were both treating and studying the phenomena. To put this into perspective, a study by Prince and Bentler (1972) found that less than 30% of a sample of 504 transvestites

sought a form of clinical and/or medical intervention. Most of the research was done on the clinical population who sought therapy and/or treatment options, neglecting the ones who did not (Bullough & Bullough, 1993). This changed from the 1960s onwards with the work of Virginia Prince, a transgender activist who was instrumental in creating clubs, groups, magazines and books for crossdressers within the US. Her voice was also instrumental in defining the crossdressing identity, serving as a model for many crossdressers and shaping how crossdressing came to be known and understood in large parts of the Western English-speaking world (Ekins & King, 2005). Bernie and Vern Bullough (1993) describe this moment as the emergence of an '*organised crossdressing*;' that is, of a narrative and a script for what it means to be a crossdresser. According to them, this is the first evidence of a crossdressing consciousness within Western societies.

Prince's legacy is, however, a mixed one, as the script that she proposed for crossdressing was about creating a respectable image for the crossdresser – that is, an image for the respectable, middle-class, heterosexual man who occasionally cross-dressed in order to express their beautiful 'woman' within (Docter, 2004; Ekins & King, 2005). Most of what diverged from this script was excluded and, together with it, any reference to sex, masochism, bondage, sadism, partial crossdressing, women who cross-dressed, crossdressers who were not heterosexual, crossdressers who had gender reassignment surgery or crossdressers who were involved in sex-work (Brake, 1976; Weeks, 1977). On the basis of Prince's model, then, only some crossdressers could be members of the crossdressing culture.

This non-clinical sample of club members is also present in the work of Buhrich (1976, 1981), McConaghy (1977b, 1979), Docter (1988, 1997) and Bernie and Vern Bullough (1976a, 1976b, 1983, 1993) who have all written extensively about club members crossdressers. Still, the crossdressers that found themselves outside the respectable, middle-class and Anglo-American club movement seemed to have had quite a different lifestyle. In his cross-cultural studies on crossdressing within communities in Java, Thailand, Guatemala, Peru, Brazil and the US, Whitman (1980, 1986) showed that non-heterosexual crossdressers, sex workers and crossdressing with a variety of sexual and gender scripts are present. In Brazil, for example, crossdressing is divided into three categories: *transformistas* (closer in meaning to the Western *drag artist*), *carnaval* (cross-dressed men who do little to hide their masculinity) and *travestis*

(excessive female presentation with a 'hidden extra,' usually bodies with breasts and a penis who engage in sex work in both passive and active roles).

Moving on, the 1960s and 1970s brought about significant changes to the paradigm of how sexuality and gender are thought of and understood. An important consequence of the *Women's Liberation Movement*, along with other socio-political changes from that time, prompted more interest in the study of gender/sex roles and identities and sexual orientation. The scholarly attention started to shift from justifying the treatment of various sexual and gender categories towards trying to reach an understanding of gender and sexuality in all people (Fremi, 2014). It is worth mentioning here the work of Money and Ehrhardt (1973) who introduced and popularised the categories of '*gender identity*,' '*gender role*' and '*sexual orientation*' as being distinct from the biological sex. This separation allowed the conceptualisation of transsexualism as an identity and opened up the path towards seeing gender and all categories associated with sexual pleasure and desire as a product of social, cultural and historical developments (Ekins & King, 2006). Remarkably, this new focus on identity also led to the apparition of '*gender dysphoria*,' a term introduced by Fisk in 1974.

Siann (1994) argues that there are three major paradigms to our understanding of gender and sex: *essentialist*, *socialisation* and *structuralist*. Briefly put, the essentialist paradigm refers to the belief that gender identity categories reflect innate biological characteristics that comprise the human condition of the members of those categories. The socialisation paradigm, influenced by Freud's theories, would look at gender development in children and the process through which they learn from their parents about the social expectations and behaviours associated with each gender. The structuralist paradigm, on the other hand, is concerned with illumining the deep structural relations that underlie not only social behaviour but also the manner in which the world is conceptualised, seen and understood. Foucault (1990 [1976]), for example, argues that sexuality, sex and gender are not biologically ordained but contextual and constituted in society and in the course of historically specific social practices; practices which take place within institutional structures of power and knowledge. More specifically, sexuality, sex and gender are not independent 'truths' separated from their contextual history and their social, cultural and political settings. For Foucault, then, the organisation of sexuality is not only repressive but generative of sexualities and genders, which are constantly produced and re-produced.

Overall, social sciences have switched the perspective by focusing not on a given isolated individual and/or identity but on investigating society as a whole (Fremi, 2014). From this, many scholars went on to analyse and explore concepts and areas such as femininity, masculinity, media, labour market, sexuality, violence, leisure, health and so on, redressing the absences in, and even biases of, other disciplines. With its focus on society, social sciences reunite people's behaviours with their cultural context, considering their perception of the social attitudes towards them and the influence of others on them. Social sciences have allowed for gender binarity to be recognised as an implicit assumption, giving further possibility for gender fluidity and flexibility to be acknowledged (Marchbank & Letherby, 2014). The major implication is that, from a sociological perspective at least, crossdressing moves from sexuality to gender, from the medically constructed '*transsexual*' or '*transvestite*' to '*transgender*.' In sociology, the term '*transgender*' does not relate to a psychiatric or a medical condition but to various behaviours considered to be transgressing societal gender norms and boundaries. Thus, the term applies to *'those who attempt to blend various aspects of genders, either in respect of themselves or others'* (Ekins, 1997, p.3). As such, the interpretation of crossdressing has moved from the expression of a sexual interest towards the expression of a gender identity (Kerchove, 2001). Within this sociological paradigm, gender is fundamentally seen as a social concept which is first learned as a child and later reinforced as an adult by observing and imitating others (Basow, 1992; Brannon, 1996; Hall & Lindzey, 1978).

Because of the wealth of information coming from the socio-cultural sphere, I will discuss how crossdressing has been presented and understood within art and performing arts. In *Section 1.10. Crossdressing within (popular) culture*, I will specifically talk about the long tradition of crossdressing within theatre, opera and the art of theatrical burlesque. Still, looking at gender and sexuality from social, cultural and critical lenses has prompted an ever-growing body of knowledge along with the development of new academic fields (such as feminist studies, gender and sexuality studies, Queer studies and masculinity studies). The emergence of *Transgender Studies* in the 1990s, for example, gave the term '*transgender*' a radical and political value, going beyond the M/F gender binarity and the idea of 'gender' altogether. (Namaste, 1996). As Ekins and King (2006) argue, there is a move from *'gender as something that people have'* to *'the production of a gendered social identity as an ongoing accomplishment, something which is constantly being done'* and re-done (p.23). This further

announces the influence of Queer Studies and the poststructuralist idea that gender is largely a matter of performance and the consequence of heteronormative social constructions of sex. I will look into this in Section *1.8. Queer and Trans Studies*. Obviously, structuralism, post-structuralism and even Marxism have not only been applied to gender and sexuality but to class, race, ethnicity or (dis)ability as well. In *Section 1.9. Intersectionality and crossdressing*, I will discuss the intersection of gender and sexuality with multiple other identity categories. After this, the Literature Review will finish with a discussion around the gap within existential literature on crossdressing (*Section 1.11*) and some reflexivity aspects (*Section 1.12*).

1.3 Early history of crossdressing

When it comes to crossdressing, the best attempt to compile strands from all historical sources is the work of the humanist scholars Bonnie and Vern Bullough (1974, 1976a, 1976b, 1987, 1993) who wrote extensively about the history of crossdressing, tracing it from various times, countries and societies, and on which this part of the literature is based.

Within Antiquity, crossdressing was very present, especially in connection to festivals and religious ceremonies that symbolised life transitions, the cults of specific gods and the link between the human and the divine. Crossdressing figured prominently not only in mythology – Achilles, Heracles and Theseus, for example, were all associated with episodes of crossdressing and all were often being mistaken for girls – but also on the theatrical stage as well (Brierley, 1979; Bullough, 1976a, 1976b, Bullough & Bullough, 1993; Garber, 1992). Bonnie and Vern Bullough noticed that when people were more relaxed (at festivals, ceremonies and entertainment spaces) gender boundaries would also follow suit by becoming more tolerant of transgressive forms of crossdressing. This habit appeared throughout history and is still present today in the act of crossdressing for Halloween. Men could cross-dress for different socially accepted reasons of their time or to simply gain short-term advantages by impersonating women, especially when they wanted to escape difficult situations. Yet, other types of crossdressing seem to have had a negative connotation when correlated with loss of political power and/or status. This loss meant both symbolic violence against the self (through shame and stigma) and social and physical violence (when the person in power was replaced and/or killed). A good example in this sense is the story of Sardanapalus, the alleged King of Assyria, one of the earliest historical references of male crossdressing. The story, which is now

seen more as a myth rather than factual history (Wolfson, 1991), has been so powerful that one can see it being referenced in the writings of Aristotle, Goethe, Liszt, Alighieri or Dickens, and even depicted in the famous *The Death of Sardanapalus* (1827-1828) by Delacroix. Within this story, crossdressing is seen as a human vulnerability and a sign of an unfit leader, while Sardanapalus is '*the archetype of oriental debauchery*' and effeminacy, more fitted to be a slave than a King (Campanile et al., 2017, p.120). This is quite similar with descriptions of crossdressing within the Roman Empire. Caligula (37, 68 AD), Nero (37, 68 AD) and Antoninus (204-222 AD) were all associated with crossdressing and, consequently, with symbols of 'bad' emperors and/or superhuman statuses, sexual taboo, promiscuity, perversion, excess, extravagance, decadence, tyranny, cruelty and evil (Bullough & Bullough, 1993; Brierley, 1979). On this note, Iks (2017) notes that the crossdressing practices of these three Roman emperors might be further associated with theatre. Caligula and Antoninus often performed as deities, maidens and married women, while Nero often made the rounds in disguise among the sex workers of Rome.

Moving on to the Middle Ages (5th to late 15th century), crossdressing was generally frowned upon, yet not seen as an illegal or criminal activity, with maybe few exceptions of acceptance in very specific social and cultural contexts. Outside these exceptions, the negative connotation from antiquity around loss of power and/or status is preserved while new connotations are added. Crossdressing, then, started to be seen as a suspicious activity associated with men who used it to gain access to women for sexual purposes. It also started to be seen as a pagan, pre-Christian and anti-Christian ritual and activity, a sign of witchcraft. Around this time, the connection between crossdressing, effeminate men and male same-sex activity is made, an example in this sense being the writings of Saint Cyprian (d. 258 C.E.), who considered such practices to be morally offensive (Bullough & Bullough, 1993). Following the 16th and 17th centuries of the Early Modern period, there are signs of gender differences becoming more relaxed. However, the hostility against male-to-female crossdressing continued, with the exception of the female impersonation on the theatrical stage. Crossdressing continues to be associated with homosexuality while, for the heterosexual man, it continues to offer access to women for sexual purposes. Bonnie and Vern Bullough (1993) note that there was clearly a more sexual overtone to male crossdressing compared to female crossdressing. For the male crossdresser it became increasingly harder to be socially accepted

and understood. Female crossdressing, however, was seen as a transgressive act that allowed women to overcome the limitations and social inequalities of their female role in order to 'better themselves' by being like men. This made female crossdressing a bit more understood and tolerated by societies. And if there were any socially known male crossdressers, they primarily belonged to the royal and nobiliary families of the time. Due to their stable position as members of a respected family, these male crossdressers were less worried about loss of status that might have resulted from their crossdressing.

The early 19th century saw a consolidation of fixed social, gender and sexual categories through numerous instances of bodily disciplines. This period would set up the foundation for the modern views on biological sex, gender and sexuality (Delyfer, 2019). As European societies were evolving into hierarchical and patriarchal societies, the simple fact of being born a male was not enough to guarantee dominance, violence and power over women. For the male individual, then, it became necessary to be more aggressive and to emphasise his masculinity, by being either vulgar or simply a *'jolly good fellow,'* (p. 114) in order to escape the fear of being labelled as female and as exhibiting feminine weakness and frailty. An area where masculinity could be demonstrated was by asserting power over the wife and the family with the support of the law, religion and tradition, which were all contributing to maintaining the early patriarchal systems of dominance, power and oppression. Bonnie and Vern Bullough (1993) write that, within the private sphere, the power of the husband/father was similar to the power of the monarch. The early 19th century crossdressing also became the object of intense policing, social anxiety and an unprecedented level of curiosity. In England, these were exacerbated when the crossdressing link with homosexuality came under close public and legal scrutiny during Oscar Wilde's trials in 1895 (Delyfer, 2019). The legal framework for this trial was given by the *1885 Criminal Amendment Act,* which made any acts of '*gross indecency*' a criminal offence in the UK. The act was repealed only 82 years later, in 1967.

Wilde himself was considered '*somewhat of a fop*' (Bershtein, 2018, p.8). In late-Victorian times, the *fops* were the subject of intense public caricature representing men whose interest in dress and feminine manners made them effeminate and homosexuals. The *fops* were not considered men at all due to their passive role in sexual encounters. Yet, by that time's standards, a 'real' man could penetrate both women and men without having his masculinity and power questioned. Other ways for a man to prove his masculinity included duels and sexual

conquests along with the ability to perform. At the core of the debate between masculinity, femininity and power we also have the *rakes*. These represented the extreme and excessive forms of late-Victorian masculinity. The *rake* was usually the man who was a libertine with numerous sexual conquests, a republican and possibly a religious sceptic who engaged in sodomy and lived outside the norms of the standard Christian behaviour (Bullough & Bullough, 1993). However, not everyone conformed to the traditional masculine stereotype, and special underground clubs for the upper-class males appeared. An example would be the Molly clubs, which were frequented by members who dressed up in female clothing to drink, socialise and party and who were almost entirely referred to by their female pronouns (Ftacek, 2020). In these clubs, mock marriages were performed, births were enacted and men were able to take on feminine identities. According to Bonnie and Vern Bullough (1993), Molly clubs were the first and the only organised crossdressing groups in the Western world prior to the mid-20th century.

1.4 Psychoanalysis and crossdressing

> *'The psychoanalytic notion of castration depends on heteronormative and colonial epistemology of the body, a binary anatomical cartography in which there are only two bodies and two sexes: the masculine body and subjectivity, defined in relation to the penis (...) and the female body and subjectivity defined by the absence of a penis. Outside this binarity, there are only pathology and disability'* (Preciado, 2018 [2000], p.5).

The relationship between psychoanalysis and sexuality is a complex one and, for a long time, the classical view of this relationship has been one of '*an old love affair*' (Levine & Schwartz, 1999). Once profoundly intertwined (sexuality was indeed fundamental to the psychoanalytical theory) these have been, for some time already, considered as completely separate. This is highly relevant as psychoanalytic theory has had significant implications on how 'abnormal' sexuality has been defined and, more specifically, how crossdressing has been understood.

Going back to the early start of psychoanalysis, Freud did not write explicitly about crossdressing (Ackroyd, 1979). Still, his theories on castration anxiety (for the male, penis envy

for the female) and the Oedipal conflict have been used to explain the *perversions* of fetishism and transvestism and have been influential among psychoanalysts and psychiatrists who were writing about it. The roots of castration anxiety are in the male child's primary loss: the child realises that his mother/sister does not have a penis and becomes afraid of losing his own (Freud, 1909). To resolve this anxiety, he becomes an imagined phallic woman (Fenichel, 1930) – that is, he becomes a crossdresser. Later, in 1921, Freud proposed a new theory and introduced the Oedipal conflict. Within this theory, the male child is attracted to his mother and starts to compete with his father for his mother's affection. Here, crossdressing would represent an example of a failure to resolve this conflict in the expected normative manner. However, further generations of psychoanalysts have criticised both his understanding of sexuality and how his theories have been used to explain crossdressing and transsexualism. In particular, the use of 'castration anxiety' has been criticised by Gillespie (1956) as being far-reaching and dependent '*on accidental and external factors, too little on endopsychic ones*' (p.4). Furthermore, Storr (1957) argues that the essential aspect of crossdressing is not the fear of castration, as Freud puts it, but the feeling of being castrated. As such, a person who engages in crossdressing would feel inadequate as a male and would require female clothing in order to feel 'potent.'

Moving from sexuality to gender, the early psychoanalytic theory adopted a traditional binary model of gender development. Within this perspective, gender was seen as biologically determined – that is, men should internalise and identify with masculinity and women should internalise and identify with femininity (Lentz, 2004). It was considered a sign of unnatural and pathological development if one's gender did not match one's sex (Freud, 1989 [1937]). Returning to the Oedipal conflict, Freud (1921) considered it a crucial period for the development of a healthy masculine identity. He believed that the child's identification with the father was the signal of a healthy resolution of the Oedipus complex in men, and that this resolution was a vital step in forming a healthy masculine, heterosexual identity. Naturally, everything that falls outside this model – e.g., a crossdresser who transgresses these gender boundaries – has, in turn, been understood as problematic and pathological (Preciado, 2018 [2000]. Other psychoanalytical thinkers like Chodorow (1978) and Person and Ovesey (1983) explain crossdressing as an unresolved intrapsychic conflict which mainly results from a disturbance in the child's separation process from its main female parent, an unresolved

Oedipal conflict, a fetishist fixation or a core gender identity confusion. This is well exemplified within the psychoanalytic case studies on crossdressing from that time (see Fenichel, 1930; Glasser, 1979; Greenson, 1966; Lewis, 1963; Volkan, 1973).

Some contemporary psychoanalysts, such as Ahumada (2003), Argentieri (2009), Leuzinger-Bohleber (2009) and Luca (2002), arrive at crossdressing from the perspective of it being a '*perversion*.' For example, Leuzinger-Bohleber (2009) and Luca (2002) follow Glasser's earlier insight (1979) that mothers of '*perverts*' relate to their children in narcissistic ways, as an extension of themselves, without recognising the child's own emotional needs. On this note, Leuzinger-Bohleber (2009) describes transvestism as an '*unconscious fantasy to be an omnipotent man-woman'* (p.47), which is a narcissistic defence against unbearable feelings of dependency on the (depressed) primary object. More specifically, the author talks about the depressed mother not being able to accept the sex of her baby boy. Similarly, Argentieri (2009) believes that these '*perversions*,' which include both crossdressing and transsexualism, are fragments of pregenital sexuality (i.e., partial undeveloped and unrepressed drives deformed by defence mechanisms) which take over the leadership of adult sexual organisation. All four of them continue the well-established tradition present in most of the psychoanalytical literature of understanding crossdressing as an unresolved Oedipal conflict or, more specifically, as an unresolved conflict during the individuation-separation phase.

1.5 Nurture and crossdressing

Following insights from psychoanalysis, clinicians have started to explain crossdressing as a learning and development issue. More specifically, connections regarding a child's specific upbringing and crossdressing have been made both in psychoanalytical literature and psychological and clinical studies. There are a few ways in which the childhood and the family background of the crossdresser have been used to explain their non-normative behaviours, both in crossdressing and in gender dysphoria cases.

Lukianovicz (1959), for example, considered that childhood experiences prone to favour crossdressing include parental rejection, crossdressing the child or a dominant mother versus a passive father relationship. From these, the devaluation of fathers by mothers within the family of crossdressers has been reported in numerous case reports (Ahumada, 2003; Calogeras, 1987; Coltart, 1985; Grand, 1997; Luca, 2002). More recently, Leuzinger-Bohleber

(2009) describes core scenes of early childhood memories of the mother humiliating the father in front of the children as being recalled during the analysis of a crossdresser. Furthermore, Brown (1960), Beigel and Feldman (1963) and Stoller (1966) emphasise the importance of the absence of male role models during childhood, while Storr (1957, 1974) mentions excessive maternal influences. A common theme within these theories is the psychoanalytical idea that a dominant and overly protective mother is a key element in 'causing' homosexuality and perhaps other non-normative gender identities (Bieber, 1988). Stoller (1966, 1971, 1984, 1992), in particular, saw the family of the crossdresser as the cause of it. From his clinical work, he argued that mothers of crossdressers could have unresolved envy and rage towards males which is expressed by humiliating them, and which would thus create a conflict with the young boy that is, at later stages, resolved through crossdressing. He also argued that parents' wish for a different sex child could have an influence on the child's sexual and gender development.

Yet, subsequent studies have largely contradicted these ideas. For example, Bullough and Smith (1983), in a survey performed on the members of a crossdressing club in Australia, found that 85% of the participants were raised by families headed by a mother and a father. The study also dismissed the assumption that the child crossdresser would not engage in activities traditionally performed by boys. In another study, Bennie and Vern Bullough (1993) reject, again, the 'absent fathers' factor and the suggestion that crossdressing develops because they were compelled to cross-dress by their parents. Similarly, Rudd (1999) found that only 5% of the 504 interviewed crossdressers stated that their mother would have preferred a girl or that she thought of them as a girl. Again, there was no significant mention of absent fathers. Lastly, in a much larger study, Docter and Prince (1997) found that 75% of their 1032 sample of crossdressers reported being raised by both parents, while 76% of them reported growing up with a father who provided a '*good masculine image'* (p.14).

1.6 Psychopathology and crossdressing

In the clinical field, crossdressing has been a constant presence within the DSM, starting with its first edition (1952), by being categorised under different disorders and even under different classes of disorder types. Crossdressing has been conceptualised as a psychopathic personality with pathologic sexuality (1952, p.39), sexual deviation under personality disorders

(1968, p.44), paraphilia under psychosexual disorders (1980, p.18), paraphilia under sexual disorders (1987, p.8), paraphilia under sexual and gender identity disorders (1998, p.21) and, lately, as a paraphilia under paraphilic disorders (2013, p.685). The current edition of the DSM diagnoses crossdressing under the 'transvestic disorder' rubric, which, alongside voyeuristic disorder, exhibitionistic disorder, frotteuristic disorder, sexual masochism disorder, sexual sadism disorder, paedophilic disorder and fetishistic disorder, makes the larger group of paraphilic disorders. The transvestic disorder is defined as a recurrent and intense sexual arousal from crossdressing, as manifested by fantasies, urges or behaviours, over a period of at least six months (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Starting with DSM IV-TR (2000), efforts to differentiate between the behaviour and the disorder have been made. Therefore, clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational and other important areas of functioning is necessary for the diagnosis, the presence of the behaviour itself being insufficient. A paraphilia (the behaviour) is understood as an intense and persistent sexual interest other than sexual interest in genital stimulation or preparatory fondling with phenotypically normal, physically mature and consenting human partners. On the other hand, a disorder is defined as a paraphilia that causes distress, impairment, personal harm or risk to the individual or others (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Moving on to the '*International Classification of Diseases*' (ICD), published by the *World Health Organisation*, crossdressing has had a similar treatment. In 1948, ICD-6 introduced the category of '*sexual deviation*' under the sub-category of '*pathogenic personality*,' which grouped together a number of non-reproductive sexual behaviours such as exhibitionism, fetishism, homosexuality, pathologic sexuality and sadism. In 1965, the ICD-8 brought a new structure of the category of '*sexual deviation*' and, as such, homosexuality (male and female) now constituted an extended category which included paedophilia, sodomy, exhibitionism, transvestism and fetishism (Giami, 2015). Later on, transvestism and fetishism would be separated from homosexuality. The next edition, ICD-9, had a new category of '*sexual and gender identity disorders*' and a new label: '*transvestic fetishism*' – which is for the first time differentiated from transsexualism. This edition also offers an explicit definition for '*sexual deviation*' as: *'the limits and features of normal sexual inclination and behaviour have not been stated absolutely in different societies and cultures but are broadly such as serve*

approved social and biological purposes' (p.40). However, this definition has had a short lifespan, as it was replaced with the notion of *paraphilia* within the ICD-10.

The ICD-10 (1992), in turn, proposed two separate diagnoses for it: *Fetishistic transvestism disorder* and *Dual-role transvestism disorder*. The fetishistic transvestism disorder is defined as the *'wearing of clothes of the opposite sex principally to obtain sexual excitement'* (World Health Organization, 1992, p.218). The dual-role transvestism disorder is defined similarly, yet without the sexual fetishistic component. Compared with the DSM, the observable behaviour is considered a synonym for the disorder, the behaviour being enough proof to qualify an individual for the diagnosis.

The latest edition, ICD-11 (2018), has completely removed crossdressing from its list of diagnosis along with sadomasochism and fetishism. The previous diagnostic of dual-role fetishism was recommended for removal due to a '*lack of public health or clinical relevance*' (Reed et al., 2016, p. 210). Concerning fetishistic transvestism, it was pointed out that the diagnostic was incompatible with the ICD-10's own principles and guidelines of what constitutes a mental health disorder: *'social deviance or conflict alone, without personal dysfunction, should not be included in mental disorder*' (p.11). As such, crossdressing, sadomasochism and fetishisms may be considered '*unusual*' patterns of sexual arousal, yet there is no distress, dysfunction or harm to the individual or others to include them in the mental disorder category. Distress, in this context, should not be entirely attributed to rejection or feared rejection by others but to a significant risk of injury or death (e.g., Asphyxiophilia).

1.7 Transsexualism, Transgenderism and Crossdressing

> *'Transsexualism, in fact, is one distinctly twentieth-century manifestation of crossdressing and the anxieties of binarity, an identifiable site, inscribed on the body, of the question of the constructedness of gender'* (Garber, 1992, p.15).

The previous discussion on how the clinical field has conceptualised crossdressing is the result of multiple and sometimes contradictory ways of seeing the phenomenon. While there had been unanimity that there was something inherently 'pathological' about crossdressing, what exactly *that* was had been a matter of numerous debates throughout the literature on the topic, starting with the 19th century up until today when crossdressing is

slowly moving away from pathology and from the diagnostic manuals. To summarise, crossdressing has been associated with male homosexuality, fetishism, atypical sexual interests (as paraphilia or as a sexual deviation and/or perversion), gender identity disorders and transsexualism (as a non-normative gender expression). For this reason alone, there is significant overlap and confusion between crossdressing and other categories that have been used for non-normative gender and sexual minorities.

I will now start with the relationship between transsexualism and crossdressing. As I have already mentioned, dual-role transvestism was considered a gender disorder next to transsexualism, while transvestic fetishism was considered a paraphilia. This seems to suggest that crossdressing could be equally distinct from transsexualism or a continuum towards transsexualism. This also highlights a long-lasting debate within the literature regarding the complex relationship between crossdressing and transsexualism. Some scholarly voices have described crossdressing as a progressive developmental phenomenon (Benjamin, 1966; Buckner, 1970; Person & Ovesey, 1974; 1976; Brierley, 1979; Docter, 1988), while others have conceptualised it as two discrete clinical entities (Buhrich & McConaghy, 1977a, 1977b, 1978, 1979; Buhrich, 1976, 1977, 1981; McConaghy, 1986). The first view describes a '*transvestite career*,' which includes different activities that may occur in phases over a lifetime. In this sense, Benjamin (1966) insists on the existence of six developmental stages:

a) sexual arousal to female clothing (fetishism),
b) sexual arousal while fully dressed as a woman,
c) development of a '*femme self*' characterised by a weakening in the relationship between crossdressing and sexual arousal and by an increase in fantasies of being a woman,
d) sexual arousal is predominately associated with the '*woman within*,' with fantasies of female anatomy (breasts or buttocks) and female bodily functions (menstruation or pregnancy),
e) fantasies of living full-time as a woman and/or taking steps to do so by means of feminisation therapy.

Obviously, the order of these phases, or the time spent in any of them, will be different from person to person and, thus, not every crossdresser will necessarily go through all of them.

On the other hand, Buhrich (1976, 1977, 1981) describes two separate entities which seem much closer to how mental health diagnoses have portrayed crossdressing:

a) '*nuclear transvestites*:' individuals who are satisfied with crossdressing, with or without sexual arousal, and report varying degrees of expression of their feminine nature while cross-dressed.
b) '*marginal transvestites*:' individuals may engage in fetishistic crossdressing, experience an intense female gender identity (e.g., feel like a woman when nude) and take steps to live as a woman through hormone therapy or surgical intervention.

This is also mirrored in the way transsexualism has been understood as primary and secondary transsexualism (Barrett, 2007; Docter, 1988; Person, 1999; Person & Ovesey, 1974a, 1974b; Tsoi, 1992; Stoller, 1985). Primary transsexualism – also called 'true' or 'real' or 'authentic' transsexualism – is described as starting with an early age onset, low sexual activity, lack of sexual arousal with crossdressing, sexual interest in the same biological sex and some degree of gender identity disorder in childhood. Secondary transsexualism, on the other hand, appears to debut with fetishistic transvestism characterised by highly sexual arousal, which then moves to meet the characteristic for dual-role transvestism, while some clients eventually meet the diagnostic criteria for transsexualism. Secondary transsexualism is similar to Buhrich's 'marginal transvestites' and with the latest phases, d and e, described by Benjamin. To date, there has been limited empirical investigation with non-clinical clients regarding the validity and usefulness of any of these categories (Aizura, 2018).

The core of the issue is how to differentiate between people who may or may not have different experiences, needs and expressions. Important here is *who* makes the categories, the differentiations around these categories and for what purpose. The categories of transvestism and transsexualism were created by clinicians, starting from the context in which these people were encountered and their relationship with relevant institutions/organisations. As mentioned before, transsexuals seem to want gender reassignment surgery, hormone replacement therapy and to socially transition, while all others who do not fit this category are grouped undifferentiated under the label of 'transvestism.' In this way, transvestism could account for a variety of sexual and gender issues depending on the perspective and the diagnostic criteria.

Now, the term 'transgender' is different, because it comes directly from people who identify as such and who, by doing so, wish to resist medical and psychiatric diagnosis (it is worth remembering that transsexualism and transvestism are medical and psychiatric terms). 'Transgenderism' is, by comparison, a more de-medicalised term that extends the M/F gender-sex categories and their expression. This term, compared to how crossdressing and transvestism are usually defined, might be said to challenge the dichotomised M/F gender system and thus to be more inclusive and neutral (Ekins & King, 1996). Overall, it allows for a wide array of non-normative gender expressions to be seen and recognised (Fremi, 2014). The origin of the term is linked to Prince's self-identification as a male-born individual who decided to express her previously '*repressed femininity*' without, however, resorting to hormone treatments and sex-reassignment surgery (1971, 1976).

After the term appeared, it quickly became highly influential, incorporating within it the existing categories of both *transvestism* and *transsexualism*. Nowadays, 'transgender,' or its short version 'trans,' is an umbrella term which encompasses various aspects and expressions of gender-sex identity, including crossdressing along with numerous other identities, such as "*FTM [Female to-Male], MTF [Male-to-Female], eonist, invert, androgyne, butch, femme, Nellie, queen, third sex, hermaphrodite, tomboy, sissy, drag king, female impersonator, she-male, he-she, boy-dyke, girlfag, transsexual, transvestite, transgender*" (Stryker, 1998, p.148). However, on the other side, the crossdressers' voices seem to have disappeared, and the impact of their disappearance has also been overlooked within the literature. For example, within more contemporary literature, crossdressing is mentioned as a part of the *trans* umbrella term, but nothing more specific is said about it. Fremi (2014) convincingly explains that crossdressing cannot be appropriated within the M/F binary gender divide or within the more inclusive and neutral 'transgender' language, for it remains within '*an ambiguous space somewhere between what it is 'real' and what it is not*' (p.38).

1.8 Queer Theory and Trans Studies

Queer Theory is a critical interdisciplinary approach, perspective and practice developed in the early 1990s from both feminist and gay and lesbian studies. It is inspired by the work of Sedgwick (1990), Deleuze (1995 [1968]), Foucault (1990 [1976]), Butler (1990), and de Lauretis (1991). The term 'queer,' once a colloquial and derogatory term for

'homosexual,' now refers to those individuals whose sexuality, gender, sex and bodies do not conform with the dominant heterosexual norms. It refers to those who trouble, twist, destabilise, denaturalise and violate, or are perceived as violating, the '*regimes of the normal*' (Warner, 1993, p.3). It further refers to those individuals who dissent from the political, social and epistemological gender binary system (male/female, masculine/feminine, butch/femme, heterosexual/homosexual, cisgender/transgender) and who, by doing so, are not some fixed and stable identities but rather a multiplicity of contested identities (Plummer, 2013).

In short, Queer Theory explores the discrepancy between anatomical chromosomal sex, gender identity and sexual desire, opposing heterosexuality as the default sexuality and kinship norm and the premise of two distinct, opposite gender positions. A heterosexuality which, as Fineman (2009) argues, promotes the reproduction of fixed gender arrangements, comprehends a limited spectrum of possible sexual identities and sustains specific configurations of personhood while eliminating others. With its resistance to normative limits in terms of gender-sex categories, queer theorists are opposed to all forms of essentialism, determinism and naturalism. For them, it makes no sense to speak of a 'natural,' inevitable and biologically determined gender-sex or of a deviancy from a 'natural' norm, whether essential or evolved. Rather, all categories are culturally and socially constructed, manifested through repetitive discursive and performative practices that the subject constantly enacts (for an overview, see Marinucci, 2010). An object of gender-sex desire, for example, cannot be separated from the social, economic and gender-sex discourses about it. Equally, an object of desire is not a neutral attractor for a natural, innate desire.

Queer theorists would often insist that *all* identities are fluid, free-floating and *in-becoming*: always in constant formation and always subject to revision (Halperin, 1990; Beemyn & Eliason, 1996; Jagose, 1996). Such identities must always '*find variations in [their] lives and seek to vary them further'* (Williams, 2005, p.74). Identity should no longer be driven by the temptation of sameness – exemplified by the question: *What/Who do I want to be?* – but by that of difference – *Where can further becoming be put into play?* No longer 'difference' as *difference between* gender-sex identities, but 'difference' in and by itself, as a series of variations of *differences within* an identity. The identity of the crossdresser might, then, be an identity *in-becoming*, one that must always '*create within the repeating cycles of difference and disappearing sameness that we are thrown into*' (p.75). To an extent, Queer Theory

radically questions the possibility of a stable, once and for all, gay, queer, crossdressing, cis or trans identity. By doing so, it shifts from stable identity to variation; the first, according to Deleuze (1995 [1968]), being necessary but incomplete without the latter. On this note, if crossdressing complicates the debate regarding the separability of gender and sexuality, Queer Theory proposes an anti-identitarian approach that questions not only heteronormativity but also any fixed and stable categories of gender, sex and sexual expression. Because of the way Queer Theory thinks about categories of gender and sexual expression, male-to-female crossdressing remains, to some degree, un-named and under-theorised.

Within Queer Theory, the identity of the crossdresser, like any other identity, is a structure of power-knowledge which has, in its turn, the capacity to determine and impose acts, values, and norms upon any difference from its within. In other words, '*identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes whether as the normalising categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression*' (Butler, 1991, p.13-14). The biggest difference between Queer Theory and Feminism, Gay and Lesbian studies and Transgender Studies, for example, is that within all the latter identity is taken as a stable foundation.

Through the seminal works of Namaste (1994, 1996) and Rubin (1999, 2003), Transgender Studies, in turn, expands and critiques the insights from Queer Theory, especially its tendency to rarely look at '*the implications of an enforced sex/gender system for people who live outside of it*' (Namaste, 1996, p.183). According to Transgender Studies, Queer Theory has all too often absorbed trans phenomena and trans oppression into its deconstructive and antinormative aims without inquiring about the epistemic, political, social and legal consequences of these aims for trans bodies (Keegan, 2018). The idea of identity as fluid might be, for many Transgender Studies scholars, a pure fiction (Owen, 2016). Instead of looking at trans people as being the outcome of some queer performative gender-sex actions, Transgender Studies scholars are looking, usually through narratology and phenomenology, at how transgender people are being the makers and creators of their own gender-sex actions and at how their sexual and gendered bodies are actually lived. In this way, they disrupt the queer figural use of 'trans' in order to examine the complexity of the lived experience of transgender people (Namaste, 1996); no longer asking '*what is the matter with someone*' but '*what matters to someone*' (Rubin, 2003, p.11).

Transgender Studies also reminds Queer Theory that '*not every gender-crossing is queerly subversive'* and that *'by no means are transgendered subjects necessarily queer*' (Prosser, 1998, p.32), in the sense that many people might, in fact, desire recognition within the bounds of, thus seeking '*to claim status as either male or female subjects*' (Awkward-Rich, 2017, p.838). If there is a transgender critique against heteronormativity, it is not necessarily one which aims for its dissolution but one which simply questions what the 'natural,' 'biological' category of woman/man contains, who counts as woman/man in our society and whether the identity of woman/man exists as invoked (Stryker, 2006). Transgender people, then, might challenge, shift or reproduce heteronormative constructions of gender. And the way they do this is by making visible their female/male sense of being, as well as their desire to attain ordinary lives after having lived as both female and male subjects (Rubin, 2003; Dozier, 2005).

The Transgender Studies' relationship with Feminism and Women's studies is much more complicated than that with Queer Theory. This is because transgender women are still seen, here and there, as a betrayal of the feminist goals and as a distinct category in relation to 'natural,' 'biological' women. Transgender Studies scholars would often insist against Women's Studies' understanding of female subordination and the assumption that ending this subordination will eventually liberate women and end heteronormativity. For transgender studies, then, binary gender-sex does not map neatly into the social operations of power, domination and violence. In order for there to exist a binary violent relation, women '*need to keep presuming that there are such things as women*,' category that transgender people '*threatens to scramble in its undercutting of the ability to tell which gender or sex is where*' (Keegan, 2018, p.7).

Within Transgender Studies, the crossdresser is named and acknowledged along with a multitude of other gender identities. However, the discourse is always collective under the transgender rubric. This allows flexibility and fluidity without a need for a clear-cut criteria to separate between identities but, at the same time, there is a need for more research that highlights the diversity of identities and gender practices among transgender people. As I already argued, the voices of crossdressers seem to have disappeared and this disappearance has been largely overlooked.

1.9 Intersectionality and crossdressing

The heteronormative markers of power and domination do not stop at gendered, queer and trans bodies, but also come into contact with racialised, colonised, ageing, disabled and classed bodies as well, bodies that are affected by multiple and intersecting systems of power and domination. We do not only find privilege and/or marginalisation on just one side of any given dichotomy (*across* identities) but on both sides at the same time (*within* identities), each reinscribing further relations of privilege and/or marginalisation in their turn. Oppression, then, is to be found at the intersection of heteronormativity, racism, patriarchy, white supremacy, religious bigotry, colonialism, class exploitation, dis/ability and other markers of power and domination (Crenshaw, 1991). And yet, while there is much academic research on the violence, discrimination and marginalisation that come from *across* identities and against trans/crossdressing communities, rarely do we find research on the violence, discrimination and marginalisation that exist *within* trans/crossdressing communities; underscoring, for example, the relation between crossdressers who engage in kink and fetishist activities and those who do not, between crossdressers who are heterosexual and those who are not, between those who may choose to transition and those who may not, and so on (Schimanski & Treharne, 2019).

According to Spelman, '*gender is constructed and defined in conjunction with other elements of identity*' (1990, p.175). For this reason alone, '*the victim*' in one intersection can easily be '*the oppressor*' in another (Johnson & Henderson, 2005). By reconceptualising identity through a recognition of intersectionality, we are able to recognise '*the need to summon up the courage to challenge groups that are after all, in one sense, home to us, in the name of the parts of us that are not made at hom*e' (Crenshaw, 1991, p.129). In this sense, we might be able to speak against internal marginalisation and exclusions. Some people may gain social privilege by being heterosexuals, while some queers, trans or cross-dressed individuals may receive social privilege by simply being white, male, young and upper-middle class. The research on intersectionality shows that, overall, transgender people experience different intersecting forms of violence, discrimination and social marginalisation, with transgender people of colour reporting the higher rates (Hatchel & Marx, 2018; Wesp et al., 2019).

Disabled individuals, to give one example, are an absent presence within the usually visible nature of ableist modes of being, doing and thinking. According to Bourdieu (1989 [1979]), these modes are usually symbolic and violent, for ableism is part of our everyday practices and discourses without us being aware of it or recognising it as such. For Disability Studies, the system of able-bodiedness (vector of power) is intimately linked with the system of heteronormativity (vector of oppression), which not only produces queerness and transness but also leads to the rejection and humiliation of disabled bodies as well (McRuer, 2008). The body does not only come in genders; it also comes with abilities and disabilities. Some authors would argue that disability is, in fact, '*the new gender*' of our postmodern societies (Hirschmann, 2012, p.392). Other scholars would argue that in a world where heterosexuality is the norm, gay, lesbian, queer, crossdressing and transgender individuals are often understood and constituted as disabled individuals, while disabled individuals are often understood and constituted as genderless, asexual, undesirable and untouchable individuals (Mollow, 2012; McRuer, 2008, 2017; Liddiard, 2018; Thorneycroft, 2021).

1.10 Crossdressing within (popular) culture

The socio-cultural models discussed in the previous part built on an extensive and wide use of crossdressing in almost all the existing artistic mediums of expression, from literature, film and television to opera, drag queen culture and theatre. The actual term for crossdressing within performance arts is *travesti* (or 'across dress'), from the Italian *travestire*, which applies to any character sung and/or played by the 'opposite sex.' It simply means 'to clothe oneself' (it. *vestire*) in the garments of the 'opposite sex' (it. *trans*). Terms such as 'trousers,' 'breaches,' 'pants,' or 'Hosenrolle' are terms for travesti roles for women singing and/or playing a male character in male clothing. A closely related term is 'skirt,' this time for travesti roles for men singing and/or playing a female character in female clothing (usually a stepsister or an older woman) for visual and comic effects. Besides these, there is also the term 'disguised,' which is mainly assigned to a woman who sings/plays a female character but who, at some point in the plot, appears on stage disguised as a man (for an overview, see Blackmer & Smith, 1995).

Throughout a good part of history, from the ancient Greek theatre to the public theatre in England's Renaissance, women were prohibited from performing on stage. For this reason, every play with a female character in it embodied an instance of gendered crossdressing. In

Shakespeare's times, for example, young male actors would not only perform the feminine character (e.g., Desdemona in *Othello*, 1603) but would also play a woman playing a man (e.g., Viola acting as Orsino in *Twelfth Night*, 1601-1602). According to Hawkes (1996), this double disguise reflects Shakespeare's political strategy of blurring and confusing the idea of fixed identities, at a time when gendered crossdressing was socially seen as 'deviant' and 'abominable.' Those who dared, especially from lower social classes, to cross-dress were treated as 'prostitutes,' 'sodomites' and/or 'criminals.' In other words, while the men who cross-dressed were often accused of sexual perversion, the women who cross-dressed were suspected of sexual incontinence (Hunt, 1996; Kirtio, 2012). However, the liminal space of the theatre somehow allowed for traditional rules of gender expression to be constantly broken. For some reason, the theatrical act of crossdressing was (and still is) more palpable for society than the one in which a genderfluid, crossdressing or transgender individual participates to convey their identity. In theatre, crossdressing was meant to be noticed and enjoyed from a certain distance; in real life, however, crossdressing was simply meant to be hidden (Brown, 2018). Still, in 1660, 44 years after Shakespeare's death, women were finally allowed to perform in public and, thus, to share the public stage with men as men. According to Lehnert (1994), the 'trousers' heightened male pleasure by lifting a woman to the level of a man only to, after the final curtain, drop her back into her 'proper place.' It was this powerful phallic sign that made the woman only thinkable in relation to the masculinity she represented and performed. Other scholars would argue that the cross-dressed woman made same-sex desire more visible (Rosenberg, 2016).

Now, the theatrical art form that truly took hold of the concept of *travesti* in all its forms would have to be Opera, an innovator of the crossdressing role (André, 2006). The first Italian operas – Peri's *Dafne* (1597) and Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (1607) – were written for a castrato voice. This voice was formed through rigorous years of training and after a surgical procedure performed on boys before puberty at the age of eight or nine. The castrati dominated the operatic stage for at least two centuries up until the mid-nineteenth century. However, they had no easy life. Back then, they were idols as well as 'monsters' whose profession was considered, by the majority of people, little above prostitution (Tråvén, 2016). After Napoleon's invasion of Italy in 1796, the admiration for castrati was starting to fade away. The need for a heavier orchestration, a bigger number of instruments, a more natural sound and expressiveness and

military leaders as characters was considered urgent and necessary. The impact of this was the acceptance of women and other types of male voice (e.g., tenor, baritone, bass) on the operatic stage.

Besides Opera, we can also find crossdressing practices in variety shows, 'striptease' shows and theatrical burlesques formats, originally introduced in the 1840s as a reaction to the upper class and educated operagoers, as well to the overall societal hegemonic configurations of gender and sex. Burlesque introduced a diverse cast of characters which, by means of parody and resistance to gender hegemony and heteronormativity, are intentionally ridiculous and excessive. In burlesques, we can find drag queens with over-the-top feminine clothing and mannerisms who engage in impersonating, imitating or parodying people whose personas are usually associated with power, tragedy and female sexuality. More often, racial, gender and language conventions are exposed and denaturalised through these acts (Tyler, 2015).

1.11 Existential perspectives and crossdressing

The existential literature on sexuality and gender remains, in general, sparse and fragmented. There are, however, ongoing discussions which show evidence of an emerging and developing field: Milton's oeuvre on sexuality (2000, 2007, 2014ab; Woolfe & Milton, 2010), Spinelli's phenomenological work on sexuality (1996, 2004, 2014), the debate regarding homosexuality and affirmative therapy (Acton, 2010; Crabtree, 2009; Du Plock, 1997, 2014; Langdridge, 2007a; 2014; Medina, 2008; Milton, 2000) and, more recently, Richards and Baker's contributions on working with trans clients (2013, 2015; Barker, 2011; Richards, 2015, 2016). We can add to this Vitelli's clinical phenomenological inquiry into male-to-female transsexualism (2015) and Haulotte's program of a possible 'transgender existentialism' (2022). Unfortunately, crossdressing is not among these topics and, to my knowledge, there are no existential writings which specifically discuss crossdressing.

One of the main threads within the existential literature has been represented by the idea as to whether sexuality and gender can be considered 'existential givens,' in a stable, fixed, existential sense, or as expressions of the 'thrown world,' in an unstable, fluid and always evolving sense. Some scholars see sexuality and gender as being open to change, always in-becoming and always contingent on the social-cultural-discursive norms of one's time. On this line of thought, one's gender/sex identity is intersubjectively and performatively constituted

through different social discourses, norms, myths and practices of being recognised and recognisable. Here, gender and sexuality are not considered to be existential givens (Cohn, 1997; Houghtaling, 2013; Leighton, 1999; Spinelli, 2014; van Deurzen, 2010). We can find support for this existential thread of thinking in Sartrean philosophy, de Beauvoir's well-known dictum '*one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman*.' Merleau-Ponty's ideas of embodied sexuality, as well as the larger post-structuralist and queer philosophy from Foucault to Butler. When it comes to Sartre's influence, for example, the idea of being a sexuality – gay, straight or anything in between – would not be existentially correct, even if it appears that we have a specific identity linked to a sexual desire. Rather, this is the result of a process of objectification in the gaze of another individual and their power to name. Put differently, sexual desire is the attempt '*to get hold of the Other's free subjectivity through his objectivity-for-me*' (Sartre, 1992 [1943], p.382).

Other scholars are also invoking the argument of an 'authentic,' 'real' self, which further connects with the idea that our gender and sexuality have been fixed with us from birth. Identifying this 'authentic,' 'real' self is seen as fundamental in becoming the person one always really was. On this line of thought, transitioning is seen as a matter of such becoming. This reflects a tendency in the existential literature to look out for biological causes and explanations for transsexuality and/or transgenderism. Richards (2016), for example, turns to '*some neuronal evidence*' in showing that trans women's number of bed nucleus neurons (BSTc) are in the same range as that of cisgender women, or that trans men's white matter in the brain is in the same range as that of cisgender males. As she argues, '*these brain regions will interact with the [social] world epistemically and so existential arguments about gender and sexuality […] should hold within them the current evidence of a biological aetiology of trans for some people*' (p. 38). Following this, it seems that the 'true' and 'authentic' trans individual may only be the one who is neurobiologically destined to be so (McQueen, 2016). When it comes to gender alone, Richards describes it as a bridge between the '*eigenwelt*' – the personal world of gender identity – and the '*mitwelt*' – the world of gender presentation –. Embracing Sartre's concept of 'bad faith,' she further argues that the trans person is 'condemned to be free,' and because there is some freedom to choose, the trans person is at risk of being inauthentic or in 'bad faith,' especially if they adhere to the dominant cultural norms of their time (Richards, 2011).

1.12 Reflexivity aspects

Overall, it was fascinating and insightful to spend significant time reading about crossdressing. It was surprising to actually discover how much literature is out there on the topic and what a significant part crossdressing has had within various disciplines and cultures. Coming from the perspective of someone who is a part of the LGBTQIA+ community and who identifies as queer, it was particularly challenging to read accounts where non-heterosexual and non-cisgender ways of expressing gender and sexuality have been pathologised. When you realise that *who you are* and *how you are* used to be a psychiatric diagnosis a couple of decades ago, it makes it really hard to separate myself as a 'professional' from the 'patient.' The crossdresser cannot be an 'other' for me, in the same way in which it has been acknowledged and presented throughout some of the articles I read for this Literature Review. In fact, the opposite has happened. The more I read about how *unusual*, *different* and *other* the crossdresser is through the words of the mental health practitioners who used to diagnose them, the closer I feel towards them. While I may not know how it is to be a crossdresser, I could certainly empathise with how it feels to be treated as a different *other*. And yet, while in most cases I do not share the pathological views of some scholars, I believe there is value in acknowledging all the perspectives on crossdressing and enquiring into the history of how our thinking about crossdressing has evolved. I have attempted to do this by highlighting what seemed like major disruptions into how our thinking has evolved. Overall, I think that what I wrote may say even more about our profession/institution rather than the crossdresser itself, and the reader should be free to draw their own conclusions. Certainly, the way aspects of sexuality and gender have been thought about is illuminating on how the medical/clinical/psychological professions function and how they produce knowledge for their own internal (and sometimes hidden) power structures.

CHAPTER II. METHODOLOGY

This chapter aims to describe my own philosophical and epistemological position (Section 2.1) and to justify how it connects with phenomenology (Section 2.2) and with hermeneutic phenomenology (Section 2.3), leading to my decision for choosing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the most suitable research method for this study. I further aim to describe IPA, why it was chosen and how it was applied (Section 2.4), along with its main limitations and what they might mean for the current research. Lastly, I will consider other possible options for doing this research, such as grounded theory, descriptive phenomenology and van Manen's hermeneutical phenomenology (Section 2.5). On this note, I will explore what advantages and disadvantages each of them has in the light of this research, and why I considered that IPA would be most suitable compared to them.

2.1 Epistemological Framework

Most of the past research on crossdressing has been grounded in a positivist framework, in an explicitly theoretically oriented approach and/or within a psychoanalytically oriented framework. However helpful and informative this literature is, only a small portion of it tries to describe crossdressing and, at the same time, to take into account how people describe and make sense of their lived experiences of crossdressing. In other words, it seems that the crossdressers' voices are primarily missing within this vast literature.

Now, to contribute towards addressing this gap, there is the option to use a qualitative research paradigm or a quantitative one. Fundamentally, any quantitative research is based on a positivist epistemology where reality is considered objective. This can be measured through observation, the observer being entirely separate from what is being observed, thus producing research which is supposed to be 'unbiased.' Qualitative research methods, on the other hand, assume that the reality is intersubjective – in other words, it is experienced differently by each individual, the researcher is part of the research, while the overall study is always subject to 'bias.' The purpose of this thesis is to research the lived experience of crossdressing, with a strong emphasis on the meanings it has for each participant. This aim places the research in the qualitative paradigm. Here, the core assumption is that knowledge is co-constructed. As such, it reflects both the experiences of the participants and the voice of the researcher through the choices they make concerning the research (Langdridge, 2007b).

A way to describe myself and my position within this research is both as an *outsider*, as I do not identify as a crossdresser, and as an *insider*, as I am a member of the LBGTQIA+ community with my own experiences, knowledge and values. Yet, I am a fascinated observer of the *world* I have discovered through this research. Regarding my own assumptions and epistemological position, I share a queer, postmodernist view of sexuality and gender, primarily by being reserved towards grand narratives and by being willing to have a critical and questioning stance towards any theory and discourse in this area. On this note, I am particularly critical towards psychopathology, especially when it comes to paraphilia and gender dysphoria or the psychiatric/medical model of sexuality and gender.

Moreover, as a person who has questioned their own cisgender identity and who does not identify as being heterosexual, I am conscious of embedded heteronormative and heterosexist layers within academic, clinical, social and political discourses. As such, I am interested in a descriptive, interpretative and idiographic account of crossdressing by using the actual lived experience as a source of knowledge. I am interested both in the content of my participants' discourses as well as in the way they speak about their experiences. Both parts would be present in the counselling room. Lastly, as a follower of Foucault's work (1990 [1976]), 1991 [1975]), I am aware of the power dynamics that are ever-present within the theories of gender and sexuality, within the counselling room and within the interview encounter (face-to-face and online) with the participants.

2.2 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is one of the several influential philosophical disciplinary fields and movements of the 20th century inaugurated by Husserl (2001 [1913]) and subsequently enriched by the works of other major thinkers such as Heidegger (1962 [1927]), Sartre (2003 [1943]), Merleau-Ponty (2012 [1945]), Lévinas (2011 [1961]) and Derrida (2017 [1967]). Just to give a short overview, Sartre (2003 [1943]) saw phenomenology as an opportunity to be able to philosophise about everything and mainly used it for questions surrounding human freedom, while Heidegger (1962 [1927]) recognised that phenomenology permitted questions about the fundamental nature of Being, starting from our everyday being-in-the-world. Much closer to the current topic of this research, Merleau-Ponty (2012 [1945]) used phenomenology to illuminate our embodied relationship with this world. Derrida (2017 [1967]), on the other hand,

took phenomenology to a completely different level towards *différance* and *deconstruction*, two concepts which highlight the limits of phenomenology but also a major departure from it.

What is, then, phenomenology? One way of explaining it is as an approach of doing philosophy, which attempts to describe phenomena as '*whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that is, as it manifests itself to consciousness'* (Moran, 2000, p.4). Husserl (2001 [1913]) described phenomenology as leading '*back to the things themselves*' (p.168), meaning a return to things in the way they first manifest to us, before any conceptual judgement and construction manage to shape and alter our perceptions and experiences (i.e., *the principle of presuppositionless*). Any research that is informed by phenomenology focuses on people's perceptions of the world in which they live in; in other words, it concentrates on people's lived experiences (Langdridge, 2007b). Therefore, the general aim of the phenomenological research, which overlaps with that of the current research, is to obtain rich descriptions of experiences (in this case, the experience of being a crossdresser) in order to arrive at an understanding of the meanings and the 'essences' of these experiences. To put this into perspective, in the following paragraphs some of the main conceptual ideas of phenomenology will be explored, particularly in reference to Husserl's work.

Phenomenology starts with a theory of consciousness, of *intentionality*, which Husserl (2001 [1913]) initially discovered in the writings of the German philosopher Franz Brentano (1995 [1874]). In short, Husserl's understanding of *intentionality* refers to the fact that when we are conscious, we are always conscious of something (Langdridge, 2007b); in other words, the conscious experience is '*aboutness*' or '*directness*,' a way to be 'in touch with' the world. For Husserl, then, this particular understanding of the intentional structure of consciousness is the basis for all conscious experiences, including his phenomenological reflections as well (Moran, 2000).

Before moving forward, it is worth mentioning that within some areas of philosophy and psychology, a distinction is made between subjects and objects. This refers back to Descartes' (1999 [1637], 2008 [1641]) Cartesian dualism, a longstanding debate which sees the mind as being separate from the body into two different kinds of substances. It is this very dualism between subjects and objects that phenomenology aims to change. Intentionality, then, transforms this dualism into a correlation between what we experience and the way it is

experienced (Langdridge, 2007b). This is what Husserl (2001 [1913]) describes as the *noetic-noematic structure of consciousness*. He names an object or intuition a *noema*, and *noesis* the intentional correlation. Phenomenological philosophical reflection and research focus on the correlation between intentional acts (i.e., the act of appearing*)* and the ways in which things appear as such (i.e., the act of appearance). Phenomenological research is therefore interested in the study of acts of consciousness – i.e., acts of being aware – and the objects of consciousness as we experience them (Finlay, 2011). From an ontological point of view, *meaning* for phenomenologists is neither in the mind alone nor in the world alone but in the intentional relationship between the two (Langdridge, 2007b).

This said, not every thinker within the area of phenomenology is seeing the issues I have mentioned with the same eyes. Moran (2000) argues that phenomenology is always in tension with Descartes' dualism as it seeks to radicalise it or even overcome it. Sartre (2006 [1943]) saw phenomenology as a continuation of the Cartesian dualism, while for Heidegger (1962 [1927]), the emphasis is quite distinct on the inseparable relationship between the two. Equally, Husserl (2001 [1913]) and the thinkers that followed him have had different ideas about the transcendental part of phenomenology. Husserl (2001 [1913]) originally envisioned transcendence within phenomenology as an ability to go outside of your experience. Merleau-Ponty (2012 [1945]) described this transcendence as a 'God's eye view' and as the ability to go outside ourselves in order 'to view the world from above.' Almost all of the thinkers who followed Husserl rejected this part of his philosophy in favour of an existential turn which emphasises our experience of the world as it is lived by us (Langdridge, 2007b).

2.3 Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Heidegger's (1962 [1927]) existential turn on phenomenology highlights an embodied being-in-the-world – here, the hyphens are indicating that it is impossible to separate our being from the world (Langdridge, 2007b). One implication is that, viewed phenomenologically, body-self-world are intertwined (Finlay, 2011). In a way, this is crucial for the topic of sexuality and gender as they represent two phenomena that can be seen holistically at the confluence between body, self and the world. Indeed, this philosophy is at the core of this research, because crossdressing is explored as an embodied lived experience. Moreover, compared to other ways of doing qualitative research, the source of knowledge is the actual lifeworld (i.e., the world as

concretely lived) of the participants, description being favoured to any explanation and theory, thus giving the opportunity for crossdressers to be witnessed in their experiences and to allow them to give voice to what they are going through (Finlay, 2011).

Secondly, being-in-the-world is not only mediated by embodiment but also by language, which connects phenomenology with the hermeneutical turn. Hermeneutic Phenomenology has emerged from the works of Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur. In their different ways, each of these philosophers argued that we are born into a world of language. As such, *understanding*, according to Heidegger, would presuppose *interpretation* (Heidegger, 1962 [1927]). This means that in contrast with pure phenomenological methods, which are overall engaged with the structural and textual constituent parts of the descriptions, in the hermeneutical variants more attention is given to contextual meanings, which are made overt through interpretation (Churchill, 2007). This allows any lived experience to be thematised through the use of language. This, in turn, offers the possibility for information to be filtered and interpreted through a variety of perspectives (be these philosophical, theoretical, literary and/or reflexive). The benefit of interpretation is that it breaks free from the literal meaning towards more implicit meanings of the lived experience, primarily by capturing multiple layers of the complexity of the phenomenon (Finlay, 2011).

Practically speaking, Finlay (2011) describes four different layers of interpretation which can be present within the hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry: (1) contextual interpretation (which situates the participants' discourses within their specific being-in-the-world); (2) the researcher's own interpretation (based on their own understanding and life experiences); (3) interpretation through spatial-temporal lenses (which bridges the research with the social, cultural, political and scientific context) and (4) interpretations both from the participants and the researcher (which arise out of the specific context of the research); in other words, the process of meeting a person and sharing their experience of the phenomenon under investigation. It should be clear, then, that this interpretative approach is beneficial for the present research.

Similarly, according to Smith et al. (2009), this process is a 'double hermeneutics' where '*the researcher is making sense of the participant, who is making sense of x*' (p. 35). They further believe that the researcher should navigate through the IPA's layers of

interpretation by using the duality of the insider-outsider approach – that is, by being both '*empathic and questioning*' (p. 35) – which, as mentioned in the introduction, mirrors my own position towards the world of crossdressing, as I am both an outsider and an insider.

Lastly, hermeneutic phenomenology puts a big emphasis on the role of the researcher within the research. On this note, it advertises *reflexivity* – that is, a continuous process of reflecting upon the researcher's involvement in the analysis (Etherington, 2004). Since the present study includes the researcher's own understanding and experiences, along with the nature of the interaction between the researcher and the participant, it is important to reflect, present, discuss and address all these issues transparently (*Section 3.6. Reflexivity*).

2.4 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

The main reason for choosing a hermeneutic and phenomenological approach lies in the fact that this paradigm comes close to my own epistemological position and that it offers great potential for this type of qualitative research. Another valid reason is that it '*offers a bridge across the gulf that separates research from clinical practice within the field of therapy*' (Finlay, 2011, p.12). It is also clear that any chosen method would have to reunite both traditions, making good use of both interpretation and description. Following up on this idea, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), as described by Smith et al. (2009), was proposed as the chosen method. In short, the purpose of IPA is a '*detailed examination of individual lived experience and how individuals make sense of that experience*' (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 179). This mirrors the overall aim of this study. Subsequently, IPA was selected from the larger family of phenomenological methods as it is particularly suitable for exploring issues surrounding sexuality and gender (Seymour-Smith, 2015). Now, besides its phenomenological and hermeneutical ethos, IPA incorporates other concepts, such as *idiography* and *symbolic interactionism*, which add further reasons to justify it as a choice.

The *idiographic* approach mainly refers to a distinction made by Windelband (1980 [1894]) between two different approaches to knowledge – idiographic and nomothetic. In short, idiographic research strategies emphasise a historical individualised approach, while nomothetic research strategies focus on drawing law-like inferences that are generalisable across a large span of individuals (see Haynes & O'Brien, 2000). This distinction goes to the core of IPA, which seeks idiographic accounts of people's views and perceptions (Smith et al.,

2009) – in other words, how participants themselves as individuals understand and give meaning to their experiences. This is also demonstrated by the relatively small sample of IPA, which stresses the depth and the detail of the micro-level data analysis (Finlay, 2011).

S*ymbolic interactionism* is a sociological and social-psychological perspective that sees human beings as creative agents who construct their social world through intersubjective interpretations. In other words, people learn and assign meanings, definitions, symbols or metaphors to the objects and actions that surround their everyday experiences (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Williams, 2008). IPA incorporates this perspective and, according to Smith et al. (2009), people's interpretations are not considered entirely idiosyncratic but bound to the social interactions and processes that they are referring to.

2.5 Limitations and criticism of IPA

Perhaps it is important to correlate IPA with the context of its specific epistemological and ontological position. If one comes from a positivist position, it is easy to criticise IPA for not being 'scientific' enough and for not describing 'the things as they are' (Giorgi, 2010). To be able to substantiate a claim such as 'things as they are,' one needs to assume scientific objectivity, a differentiation between the individual and the world and, perhaps, an unmediated access to people's experiences. All these assumptions would be incompatible with the theoretical framework advanced by hermeneutic phenomenology and IPA. Within this position, our embodied being exists contextually – that is, it exists historically, temporally, spatially and socio-politically. Willig (2001, 2013) makes a similar argument when she writes about the dangers of phenomenological research as being interested in the 'actual experience' itself. She makes a compelling argument for the role of language in IPA, for there might be concerns about the representational validity of language. On this note, she claims that language does not simply describe but can also prescribe what we can think and feel.

Furthermore, there might be concerns about the suitability of the accounts of the participants as well. Does language offer participants the 'necessary tools' to capture their experiences? Applying this insight, it raises the question of whether an interview transcript tells us more about the way in which an individual talks about a particular experience within a specific context than about 'the experience itself.' In other words, will this research merely capture people's opinions about an experience rather than the experience in question? Again,

the key phrase here is the 'experience itself.' As far as this research is concerned, there are no arguments about the nature of the world itself, and *'the important reality is what people perceive it to be'* (Kvale, 1996b, p.52). And is this very reality that matters within this research. Furthermore, it can be argued that the way in which an individual talks about a particular experience is as revealing as the actual content of their words. A counsellor might be interested in both, as both are present in the counselling room. Smith et al. (2009) argue that IPA, through the use of hermeneutics, idiographic and contextual analysis, provides details about the social and cultural context of the experiences it aims to describe, while admitting that experience is always intertwined with language. Similarly in the therapeutic session, all descriptions and interpretations are contextual, incomplete, subject to change and multiple. And yet, rather than being a shortcoming, this aspect is the very basis of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Indeed, some of these points might be more relevant to a research that perhaps aims to explain crossdressing. Trying to understand 'why' crossdressing occurs, how and why it has appeared is not the purpose of this research and, as such, this would not represent a limitation for IPA, especially in this particular case. On the contrary, this research is much more interested in the 'how' of crossdressing rather than the 'why' of crossdressing.

2.6 Other methods considered.

Hermeneutic phenomenology describes a family of methods based on later Husserl, Heidegger and Gadamer that moves away from the search for *essence*, which is more specific for descriptive phenomenology. A popular example is the hermeneutic phenomenology method described by van Manen (1990, 2016). Grounded particularly in the writings of Gadamer, van Manen's (1990, 1997) method is much more resistant to the idea of a formalised method, as it gives the researcher the freedom to see the method emerging uniquely in the context of the phenomenon being investigated (see Langdridge, 2007b). This allows freedom and creativity, but it can be quite daunting for a novice researcher, especially compared to IPA which is well-described, easy to use and has been successfully applied to many studies, particularly regarding sexuality and/or gender. Lastly, IPA is more favourable for this study due to its greater emphasis on an idiographic approach, which would allow a better intimate exploration of participants' experiences and the meanings they attach to them. This mirrors the goal of this research to produce knowledge that contributes to the literature available for counsellors who

work with crossdressing and, additionally, knowledge that explores in depth how their clients might understand and experience the phenomenon.

***Descriptive phenomenology*:** In general, researchers working within this strand of phenomenology are more faithful to early Husserl, seeking to reveal the essence of a phenomenon in one way or another (Colaizzi, 1973; Giorgi, 1985, 2012; Fischer, 2005). With the goal to describe essential structures of experience, this type of phenomenology can employ Husserl's ideas on epoché, phenomenological reduction/eidetic reduction or imaginative variation. The purpose is to bring the pre-reflective lived 'world' to light without overtly trying to interpret meanings by conveying external theory in it (Finlay, 2011). The first reason for choosing IPA over descriptive phenomenology lies within the debate between a general description of the phenomenon and an idiographic analysis. Indeed, descriptive phenomenology tends to go more towards, what Giorgi (2008) describes, the actual nature and structure of the phenomenon, searching for its essence, an essence which could play down the significance of idiographic details in an attempt to move from the level of individual experience towards a more general one. While both approaches are correct, this research will focus more on the depth and details of individual experience without the ambition to generalise these findings. Secondly, an overt interpretation with everything it entails (e.g., layers, double hermeneutics, the use of hermeneutic circle and an emphasis on reflexivity) is considered a better fit for this study than pure descriptive phenomenology.

Grounded theory represents a collection of qualitative research methods developed initially by Glaser and Strauss (1967), with subsequent developments by Charmaz (2006), adding a constructivist ethos, or by Clarke (2005), adding an infusion of postmodern thought. For example, Charmaz describes the method as '*consisting of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves*' (2006, p.2). On this note, the overall result of applying this method would be a theory or a set of theories. As such, grounded theory moves beyond describing an experience towards generating inductive theories – that is, an abstract analytical schema of a process, action or interaction, by applying successive analytical strategies (Corbin & Strauss, 1998). This would be incompatible with the purpose of this study because it favours theorising rather than presenting the actual voice of the crossdressers. Furthermore, this research does not seek

to provide any explanations for crossdressing, but rather to explore and to understand their lived experience and sense-making process.

CHAPTER III. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Research Aims

The aim of this study is two-fold. First, it aims to contribute to the sparse literature on crossdressing, with a focus on lived experience, and to contribute to the development of an informed existential perspective on the phenomenon. Second, it aims to use descriptions of lived experience, to start the grounds for a discussion regarding how we approach crossdressing within the therapeutic setting. For these reasons alone, the research question is not framed in a manner which draws on a positivist ontology or theory, but rather, it is as open as possible. Therefore, it consists of a simple research question:

'*How do you describe your lived experience of crossdressing*?'

3.2 Participants

Overall, I aimed to interview six to eight adult individuals over the age of 18, and I interviewed eight. This size sample is characteristic of a qualitative research, considering that there is no requirement for obtaining a representative sample. Moreover, referring back to IPA, Smith et al. (2009) assert that this method does not need a substantive sample but a purposeful selected one. Here, the purpose was to find a defined group for whom the research question has relevance and personal significance. According to Smith et al. (2009), the homogeneity of the group depends on two factors:

- interpretative concerns (this refers to the degree of similarity or variation that can be contained in the analysis of the phenomenon).
- pragmatic considerations (this refers to the ease or difficulty in contacting potential participants; indeed, when the topic is more common, the sample may be focused on individuals with similar demographic and/or socio-economic characteristics).

Regarding crossdressing, there are difficulties in contacting potential participants. Also, due to a lack of qualitative studies performed on the subject, the topic cannot be considered common. Here and there, some studies do exist (Hogan-Finlay, 1995; Kerchove, 2001; Lentz, 2004; Middlehurst, 2013; Sheldon, 2018), but these have not used any recruitment criteria for demographic and/or socio-economic characteristics, and they have not explored differences

regarding cultural and/or religious factors sufficiently in order to take additional research decisions in this sense. Therefore, no further recruitment criteria were added. To achieve a purposeful, defined sample, I considered the following characteristics and inclusion-exclusion criteria:

1) Participants over the age of 18.

To my knowledge, there are no studies on how age influences crossdressing to draw informed decisions in this sense. It may be very possible for people to have different experiences of crossdressing, depending on their age and on the society/times they were born into. However, because of multiple ethical concerns and difficulties in finding participants and attaining consent, participants under the age of 18 were excluded, and other age constraints were not set up for this research.

2) Participants who have at least two years of experience regarding their crossdressing activities.

Within the literature, some scholars (Docter, 1988; Docter & Prince, 1997; Hogan-Finlay, 1995; Lentz, 2004) have pointed out that the experience, or history, of crossdressing might be a more relevant factor compared to age. For them, it is possible to differentiate between three stages which seem to have similar patterns of crossdressing for a large number of individuals. These are: an *early stage* (which could last from the first experience of crossdressing, in most cases before the age of ten, until the individual reaches adulthood), a *middle stage* (this is a time for learning, meeting other crossdressers, reading about crossdressing and experimenting with crossdressing) and a *late stage* (when crossdressing becomes more integrated, social and public). For practical and homogeneity concerns, I aimed to interview adult participants who were reasonably comfortable and settled with their crossdressing identity and/or behaviour and who, in turn, were willing and comfortable to talk about their experiences. This justified the minimum two years of experience requirement. At the time of the interviews, all eight participants were either in the middle or in the late stage, based on the information they disclosed during the recruitment process.

3) Only participants that were assigned male at birth.

There is no study on crossdressing, that I am aware of, which has included individuals who were assigned female at birth. Their experiences may arguably be different and, as such, it would be better to include them in a potential post-doctoral research. Moreover, IPA, as a methodology, requires a fairly homogeneous sample (Smith et al., 2009). This would advise against including participants who were assigned female at birth.

4) The participants are involved in crossdressing activities as part of their sexual, their gender expression or both, or they self-identify as crossdressers.

Here, the tension consists in delineating the target sample without being prescriptive and without imposing an already assumed theory, belief or label. For this reason, I chose to focus on behaviour, the self-reported reasons behind crossdressing and the self-reported identity. As the existing literature makes it clear, not everyone who engages in crossdressing activities self-identifies as a crossdresser (Hogan-Finlay, 1995; Kerchove, 2001; Lentz, 2004; Middlehurst, 2013; Sheldon, 2018).

5) The participants are involved in 'regular' crossdressing.

There was no clearly defined range for regularity. Instead, each participant decided for themselves if they considered their crossdressing habits as regular. In each case, this was explored within the interview, by asking the participant what does regular mean for them and the rationale behind the word.

6) The participants were not undergoing gender reassignment surgery or any hormone treatment. Here, the intention was to be flexible, without overstepping in other areas such as transsexualism and gender dysphoria.

7) Participants were asked to have a good command of English, given the nature and the depth of the interview required for an IPA analysis.

8) Impersonation and self-expression.

There are a multitude of reasons why people engage in crossdressing. A particular case in this regard is represented by the blurred line between impersonation and self-expression. For example, there are drag queens, actors and others who regularly perform crossdressing acts for

entertainment, financial and/or artistic and cultural motivations. Although these people did not represent the main target of the research, they would have been included if they satisfied the recruitment criteria:

- They identify as crossdressers. There were no specific guidelines regarding when or how their crossdressing activities might happen.
- They perform crossdressing acts to express their gender and/or sexuality.

Overall, the respondents were screened through self-identification with the participants' selection criteria that were featured on the recruitment form. The selection process was then followed up by in-depth screening. The in-depth screening was organised by phone, for the first three face-to-face interviews, and through video-conference, for the remaining five online interviews which took place during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. Following Finlay (2011), these two steps represented a way to engage the participants in the research and a way to start building a relationship with them in which the terms of the research contract were clear, understood and accepted by both parties. I thought it would be particularly important to have the screening for the online interviews done online and not by phone, in order to make sure that the participants were comfortable with the online environment and the video communication software before the interview.

3.3 Recruitment

Participants were recruited through advertising. I used both printed recruitment flyers and online recruitment ads. I shared them with different organisations, groups and charities which are of interest for the target participants group (*Elop-London*, *Islington Mind, Support U, The Beaumont Society, Transliving Magazine, https://crossdressing.co.uk, Milton Keynes Transvestite Group* and *The Northern Concord Online Group and Magazine*). This recruitment process was quite successful in attracting a large number of participants in a short period of time. In practice, there were two recruitment stages: one for the pilot study (before the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, in the summer of 2019) and one after the pilot study (during the SARS-CoV-2 lockdown, in the summer of 2020). The first pilot study attracted three participants from a local charity which runs a group for crossdressers. All three were interviewed face-to-face at this charity's premises. The second pilot study attracted eight inquiries from a national charity which runs a membership group for trans individuals throughout the UK. From these inquiries,

five participants were interviewed online, two participants were not interviewed due to practical, technical and/or logistical considerations, and one participant was not interviewed because I reached the required number of participants for this research.

3.4 Data collection

3.3.1 The rationale for using interviews.

As this research is an open-ended enquiry situated within the qualitative paradigm, an appropriate method of data collection is the interview. Usually, the interviewing process is directive, unstructured, non-standardised and open-ended (Taylor et al., 2016). Considering the needs of IPA, the interview should '*invite participants to offer a richly detailed, first-person account of their experiences*' (Smith et al., 2009, p.56). In other words, it should give the participants the opportunity to tell their stories, to speak frankly and reflectively, to develop their ideas and to voice their concerns. These goals were achieved by designing an in-depth semi-structured interview with the aim to produce a rich and detailed phenomenological description of crossdressing, while allowing the freedom to engage in a dialogue and the opportunity to dynamically adapt the process accordingly to each participant. Having a broad interview schedule with additional prompts was helpful in assessing possible risks and ethical issues associated with sensitive topics. On a more practical note, it helped me make sure that the questions were phrased correctly without being leading, closed or too complex. The interviews were conducted one-to-one, both face-to-face and online, and they each lasted between an hour and one hour and a half.

3.3.1 The interview schedule

Considering that the data collection method is a semi-structured in-depth interview, a list of open and non-directive questions was planned alongside additional prompts. These questions were offered as invitations to open up the discussion rather than as directions. The complete interview schedule is included in *Appendix VIII. Interview Schedule*. The interview questions were generated by using Smith et al.'s (2009) recommendation on how to construct a schedule for a semi-structured interview. I started from the research question – *How do you describe your lived experience of crossdressing?* – by generating a set of questions which, if reunited, would attempt to answer it. I first identified the broad area I would like to hear about

from my participants (their life as crossdressers), and then I thought about a range of topics that I would want to explore in more depth, such as their history with crossdressing, how crossdressing influences their lives (particularly, their social life, romantic life, sexual life, professional life and familial life), their identity, their sexuality and gender, and lastly, the meanings, definitions and language associated with their crossdressing. The rationale for the interview was to start with descriptive and narrative questions, to make people feel comfortable sharing their experiences, and then to gradually ask more reflective and analytical questions about their crossdressing.

3.3.2 Doing the interviews, face-to-face and online.

Having established that one-to-one interviewing is the research's method of data collection, it is now important to discuss the medium for the interviews and their implications for the current research. Indeed, conducting face-to-face interviews remains the most used way of conducting qualitative research. The first three interviews were conducted face-to-face, in the summer of 2019, at a local LGBTQIA+ charity. The interviewees were already familiar with the charity as they attended a monthly crossdressing group there. This made it easier for me to create a safe and holding environment for them to open up. This also helped alleviate my own fears that the participant will struggle to open up and to feel comfortable talking about their experiences in such a short timeframe. One of the participants did actually come fully dressed up, while the others wore conventional male clothing.

Another way of conducting interviews is to use internet protocol telephony and technologies, such as Zoom, Skype or Teams, which offer the ability to interview participants using voice calls and video communication via a real-time connection. At a time of a global pandemic, online video conference was selected as it comes closest to the face-to-face format as possible. There were some changes between face-to-face and online interviews, in terms of process and practicalities. To give an example, the consent forms were either scanned or emailed by the participants before the interview took place.

When doing online interviews, specific points were taken into consideration, particularly regarding interview practicalities, rapport building, role performance and non-verbal cues. In terms of *interview practicalities*, a significant advantage of doing the interviews online is that it allows the researcher to transcend geographical boundaries (Rowley, 2012).

Not being fixed to a geographical location allowed me to interview participants from all over the UK. Overall, this made things quite easy for my research in terms of attracting the required number of participants in a very short time. It further allowed me to respect social distancing and reduce any health risks associated with SARS-CoV-2.

However, nullifying geographical distances through online interviewing also meant that most participants had to conduct their interview from home. This raised particular issues for my research. Online interviewing could, indeed, be a limitation for participants who do not have a private space at home where they feel comfortable to speak freely or for participants who are not out as crossdressers to their families. This was the case with some of my participants for whom we had to find a time and a day when they were alone at home. Others considered doing the interview at their friends' or parents' homes, in places where they would have a safe space. From my part, just being flexible with the interview time and open to rescheduling solved this issue, and no participant was excluded because of this aspect. Still, being at home in a familiar environment of their choosing could have some positive implications as well. Hanna (2012) and Seitz (2016) argue that this aspect may make participants more inclined to open up and, thus, more comfortable with the online interview process. Following on this point, Iacono et al. (2016) point out that when participants are finding themselves at home, or in their chosen environment, they have access to different objects that could emerge as relevant during the interview. This was actually the case in one of the interviews, as one participant showed me her collection of heeled shoes in order to explain how her sexual desires change when wearing each one of the pairs.

Other limitations highlighted within the literature include not having access to a good internet speed connection, not having the knowledge or the ability to use computers and not having the necessary equipment available with a webcam and a microphone (Janghorban et al., 2014). To mitigate these issues, I thought it would be important to highlight these aspects to my participants from the beginning. For this reason, two potential participants could not do the interview. One of them was against the idea of doing an interview online, while the other did not have the necessary equipment to do it.

Another limitation is that some potential technical changes – for example, sound quality, webcam issues, audio latency, loss of data, etc. – could happen at any time during the interview

process. Deakin & Wakefield (2014) describe these challenges as 'dropouts' – moments where the conversation stops because the video freezes or one of the two parties involved in the interview is unable to hear. On this note, Seitz (2016) goes as far as saying that these technical difficulties may create a loss of intimacy, especially when the internet connection breaks in the middle of an emotional conversation. Having a pre-screening interview before each of my online interviews allowed me and the participant to have a glimpse at how the actual interview environment would be like. Most of my participants had good internet connection with good video and sound quality, and no major issue was encountered. If there was any issue, these were resolved during the pre-interview (for example, some participants decided to change rooms to have a better internet connection). Regarding Seitz's (2016) remark on the potential loss of rapport and intimacy, in the context of my interviews, there was no issue with it. Similar to what Iacono et al. (2016) describe, even on the occasions where technical glitches and interruptions happened, there was no problem resuming the conversation at all.

What is important for an online interview of this type is an easy to use, accessible, secure and private videotelephony software. In this sense, I chose to use Zoom as it allowed me to record video and audio simultaneously. Also, it is quite easy to use. You send the person you want to interview a link, and they can either download the software or just use it from their browser. Zoom also has some privacy advantages on top of other software, which will be further discussed when reflecting on ethical considerations (*3.5 Ethical Considerations*). It helped that most of my participants were already familiar with the software and knew how to use it. Perhaps unique to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, all participants were already using videotelephony software for work purposes or to keep in touch with friends and families. This mitigated against the possibility that participants may feel embarrassed or uncomfortable being interviewed online and filmed (Hay-Gibson, 2009).

Another point that was taken into consideration is the *rapport building*, or what enables the participant to feel comfortable in opening up during the interview (King & Horrocks, 2010). This is particularly significant as the quality and depth of the qualitative interview depend on the relationship and rapport between the interviewer and interviewee (Salmons, 2015). This, in turn, depends on a multitude of factors which vary significantly between face-to-face situations and online environments. These factors may include being able to offer the interviewee a glass of water/tea, the presence of non-verbal cues, having a prior relationship with the researcher,

and the ability to look someone in the eyes during the interview (Chiumenco et al., 2018; Iacono et al., 2016). Some scholars argue that it is difficult to build rapport online (Cater, 2011), while others report the opposite (Deakin & Wakefield, 2013; Iacono et al., 2016). In anticipating this possibility, I insisted on having a pre-screening interview meeting online, using the same conditions as the interview itself, to get to know the participants, to explain my approach and to talk through the practicalities of the online environment. Reflecting back, having a pre-interview meeting online proved to be much more successful in building rapport rather than using the phone for my face-to-face interviews. I do think that seeing the researcher rather than just talking with them before the actual interview made a difference. Most participants seemed much more relaxed and open during the interview compared to the pre-interview. Yet, what further contributed to building rapport was the several e-mail exchanges before the actual interview, and some participants used this opportunity to ask questions about the research, to explain where they were on the gender spectrum, and why they were interested in participating.

Seitz (2016) describes an anticipated difficulty of using online interviews for personal topics, while Carr (2001) finds it equally just as effective. While this has been taken into consideration, my expectation was that the participants would be more open and would find it easier to talk about personal and intimate subjects online rather than in person. On a similar note, Iacono et al. (2016) describe that some of their participants mentioned that they were feeling more 'loose-tongued' online rather than face-to-face. This is also reported by Ellison et al. (2006) and Petralia (2011). Yet, while this may increase authenticity and the presentation of the self, it also raises potential ethical issues that will be explored in section *3.5. Ethical Considerations*. Overall, I could not find any noticeable difference between face-to-face and online interviews in terms of rapport and how open and relaxed the participants appeared to be. Doing the interviews online felt much more natural and easier than expected. Interestingly, all five online participants appeared fully dressed up in their female persona, and some of them made quite an effort to facilitate this.

Now, it is worth discussing the issue of body language and non-verbal cues, which are significant for building rapport and for the interview as a whole. Obviously, in an online environment, you only get a '*head and shoulders presentation*,' while the body's postural, gestural, emotional and expressive movements may be lost (Bayles, 2012, p.578). My experience was that online interviews can be as equally intense and as full of meaning as those

that are face-to-face. In an online environment, all the focus is on the face, and while you may not see the bigger picture of their body, you get a much closer perspective of their face and eyes. But just like in the usual face-to-face setting, participants will use their hands to express themselves, and the researcher will be able to notice changes in posture.

As a short conclusion, my attitude towards the participants was supportive, curious and open. I felt I was there to listen to them and assist them in expressing and making sense of their experiences. On reflection, I realise that I did not highlight the contradictions in what the participants were saying, I just listened to them very carefully. There were a couple of times when I felt it was quite difficult for the participants to talk about some topics, and I stopped myself from asking further questions on that subject. I did not comment on it. Also, I did not tell the participants that some of their responses actually had not answered my questions specifically, or maybe that they seemed to have avoided answering them. It felt like a duty of care to approach things in this manner and to be sensitive. But what I really loved about these interviews was the fact that the majority of the participants came fully dressed up and, thus, I had the chance to experience them like that. In my first interview, I was surprised at first, not knowing how to react and what to do with it. Indeed, it felt that my reaction was important and significant for the interview. I decided not to say anything immediately but to bring it up during the interview.

3.4 Data analysis

The data consists of semi-structured, in-depth interview transcripts generated by the participants. The depth and complexity of the analysis move gradually through different layers of phenomenological description and interpretation, in order to gain a dense and rich account from each participant. Applying Smith et al.'s method (2009), the data analysis process was as follows: I started the analysis by transcribing the interview, followed by reading and re-reading the transcript to ensure full immersion into the original data. Then, I made notes on the margins of the transcript, recording thoughts and associations regarding the content. Based on these notes and the actual content, my focus changed from the actual chunks of the transcript to developing emerging themes. Here, the themes had a descriptive character and they were followed by direct quotations which aimed to capture their essence. Following up, these themes were integrated while I searched for connections between them. After this process was

complete, I moved to the next interview and started afresh. I bracketed previous themes while I went through all the previous stages for each individual transcript one by one. After this part of the analysis was complete, I began to search for a pattern across all cases, noting down all idiosyncratic instances. By this stage, I was able to obtain a summary table of themes with quotations to describe them. When this was completed, I was finally able to take the interpretation to deeper levels by using metaphors and by referencing external theories and concepts to create new lenses through which to filter the analysis. There were no significant differences between the transcripts gathered from face-to-face interviews and from the online interviews. Overall, both types were similar in depth, richness, openness and engagement.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

This research involves human participants and personal data, and, as such, it complies with legal and ethical requirements such as the *Data Protection Act* (2018) and other guidelines established by different regulatory bodies. The research is further informed by the codes of research ethics established by *Middlesex University* and the *New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling* (NSPC), alongside specific considerations for conducting research with human participants established by the *British Psychological Society* (2021), *British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy* (2004) and *UK Council for Psychotherapy* (2009). I strongly subscribed to these values, by ensuring that the well-being, safety and interests of all participants were protected and that no harm was incurred during all the stages of the research. The following ethical considerations were equally applied to face-to-face and online interviews:

Informed consent

The aim of informed consent is to ensure that '*every participant from whom data will be gathered, for the purpose of the research, consents freely to the research process on the basis of adequate information*' (The British Psychological Society, 2021, p.12). Informed consent raises issues regarding how much information is to be given to the participants and when, while still ensuring they are fully informed and deception has been avoided, unless there is a strong rationale for it (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008; Willig, 2013). In practice, this was implemented through the recruitment ad/flyer and the briefing and debriefing procedures that

followed. Therefore, before any recordings took place, the participants were informed regarding:

- the aim and purpose of the research,
- the type of data to be collected and the method of data collection,
- confidentiality and anonymity procedures, including the limits of confidentiality,
- the right to withdraw at any stage of the research without any adverse consequences,
- the right to have any supplied data destroyed on request (up to a specified date),
- the right to refuse any information disclosure requested by the researcher,
- time commitment and what it is expected from them,
- details of any risks associated with their participation,
- how the results of the research can be made available to them.

All of the above follow the guidelines on valid consent according to *The British Psychological Society* (2021). Some of this information was included in the recruitment ad/flyer and all of it formed part of the information sheet. Both the consent form and the information sheet were sent to the participants well in advance and further discussed with them during the briefing stage. At this stage, the participants had the opportunity to ask questions, and sufficient time was given to them to consider the information before a written agreement was signed both by the researcher and the participant. The agreement covered consent for the interviewee to participate in the study and to allow the recorded information to be used in the thesis. For the online interviews, the consent forms were either scanned and sent online or they were posted. On top of what was already included in the recruitment flyer and the participants information sheet, I informed the participants about the software that will be used and how to use it (*see Appendix IV*).

Confidentiality and privacy

In accordance with the requirement of the available legislation, all the information obtained from and about a participant is considered confidential unless otherwise agreed in advance (The British Psychological Society, 2021). As such, the primary goal was to make sure that the confidentiality and anonymity for every participant were maintained, by implementing appropriate decisions concerning '*what information should be available and to whom'* (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008, p. 266). To protect against non-authorised access, the audio

recordings, the transcripts and the personal data of the participants are kept in digital format on encrypted drives. A significant difference is that Zoom records both video and audio. The participants in this study were informed that the video recording will be safely deleted immediately after the interview will be finished, and that only the audio recording will be kept. Zoom has a visual signal to let participants know that they are being recorded. However, I verbally informed them when the recording started and when it stopped. Furthermore, all participants were informed regarding the limits of confidentiality. As the legislation makes it clear, confidentiality might be broken in exceptional circumstances to protect vulnerable adults and children from harm or in other circumstances, such as terrorism and money laundering. In these cases, the researcher is required by law to pass on relevant information to third parties.

When it comes to privacy, this refers to the rights of the participants '*to decide how information about them is to be communicated to others*' (Shaughnessy et al., 2011, p.70). No information was published and/or shared with third parties, and all identifying information was removed and disguised within the analysis so as to ensure the participants' anonymity. All the details of significant others, which were mentioned during the interviews, were changed or removed altogether. However, I reminded participants that Zoom, as well as any other internet provider, has its own privacy and confidentiality policy regarding the data it collects from its users when using its services. Although the content of an interview itself is encrypted, Zoom stores some basic information about the participants and how they are using the service. In this sense, a specific Zoom account was created for the purpose of conducting the interviews, account which was subsequently deleted. For privacy and confidentiality reasons, the interview recordings are stored only locally rather than using Zoom Cloud's servers.

Duty of care and safety

'Risk' is defined by BPS *'as the potential physical or psychological harm, discomfort or stress to human participants that a research project may generate'* (The British Psychological Society, 2010, p. 10). According to the same code, this research would normally be considered as involving more than minimal risk, mainly because it revolves around sensitive topics such as sexual behaviour and gender identity.

There are several potential risks in this sense: the participants may feel emotionally overwhelmed and/or vulnerable after talking about their intimate experiences and thoughts,

unsealing emotions may resurface during the interview, and changes in their self-understanding may happen because of them. The participants were informed that they had the right to stop the interview at any point. All participants were offered a debriefing sheet (*see Appendix V.*), which included a list of psychotherapy organisations, low-cost practices and post-research contact information. Participants can use the contact information if they have any queries regarding their participation or if they want to be removed from the research (subject to a given date specified in the briefing information, usually a month after the date of the interview). The option to be removed from the research helps to minimise the risk of participants disclosing information that they may later regret (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008).

3.6 Reflexivity

There are multiple ways of understanding reflexivity within social sciences and even more ways to practically implement it within the research process itself. Reflexivity is particularly important for this thesis, as the research revolves around sensitive and intimate topics such as gender, sexuality and identity. Having this in mind, and also to address this issue in a way that is '*clear, honest and informative'* (Willig, 2013, p.96), reflexivity is here applied as a multi-layered concept, based on Wilkinson's (1988) three interrelated types of reflexivity: *personal*, *functional* and *disciplinary reflexivity*.

Personal reflexivity refers to the researcher's own identity. This includes my own LGBTQIA+ identity along with my own understanding of gender, identity and sexuality. Wilkinson notes that a research can often be an '*expression of personal interests and values'* (1988, p.494), which is exactly the case with the current research. The inspiration for this research has been my own journey around sexuality and gender, in which I have engaged and disengaged with a series of identities, labels, discourses, tensions and challenges.

Functional reflexivity points directly to the role of the researcher and the decisions one makes regarding it. The role the researcher takes relies heavily on the person that the researcher is. I assume that being part of the LGBTQIA+ community, white and male-born, and speaking English as a second language had an impact within the interview context in a similar fashion as the decision to use semi-structured in-depth interview and not a focus group. Another way to see this type of reflexivity is as an examination '*of the nature and function of the research enterprise'* (Wilkinson, 1988, p.495). By choosing IPA as a methodology, I placed the inquiry

within the social-constructionist paradigm, assuming that knowledge may be co-created and grounded within a particular social/cultural/historical context. Moreover, there are further ramifications from the phenomenological and interpretative traditions which add particular stances on reflexivity and the process of interpretation and 'bracketing.' Reflexivity in this research is an integral part of it, being recognised as a continuous process throughout the different stages of the research. For example, IPA encourages researchers to use their selves as a valuable resource, while reflexivity is used as a tool to move dialectically between utilising and bracketing pre-understandings within the research process (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2007). The way to approach this was to keep a reflexive journal to trace my own journey throughout this research. Where appropriate, I use first-person comments, ideas and paragraphs that inform the reader about the research process.

The last type of reflexivity discussed by Wilkinson (1988) is *disciplinary reflexivity,* which aims to put a critical stance towards the field of the research and its methods, theories, concepts and institutions. This is perhaps the broadest form of reflexivity, which can go even further than the previous ones. As mentioned before, I am critical of some of the ways diverse gender and sexual identities have been researched and conceptualised and the content and nature of some of the academic discourses surrounding them. As such, I tried to offer, particularly within the literature review, a more extensive history of the phenomenon which discusses the way crossdressing was seen in the socio-cultural context of those times. I also tried to include sources from multiple areas of thinking to give a much broader perspective on what crossdressing has meant for society, rather than just staying in the confines of clinical, psychoanalytical and psychiatric literature.

3.7 Adaptation after the pilot study

The pilot study was completed in the autumn of 2020. It is important to highlight again that this interview was done face-to-face. After completing the pilot study, I was pleased with most of the aspects concerning the way in which it was planned and executed.

A first change that was implemented was the way I later managed the use of pronouns for the participants. During the pilot study, the participant was only asked for a pseudonym but not about their gender pronouns. Therefore, I had to choose a gender pronoun based on what I believed my participant would like. I found this quite uncomfortable, and I hope the participant

will not be offended by my choice. Obviously, this was changed, and all the other participants were asked what gender pronoun they would like me to use in the research.

A second significant change was moving from doing face-to-face interviews to an online environment. In 2020, the UK was in lockdown due to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic and conducting face-to-face interviews was not possible anymore. As such, the rest of the interviews were conducted online. In this sense, the *Recruitment Ad*, the *Consent Form*, and the *Information Sheet* were updated accordingly. I also added a further section about the rationale of doing online interviews and my experience of it. Additionally, the ethical part of the thesis was updated to reflect the challenges that online interviews may bring.

Lastly, compared to the pilot study, I tried to ask the participants more clarifying questions during the interview. Also, I started to rely less on the interview schedule and to try to be more flexible and creative.

CHAPTER IV. ANALYSIS

This chapter aims to present how the analysis of the interviews has been performed and its results. For this analysis, I narrowed down the amount of data from the transcripts with the purpose of creating units and themes. As illustrated in *Table 3. Super-ordinate Themes*, the interviews have been analysed within 4 super-ordinate and 12 subordinate themes. The content of the themes themselves, which aim to express and interpret the experience of crossdressing, is further described in sections *4.4-4.7*. Before arriving there, the demographic aspects of the participants are presented.

4.1 Demographic aspects

Some demographic details were obtained from the participants before the interviews took place, using a demographic questionnaire which can be seen attached in *Appendix VII. Demographic Questionnaire*. The following table includes the pseudonyms the participants have chosen for themselves, as well as their self-reported gender, sexuality, ethnicity and relationship status.

Table 2. Participants demographic information

Nr	Participant	Age	Gender	Sexuality	Ethnicity	Relationship
1	Alex	45-60	Male	Heterosexual	White British	Single
2	Anna	30-45	Male	Bisexual	White Non-British	Single
3	Mary	Over 60	'Confused'	Gay	White British	Single
4	Charley	30-45	Non-binary	Heterosexual	White British	Married
5	Gabriella	30-45	Gender Fluid	Heterosexual	White	Single
6	Grace	Over 60	Trans	Heterosexual	White English	Married
7	Lucy	45-60	Non-binary	Bisexual	White British	Married
8	Sam	30-45	Male	Heterosexual	White English	Married

As we can see, there seems to be quite a homogeneous sample in terms of ethnicity, all participants being white and, with one exception, white Non-British. There is an even number of participants who are married and who are single (50% with 50%), and there is some diversity in terms of sexuality and age. In line with the literature review, people who engage in crossdressing, in particular, and trans people, in general, can have any sexuality, and this is clearly visible in the participant sample as well. Not surprisingly, however, the biggest diversity is connected with their self-reported gender identity: 3 participants self-identified as male, two as non-binary, one as trans, one as gender fluid and one as 'confused.' In terms of age, half of the participants were in the 30-45 age group, while the rest were split in 45-60 and over 60.

4.2 Themes

Following the research design outlined in Chapter III, all 8 interviews were transcribed by myself, by listening carefully and noting down all my reactions and thoughts in my research diary. After creating a digital copy of the transcripts, I used a MS Word table to split them into paragraphs and sentences (*see Appendix IX. Analysed Interview* for a specific example of this). Each fragment was first re-read in the context of the whole of the interview and, following Smith et al. (2009), each was later examined by thinking about three different types of comments: descriptive, linguistic and conceptual. The descriptive comments aim to capture and to describe the experience itself. The linguistic comments concern the language use and focus on the way content and meanings are presented. The conceptual comments, however, are much more abstract and interpretative. After this stage was completed, a theme was written down next to each line of the interview. The theme aims to capture, describe or conceptualise what each line contains in one word. To be more specific, I used descriptive themes and interpretative themes that resonated with the concepts described in the Literature Review. Afterwards, I grouped all these themes together, and then I tried to form groups of themes based on similarities and connection. I started with *crossdressing*, from which I built up chains of connected themes.

The majority of the participants have described crossdressing as a way to express their identities and their genders and/or sexualities. This connection is mostly mediated through *time*, and as such, the first super-ordinate theme, called *From expression to identity through time*, includes aspects about crossdressing, gender, sexuality and time. From this, I created

another chain starting from identity, which crystallised around crossdressing through acceptance and lack of acceptance. Thus, acceptance was developed as a second super-ordinate theme and includes aspects about acceptance and aspects about being out and coming out, all mediated by the theme of visibility. Subsequently, the lack of acceptance was developed as a third super-ordinary theme, which reunites the participants' difficulties (e.g., lack of acceptance, stigma, abuse, etc.) and their difficult emotions (e.g., shame, guilt, anger, etc.). The fourth remaining theme fits well within an existential framework by describing various aspects of the participants' being-in-the-world with crossdressing. This theme includes aspects and descriptions about their being and their being with others. The theme's main mediator here is freedom.

Table 3. Super-ordinate Themes

Super-ordinate Theme	Theme
1) From expression to identity through time	Crossdressing as expression, meaning and identity Gender as an open journey New and old ways of being sexual Time brings it all together
2) Milestones in acceptance and ownership	The road from acceptance to ownership Queer milestones: Coming out and Being out Levels of openness, acceptance and visibility
3) Tension, anxiety and struggle	When expression is not an option Experiences of shame, loss, guilt and frustration
4) Aspects of being-in-the-world	A story of being and ways of being Their social world: being with others Freedom puts it all into perspective

4.3 Super-ordinate Theme I: From expression to identity through time

Theme I: Crossdressing as expression, meaning and identity.

Defining crossdressing

For the majority of participants, the definition of crossdressing revolves around a binary system of gender: male and female. This binary system is mostly reflected and reinforced linguistically by putting the two in opposition. As exceptions, Mary directly avoids the binarity by saying '*other than male*' or '*the other gender*,' Gabriella by using '*a different gender*,' and Charlie by adding to the idea of '*opposite sex*' the concept of '*mixed androgynous*.' Within this system, crossdressing is overall defined in the simplest way as having to do with the opposite gender/sex which is different from the gender/sex the participants were assigned at birth. In their attempt to define crossdressing, the participants have either focused on the observable behaviour of crossdressing or on describing what is going on for them internally while doing it.

The observable part is described by Alex as '*wearing the clothes*' or '*having the appearance or trying to create the appearance of someone of the opposite gender*,' and by Sam as '*the act of presenting as the opposite gender*.' The latter further highlights the behavioural aspect of crossdressing, alongside imitation and repeated practice. For Sam, then, as for Anna as well, crossdressing is not only about dressing up but also about '*how you behave and what are you doing while you are dressed up*,' particularly '*the way you move, the way you sit*.' This further involves imitation: '*take notice from women around*' and exercise: '*practice walking in heels or... practice sitting in a skirt*.'

The internal part, in turn, is described by Grace as '*expressing the female side*' and as taking '*comfort from wearing the clothing of the opposite sex*.' Gabriella talks about '*an inner desire to wear clothes of the opposite birth gender*,' while Sam goes on to articulate the crossdresser as '*someone who wants to look feminine*.' In a different way, Mary says that she derives '*pleasure or some other added experience... heightened experience from doing it*.' Charlie, on the other hand, does not choose an observable versus internal definition framework to define his crossdressing, but a physical versus mental one. For him, the physical aspect is about '*the fetish side*,' '*masturbation*' and '*the act of wearing female clothing*,' while the

mental aspect is about his identity as a crossdresser in itself. In his words, '*it is not just crossdressing as a fetish fantasy, it is actually... part... of my identity*.'

As we can see, all these aspects are set at an individual level; yet, crossdressing seems to have an intrinsic social dimension as well. The participants talk at length not just about doing things and/or feeling things but also about being seen, recognised, treated and/or referred to as a woman by others, in various degrees and in different circumstances. For some participants, it is important to pass as a woman, while others are happy just to be referred to as one. For Lucy, in particular, this distinction is quite significant: '*When I actually present as female would be for me the real moment when I am crossdressing. I've been crossdressing for years, but that would be the moment for me, when I am presenting as female and wanting to be treated as female.*' In other words, crossdressing is the act of socially taking the identity of a woman and being recognised as such. However, this would not go as far as fully identifying as a woman, at least not at an internal level. As Mary puts it: '*crossdressing is something where you still… underneath it all… you're still that person*' – that is to say, a man.

To continue, many participants tried to define their crossdressing in rapport to being trans or transgender. For Alex, the concept of 'trans' includes a large pool of people '*from anyone who just feels there's something different to someone who's completely had sex change and everything in-between*.' Yet, he finds this definition too broad and vague for him: '*I just have a preference for transvestite... I think it's quite clear what that is... whereas transgender is so broad*.' For Anna, transgender is both a specific identity – i.e., '*being in the wrong gender and going through transition*' – and a spectrum for those who are '*not fitting completely in the gender that was assigned at birth*.' Similarly for Grace and Mary, being transgender is being part of a spectrum that can change and evolve. As Mary puts it, '*trans is a sort of generic word which covers the whole spectrum of people*.' Lastly, Gabriella defines trans in a more restricted sense of '*permanent life changes*,' such as taking hormones and having surgery.

Depending on their definition of trans, some would identify as trans while others would not. It seems that the difference between being a crossdresser and being trans is set up by temporality which is, in turn, expressed by frequency. Simply put, crossdressing is temporary and reversible while transgenderism is permanent and irreversible. For Lucy and Grace, crossdressing is usually '*part-time and made of part-timers*,' of people who '*occasionally*' do

it. For Anna, crossdressing is '*a bit more of a hobby*,' something that is '*part of the day or part of the week*.' A notable exception here is Mary for whom crossdressing is a continuous ongoing activity of looking feminine, which prompts her to say that, '*I'm basically cross-dressed all the time*.' For both Anna and Gabriella, undergoing a gender transition or having a permanent life change would make you transgender.

Meaning, expression and identity

When it comes to the question of meaning, the most prevalent view among the participants is that crossdressing is an integral part of their being and an expression of who they are. Charlie, for example, says that: '*it's just me... that's me!*,' and adds that: '*it is part of my identity*.' For others, like Anna, crossdressing '*is just the way... the way I am*,' for Grace it is '*an undeniable part of my personality*,' while for Sam it is simply '*an extension of who I am*.'

Crossdressing is also, as Lucy puts it, *'a means of expression*' and, in Anna's words, '*a way for people like me to express a part of themselves*.' Sam would go further and call crossdressing '*an act that tells you about me as a person*.' This sense of identity is often, if not always, permeated by values. For Sam, then, being a crossdresser is associated with his best self: '*I feel like that's the best version of myself.'* Similarly for Lucy, '*this is the best of me... you've got the best of me!* Now, to go to other participants in turn, for Grace crossdressing is associated with inner peace ('*the most important thing for me is a feeling of inner peace*'), for Alex with authenticity ('*I think people find me more genuine, more authentic*'), and openness ('*it means for me being open and honest about who I am*'), for Mary with happiness ('*I just feel happier, I feel more... I feel more authentic like this*'), and for Lucy with positivity ('*there's nothing... I got nothing negative to say about crossdressing*').

Finally, crossdressing has further expanded the participants' worldviews and has offered them a world they can elope to. Alex thinks that crossdressing has revealed '*more of me than I would otherwise have found*.' For Grace, in turn, crossdressing has opened a door to an '*alternative kind of persona*.' Crossdressing has also opened a door to things Anna was '*not able to do as a guy*,' such as living and exploring her existing '*feminine part*.' For Gabriella, this means the opportunity '*to explore the world of female clothing, and shoes, and accessories*.' On a different note, Lucy says that crossdressing offers her a safe space where she cannot be harmed: '*this is my safe space, this is my island, you can't hurt me here*,' while

Gabriella tells us that crossdressing offers her the opportunity to escape from her old self into her own '*little*' universe: '*I was all dressed up to leave with... with the umbrella, and it's like... you just feel coating closed in your own little world*.'

Theme II: Gender as an open journey

Their experience of gender

All participants, in their different ways, make references to a binary system of gender. According to Alex, it is society that dictates gender norms and regulates gender identity and behaviour, particularly how a person of a specific gender should look like and dress: '*yes, society dictates that men should wear trousers and women can wear trousers, but also a skirt or a dress*.' On this note, Sam questions '*how many free choices do we actually make?*' In our society, Mary adds, '*female is seen as supporting, nurturing, caring... male is seen as assertive, commanding, dominant, competitive, fighting, winning*.' A couple of participants describe very early memories of them being acutely aware of these gender norms. Lucy remembers being around 6 and '*putting on the cowboy costume, so that I could wear this woman's scarf*,' while Sam remembers being in primary school, seeing his male classmates wearing heels as a joke, and feeling that '*it wouldn't be acceptable for me to do that*.' One way through which gender norms seem to function is by assigning a gender to different things and objects of consumption which are then called, recognised and classified. This makes Alex to assert that without the process of gendering clothing, crossdressing would not exist: '*you wouldn't even have to call it crossdressing, it's just a piece of clothing*.' Lucy remarks that gender norms regarding clothing do change, but not in an equal manner; that is, women seem to appropriate more male clothing than vice-versa. Because of this, she adds, '*women are crossdressing on a regular basis*.'

Indeed, there are many expectations and social pressures to respect the norms that are associated with the two binary genders and the boundaries between them: '*it's society pressures*,' Grace says. For Gabriella, respecting the gender norms feels like belonging and doing the right thing. Not respecting them, however, feels like she is '*being too abrasive against society*.' For her, being a female largely means that '*you've got to be polite and smiley*.' Having confidence also helps. As she adds, '*social confidence is an important part of being female*.' These gender expectations may be for Grace '*kind of old-fashioned stereotypes*' that

one internalises even without fully realising it; one such stereotype is: '*the man being the provider, the woman being the little housewife that stays at home*.'

Many participants describe how public spaces are tightly controlled and how those who do not adhere to gender norms are sanctioned with staring at, shaming, humiliation and abuse. Yet, there are a couple of ways for them to disregard these norms. For Charlie and Alex, one such way is the use of humour: you can say and do things as a joke. Another way would be to attend places where gender norms are more relaxed, such as the art world for Lucy and Grace, or suspended altogether, such as The Rocky Horror Night for Charlie, where one could dress as a woman freely without any questions asked. Grace recalls how, in her school days, theatre was a place where '*it was always the same group of lads that seemed to play the female parts and seem to enjoy that*.' One can also subvert the social rules altogether by passing as a woman or by hiding '*in plain sight*' under the cover of another identity. Lucy says that by listening to '*the right type of music*' in her youth, it allowed her to have long hair and to dress more androgynously. Put simply, '*if they can label you, they leave you alone*,' highlighting that the unknown, in any form it comes, is quite frightening for others. Lastly, one can adopt a specific, recognised identity that accounts for breaking the social gender norms. Grace describes this as follows: '*I remember going into the wig shop to buy a wig and thinking, 'Oh no, I hope I don't feel embarrassed about this!' whereas now I feel quite comfortable going in and saying 'well, I'm transgender, you know, can I try a wig?*.'

Depictions of gender identity

The participants' self-reported gender identities include male, non-binary, genderfluid, 'confused' and trans. In the next paragraphs, more context is given to the way they describe their gender identity.

Alex self-identifies as male. Yet, for him, gender labels and gender pronouns are not very important, adding in the interview that he first thinks of himself as a human being '*whether I am male or female, it doesn't matter*.' A few years ago, he changed his legal name to an androgynous one in order to be able to use it both with a male and a female identity.

Charlie self-identifies as non-binary gender fluid. He describes it as '*some days I feel more masculine, some days I feel more feminine*.' He finds himself '*sort of on a sliding scale*,'

between *'full-on feminine one side, full-on masculine the other*,' or between '*girly girl*' and '*manly man*.' He further positions his gender as '*sort of drifting around somewhere in between*.' Another way for him to describe this middle ground is through androgyny, which he defines as the act of '*presenting myself a little bit more of a mix and match*.'

Gabriella describes herself as genderfluid with a female mode and a male mode in '*dual modality*.' Still, she always experiences these modes as separate: '*I can't be both people at the same time*.'

Grace puts herself as trans. But while '*the real me is female, I suppose*,' she still retains her masculine identity '*out of necessity*.' At one point in the interview, she expresses her desire '*to live full-time as Grace*' if she could.

Mary describes herself as *'gender confused.'* Throughout the interview, she says that she sees herself as *'feminine'* and as a *'woman with a penis.*' In other words, her gender is '*female*' while her sex is male. She expresses her desire to be a woman '*as much as possible*.' Her male identity, on the other hand, is there only for necessity.

Lucy self-identifies as non-binary and androgynous. For her, being androgynous is like '*you don't quite know where you fit*,' '*in-between*,' and '*somewhere in the middle*.' She expresses her desire to be '*androgynous all the time*' and to be '*as feminine as I could be all the time*.'

Sam self-identifies as male. He first describes it as '*rather than being on the beginning of the female scale, I am right at the end of the mouse there, so I still identify as a man*.' In other parts of the interview, however, he describes himself as having an '*in-between gender*,' like non-binary. He further describes this in-between gender as a '*grey area*' and a '*middle ground*.'

Finally, Anna also self-identifies as male. Yet, there are points in the interview where she says that she feels 'confused' about her gender identity and that she is still questioning who she is.

The male and the female

As we can see, some of the participants consider themselves to be male. Three of them (Alex, Sam and Anna) explicitly wrote down *male* as their gender identity, while two of them describe a sense that underneath their female presentation something was, and remains, '*male*.' Alex says that '*I am a bloke at the end of the day*,' while Mary says that '*I know that underneath all this I'm still… there's still a man*.' For these participants, the fact that they were assigned male at birth, that they have primary (genitals) and secondary sex characteristics (muscles, hair, etc.) and that they have a legal male identity (birth certificate, passport, etc) have all proven significant when determining, or referring to, their gender identity as male. Or, in Mary's case, as having a '*male reminder*.' For Alex, having a male set of genitals is important: '*I'm a man... I've got a penis… I'm biologically male*.' Mary refers to her genitals, to the male identity in the wallet and to her having XY chromosomes which make her body '*biologically male*.' Sam goes even further when he says that living 35 years of his life as a man with a male body is important in determining his gender.

There have been significant difficulties for the participants in considering themselves female as well. While all participants talk about being feminine and expressing their femininity, none of them actually identify as female or call themselves a woman. And still, in whichever way they self-identify, being treated, interpellated and referred to as a woman is very important for all of them. On this note, Sam says that '*I would not identify as female... but I want everyone else to treat me as female*.' For Alex, the limit is represented by who gets to use the female toilets: '*for me going into female toilets, I feel like a fraud because I'm not a female*.' Other participants navigate this linguistically. Lucy, for example, says that: '*I am almost a woman, I feel very womanly*,' and stresses that: '*I'm not really a woman, but I'd say I'm womanly*.'

One important aspect here may be the way the participants describe and experience their masculinity and femininity. All participants report feeling better, happier and more comfortable with themselves when expressing their femininity and/or presenting as female. There is a sense of them feeling more confident, and with it, more spontaneous, more open to interact with others and express their emotions, more visible, more extroverted and more revealing. In their feminine self, some would feel more attractive, prettier and sexier, while others would feel

more creative, more open to experiment, more artistic and more fun. There is also a sense of them being more compassionate, kinder, better listeners and perhaps better persons overall.

On a different note, being in the world as a man was defined by some participants by their responsibilities towards their family and in the workplace, with a particular focus on it being a functional and practical social role. Contrary to their female selves, their male identities are ones that are recognisable to all. For Grace, being a man comes with '*being the provider*' and with being '*a tough dad*' to her children. Sam describes himself as '*the average Joe*' who earns an income, owns a house and has a family. Some participants would go and offer quite vivid descriptions of their male identities. For example, Charlie says that he is '*a grumpy miserable dad most the times*' with '*a bad back*,' Grace says that she is a '*scruffy old hippie,'* '*like Homer Simpson*,' while Gabriella says that she is '*just the old fashioned me*,' which is '*generally a bit of a mouse*.'

There were noticeable gender differences in terms of their interest in clothing and expressing themselves in this manner as well. For Alex, the male clothing is on the lines of '*more traditional bloke stuff*,' for Anna, it is '*always the same boring stuff*,' for Gabriella it is '*the classical male me*,' while for Charlie it is '*just jeans and a t-shirt*.' Some participants would find it hard to feel sexy or attractive as a man, while others would find it hard to feel outgoing and socially confident. Sam, for example, says that '*I don't think I am an attractive man*,' while Gabriella says '*I just... get on with it... I just don't... talk to anybody*.'

Questioning their gender identity

All participants have presented their gender identity as a journey and as an evolution. Most of them have even questioned how far to take their crossdressing and where it may fit on the trans spectrum. Throughout the interviews, there were questions about whether they should consider transitioning, living full-time as a woman, identifying as a woman, having gender reassignment surgery or more permanent changes to their bodies such as hormone replacement therapy (HRT).

Alex describes a period in the past of complete openness and exploration, trying to figure out who he is and what he prefers. During this time, he tried to be '*open-minded*' as he '*kept surprising*' himself with crossdressing. He thus found himself going to new areas of

gender and sexuality which had been unthinkable for him before: '*I thought, be open-minded you might end up a woman, you might end up having surgery, you might end up wanting to have sex with men only. Who knows?*'

This period of openness and exploration is described differently by Mary, as a crisis: '*I've also had a crisis about my gender identity, a major crisis, which is resolved itself now*.' This crisis has been ongoing for her for the last three years as she would have liked to '*cross-dress all the time*' but she could not. Unlike the other participants, she describes not feeling comfortable in her male identity anymore. For a long period, she was set on transitioning, but she had to accept that she needed to keep her male identity due to the actual circumstances of her life: '*I'm not pursuing the… opportunity of living as a woman because I feel I have a sense of duty to my family*.' While for Alex and Mary, this change/crisis happened in the past, for Anna, trying to figure out what she prefers is very much in the present, at the moment of the interview: '*I consider or wondering if I should like... transition or not... I am still in the phase now*.'

The theme of wanting but not being able to be how they desire is also common for other participants. Charlie, for example, says that he is '*more comfortable feminine*,' and adds that if he were single, he '*would have gone a step further... starting hormones or something like that*.' Grace expresses her desire to '*live full-time as Grace*,' without having gender reassignment, but she is unable to do so in the present due to family circumstances. Sam also highlights that '*I don't know if I had the freedom to be who I am*,' and further describes his struggle as: '*I felt I was in the wrong gender and still question it, but I haven't found that place on a scale*.'

Theme III: New and old ways of being sexual

Depictions of sexual identity and being sexual

At the moment of the interview, 5 participants self-identified as heterosexual, 1 as gay and 2 as bisexual. This is further nuanced by what they are sexually attracted to and by how they express their sexuality. In this sense, 7 participants said that they were interested in having female partners only, the exception here being Mary who was the sole participant dating only men. Furthermore, 5 participants are married to a cisgender woman and all have children. In

the following paragraphs, I will attempt to present how the participants expressed their sexuality.

Charlie says that he is attracted to '*femininity*' and to his '*own sex*' which he identifies as '*sort of transsexual*.' He also says that his sexuality remains the same, female-orientated, in whichever way he is dressed, and that he is not interested at all in '*masculinity*' or in '*gay relationships*.' He admits that he has only experienced a '*heterosexual relationship*' and that he may be open to other ways of being sexual which he has not explored yet.

Gabriella describes her sexuality as '*acting completely male during intimacy*' with her ex-female partner who was aware and accepting of her crossdressing. And yet, she describes not being very interested in sex: '*it can be... can be arousing at times but just briefly and it soon passes […] I don't feel I am missing out or anything*.' Furthermore, she adds that she is single and that she is not interested in dating or in a relationship at the moment.

Like Gabriella, Anna is also single. She describes encounters with both women and men and having a general sexual preference for women. Regarding her sexual expression, she articulates it as: '*I actually realise that... I was feeling sexy, which is not something I tend to feel much as a... dressing as a man*.'

Sam is married to a cisgender woman and he feels he is no longer interested sexually in his wife. In his words: '*I no longer really feel anything, I no longer feel anything for anyone at the moment, I would... I-I just.... to be honest, I just want to be left alone*.' When it comes to sexuality alone, he says that: '*I have never really been in... into sex, I wasn't... as a teenager... I have never been particularly... interested in… sex generally*.'

Grace, in turn, is married and in a monogamous relationship with her wife. She describes her relationship with her wife as: '*she's not in any way a lesbian and anything like that... she's fully, you know, attracted to me as a male, but she is happy for me to express the female side… she always has been*.'

Mary describes her experience of dating men as follows: '*I think of myself as passive and the female partner in these encounters*.' For her, crossdressing '*heightens*' her sexual pleasure with her male partners, and she is '*always dressed as a woman*' when she meets other

men. Ideally, she prefers '*muscular men who like... who wear lingerie*,' but otherwise, she is fine without this aspect '*as long as they can put up with me crossdressing*.'

Lucy says she is a little bit '*autogynephilic*,' which means that '*it turns me on to be like this. I do find myself attractive*.' She further adds that '*I had ordinary sex with women including my wife and enjoyed it*,' especially if she wore a '*nighty*,' an aspect which is for her limited by other partners: '*it's not every woman that wants to do that all the time though, is it?* She also finds *'other trans girls attractive, but that's like they're your sisters.'* Similarly to Sam, her interest in sex is overall limited: '*I never ever, ever have I fantasised about having sex in my life*.'

Finally, Alex describes himself as a heterosexual crossdresser. During the interview, he says that he is satisfying his need for affection through sexual encounters with both men and women: '*I seek affection*.' He believes that the emotional abuse he experienced from his parents manifests for him through sex: '*I don't have a great understanding of it, is that often when you go through some sort of trauma or something, it can manifest in drugs, drinks, food, abuse and mine is sex basically*.'

Expressing sexuality while cross-dressed

Many participants mentioned that their sense of being sexual potentially changes, but only in relation to other men and only while being dressed up. Grace states that: '*it is a common thing*,' and that: '*a lot of us actually do see men differently when we are expressing our female side*.' This has largely proven to be the case, as almost all participants made some references to it.

Alex, for example, says that '*changing shoes... changed my sense of sexual being*,' noticing that the bigger the heel, the more feminine she feels and the more sexually open she might be with men. In his words: *'so, if I wear these shoes, which are like my first feminine shoes, very low heel, practical, then I feel more feminine. I did! and that's when I would masturbate with a man. When I started wearing these shoes, which are only slightly more higher I mean, they are more feminine, I felt almost like a physical thing that I wanted to give someone oral sex, which I did! But when I put these on... hmm, it lifted my bottom, and they are more suggestive. Then I thought, for the first time, maybe I would like to receive anal sex*.'

For Anna, her experience of sexuality while being dressed up makes her see herself as *'maybe more bisexual,'* but only if she sees herself as *'female'* and thinks about men from a female perspective. Just like the other participants, she is not interested in a '*male with male*' type of relationship. Yet, she describes her past experiences of being with a man as feeling like she was '*really a woman in that way*' and '*not a crossdresser anymore*.' While she enjoyed these experiences, she does not see herself in a long-term relationship with a man. She accentuates the fact that she is more attracted to women than men. Similarly, Grace notes that when she is presenting as female she feels sexually feminine, which means that she enjoys *'a little bit of male attention,'* but also that she would contemplate taking a *'female role in the relationship with a man.'* She also says that she would have been interested in pursuing this path had she not been in a committed relationship with her wife.

Finally, Lucy notes that '*the more you are like this... the more... you grow in that respect*.' As she becomes more '*womanly*,' she would welcome being with a man: *'I want to be with a man, and I want to be made to feel more feminine, and want to be appreciated like this*.' And yet, like Sam and Grace, it is hard for her to say exactly what '*a good-looking fellow*' is or what an attractive man looks like.

Fetishism and crossdressing

One significant point to mention is the existence of a secretive fetishistic sexual interest which is intertwined with crossdressing at early stages in the lives of half of the participants. The fetish came before they accepted crossdressing as part of their sexual and gender identity.

Alex describes being around 8-10 years old and having an underwear fetish; back then, he would borrow and steal other people's clothing and '*wear them secretly*' in order to get '*sexual gratification from that*.' This is similar to how Charlie describes the early stages of his crossdressing. For him, it started as a fetish followed by sexual arousal and masturbation. Anna, as well, describes it as a '*sexualised game*' where she would '*feel aroused*,' while Mary describes getting in her teens '*a fetishistic excitement*' out of wearing female underwear.

After passing their childhood and teenage years way into adulthood, the sexual component of their crossdressing started to fade. For Alex, a change happened in his early 20s when he stopped wearing female underwear himself and started finding them arousing on other

people instead. Up until his 40s, he describes himself as someone who used to have '*a knicker fetish*.' In his 40s, he reconsiders it again, as there were hints that '*this is now crossdressing*' more akin to a gender identity. Similarly, Mary describes how things changed when she discovered women sexually and '*the same things were still attractive, but on a woman*.' At that point, she repressed her desires and put a halt to her crossdressing up until her 50s. During this time, if there was any crossdressing, it was '*very furtive*' at best.

For Charlie and Anna, the fetishistic sexual element of crossdressing continued much way into their adulthood. Charlie says that he continued using the sexual part of crossdressing in order to hide his '*true feelings*' towards it, marking a change from '*fetish*' or '*escapism*' to ownership and self-acceptance, when he accepted crossdressing as part of himself and his identity. For Anna, things changed when her crossdressing started to extend beyond mere '*sexual gratification*' into her everyday life, when she started doing '*different stuff in the house... watching TV, cooking, cleaning the flat*' while dressed up.

Theme IV: Time brings it all together

Their experience of time

All participants started their interviews with a chronological and linear description of time, where important memories associated with crossdressing were recollected. In all cases, time was used to position and to recall events by making references to a specific age, developmental stage, education, holidays, years or time period. It was interesting to notice how precise for some, and how vague for others, these time references have been.

Some participants, Alex and Charlie for example, found it difficult to say exactly at what age or in which year a specific event happened. To account for this, they used terms such as '*maybe*' and '*probability*.' Charlie, in particular, started talking to himself, thinking out-load and questioning himself, as it was quite hard for him to narrow it down and to be specific: '*six... when did that happen?*' Lucy, instead, used elements from her memories to work out her age: '*you left that playground when you were seven, so I can't be more than seven*.' Overall, it was easier for the participants to make references to larger periods of time: teens, mid/late 20s, 1950s, 1960s, 1990s, etc.

As the interviews progressed, this time linearity started to become more flexible, as meaning required them to connect past with present and future events. On this note, time seemed to expand or to condense depending on their experiences of what was going on. Alex used five and ten years periods of time to make sense of his crossdressing prior to his coming out. But when he talked about his experience of coming out at work, for example, everything was condensed in a matter of months, weeks and even days. Similarly for Mary, there is a sense of her life pre-coming out and post-coming out, where all '*post'* events are condensed in a few years: '*last three years*', '*last few months*,' '*end of January*.' Gabriella, in turn, referred to many events as being closer to her when in reality they happened a long time ago: '*a few years ago*' is actually six years ago, '*a number of years ago*' is a decade, while '*a while ago*' can be almost seven years ago. In some parts of the interview, she says that '*it happened so... so quickly*,' and then later she adds that '*a month has turned into 12 years*.' Lastly, for Charlie time seems to expand ('*just for half an hour-an hour, it's out there, it's sort like a validation*') and to contract ('*after a few months of hormones it becomes irreversible*.')

Identity is contextual and time-dependent

Perhaps one of the more profound aspects that came out of the interviews is the fact that one person's understanding and meaning of crossdressing are contextual to the space and time in which they live. In this case, the way one talks, understands and chooses to express their gender and/or sexuality is dependent on the language and the concepts available at the time, alongside their connotations. Some participants acknowledge experiencing multiple changes in terms of social attitudes and norms regarding crossdressing.

Alex describes how when he was in his 20s there were '*males, females and transvestites*.' Grace says that in '*those days*' she would have been referred to as a '*transvestite*' – a word '*we don't use anymore*.' Mary goes further back in time to when she was ten, when '*homosexuality stopped... stopped being a criminal offence*,' and to the years that followed, when '*this country was still very repressive*.'

This raises profound questions about what this may mean for them and how they have responded to these constant changes. In contrast with the present reality, the fact that in the past there were only three categories of gender is something Alex feels more comfortable with: '*that's how the world seemed to be and now it's something exploded into anything, but I think*

you need to be reasonable in allowing other people to adapt and not be too sensitive.' Alex himself still subscribes to being a transvestite and he is still pushing for his right to call himself that way. In Grace's case, there seem to be aspects which have changed (eg., she now identifies as trans and not as a transvestite anymore) and aspects which have remained similar to how things were when she was growing up. The best example here is the kind of femininity she likes to portray as a crossdresser: '*being brought up in the 50s and 60s, there was a stereotype and women appearing in a certain way. I think that lodged in the back of my mind*.' She further explains this as: '*I do think that we're conditioned to be a certain way and I think perhaps when I'm cross-dressed, I've got the conditioning in the back of my mind... which wants me to present as a woman from that era perhaps*.'

Crossdressing as frequency

Time is also experienced by the participants through the frequency of their crossdressing. Overall, there is a clear sense of gradual evolution, although episodes of decreasing and stopping are also noted. Charlie started his crossdressing in his early teens, doing it '*once in a while, every couple of weeks, maybe*.' Later on, it gathered momentum and it became '*more and more a regular thing*.' Similarly, Anna started crossdressing in her teens, when she had the opportunity to be alone at home: '*maybe once in a month or I don't know*.' As an adult living alone, she experienced periods where she would cross-dress '*very often, maybe every day or every two days*' and periods where she would '*have less interest in it*.' In the present, she cross-dresses '*almost every day*' when she comes back from work. Gabriella also does it when she is not at work: '*every evening... ehm... and most of the weekends*,' or when she is not with her mother. Generally, she tries to take any opportunity to do it; otherwise, *'if I'm not dolled when I'm out... I would ask myself why?'* For Grace, crossdressing switches on and off depending on her family responsibilities. When her son is not at home, she almost does it continuously: '*I was able to live more like full-time Grace for quite a while. Now that the younger son moved back, Grace had to be curtailed*.' Mary has been actively crossdressing for the last five years. Before, she says, '*there were moments, but it was very furtive*.' In the present, she cross-dresses all the time, with the exception of those moments when she would visit her family or she would attend a work meeting: '*I'd tone it down when I go to... when I meet up with my family or for things like a work-zoom call*.'

Lucy, up until her 30s, cross-dressed all the time, as part of a cultural and musical movement which allowed her to have long hair, look very androgynous and wear feminine clothing: '*you could express the fact you're androgynous as much as you think you can get away with*.' Since then, there is a feminine identity and a male one, the first appearing only when she has the opportunity to do so outside family and work commitments. For Sam, the desire to cross-dress appeared at '*a very young age*,' but he could only do it when he was in his '*late teens*.' In his 20s, he was '*going out semi-regularly'* as a woman, then all stopped completely for many decades. And yet, in the present, he is crossdressing again: '*I look for opportunities where I can... ehm... disappear to my mum's house and... I dress by myself*.' He does it '*in the week, maybe twice? and then over the last… six months... maybe I have reached three times per month*.'

4.4 Super-ordinate Theme II: Milestones in acceptance and ownership

Theme V: The road from self-acceptance to ownership

For all participants, self-acceptance and ownership have been an ongoing and complex process, a journey rather than a destination. Grace describes this journey as: '*it's taken me a long time to get to this point in my life*,' a point where there is less shame and guilt when '*wanting to express the female side*.' Nowadays, she adds, '*Grace is an undeniable part of my personality*,' to such an extent that '*she'll never go away*.' For her, self-acceptance is like '*a feeling of inner peace*,' which makes her everyday experiences much more enjoyable. Similarly, it has taken a long time for Mary to arrive at a point where she feels '*happy in myself*' and understands '*where I am in the world*.' Mary sees self-acceptance as '*being at peace with myself*,' which means accepting herself as gay and crossdresser. For Lucy, all is about being proud, content and free '*to be this way*,' while for Charlie is about admitting to himself, after many years, that '*it is not just crossdressing, as a fetish fantasy, it is actually part of my identity*.' For all participants, there seems to be a positive trend of crossdressing becoming a larger and more significant part of their identities and lives with time.

However, not only the participants have been on a journey of self-acceptance on their own, but society as a whole, specifically when it comes to crossdressing and trans issues. Society's level of openness has had a big impact on the participants' self-image, their self-acceptance and their level of integration with other people. According to Mary, '*the whole*

openness about trans has only really started in the last, I would say, twenty years,' society becoming more and more accepting and tolerating. Grace remembers that whereas in the 60s and 70s one could often hear '*Oh! There's a fellow in a dress! Let's beat him up*,' these days it is more along the lines of '*Oh! There's someone who is transgender*.' Although this is encouraging, many participants have signalled that there is still a lot of stigma, humiliation, abuse and judgment in society, which often hinders their journey of self-acceptance (see *Difficulty Theme*). At a social level, Mary, for example, would like trans people to be better represented, to have a more higher media presence and to be '*taken more seriously politically'* in society as a whole. Alex would like to see more pragmatism and clarity in regard to using sex-separated public restrooms as a crossdresser. Whereas Lucy, similarly to Mary, would like to be able to wear '*frumpy frocks*' and female dresses, instead of '*comfortable slippers and male trousers*,' in care homes and health institutions.

Theme VI: Queer milestones: Coming out and Being out

Throughout the interviews, both coming out and being out were presented as important elements in the process of forming and expressing their identities. Alex says that being open about himself and being honest with everyone makes '*the world a better place*,' further adding that he *really* started crossdressing the moment he came out. For Charlie, being out is '*a big deal*,' in the sense that it provides validation and it normalises crossdressing for him. For Anna, in turn, being out means being seen and experienced by other people as a woman; it means making her feel '*less of a guy in a dress*' but more of a '*bubbly and sassy*' confident woman. Gabriella highlights many moments when others complimented her appearance while being dressed up. For her, being out means being accepted, appreciated and desired. Indeed, being referred to and interpellated as a woman is an aspect highly valued and desired by all participants. Another shared desire is being out in the open and surrounded by people with whom they can share their crossdressing. On a slightly different note, however, coming out and being out are for Lucy not only about visibility per se – e.g., being recognised as a woman – but also about creative, artistic and metaphoric ways of expressing and thinking about crossdressing, from writing a book or an article about trans issues to acting in a film or taking part in the present interview. Overall, Charlie argues that '*people coming out in multitude and saying who they are*' means increased visibility, which makes crossdressing '*a little bit more accepted*.' For Sam, in particular, the lack of community, of visibility and awareness, was very

difficult in the past. He describes it as '*I felt like... I was the only one going against the norm*,' making it hard for him to feel that his crossdressing was in any way '*normal or acceptable*' in isolation. For Gabriella, other people coming out means that she feels '*a lot less against the grain*.'

In the following paragraphs, I will attempt to give a snapshot of where each participant is in terms of coming out and being out. Alex, for instance, describes himself as '*completely out*,' a process that has taken him almost two years and a half to become fully open and say: '*I am a crossdresser*!' At the moment of the interview, he was out to his parents, partner, on social media and in his workplace. He speaks in great detail about his experience of coming out at work, something he could not have thought possible before. The way he came out was by gradually exposing himself to his colleagues: starting with some nail polish and a bit of make-up up to the point of fully wearing a female uniform on a day-to-day basis, to the extent that now '*If I'm going out, particularly to work, I am more likely to be cross-dressed*.' Nonetheless, he is less likely to cross-dress while he is by himself at home. Anna, in turn, came out to her family quite recently, a couple of months before the interview. She describes the moment as being '*very emotional*' and '*very difficult to tell*' because her parents did not understand it at all. Speaking about her first experience of presenting herself as a woman while abroad, she points out to how scared yet free she had felt. At the time of the interview, she was still starting up and gaining confidence as a crossdresser in public, mostly going out to LGBTQIA+ charities and female shops where she would feel safe to cross-dress.

Charlie is '*definitely out in the wide world*' yet '*hidden*' from his work and family world, not being '*ready for the two to mix*.' While he was out to his wife and one of his best friends, he was not out to his parents, friends, children or in his workplace. He acknowledges that coming out to more people would make him '*a lot more comfortable*,' '*happy*' and maybe '*more social*' as well, but he fears about the repercussions this may have on his wife and children. In particular, he fears that his children may '*get picked on*' and bullied at school, saying that: '*if I was to come out and everybody knew I was the... crossdresser dad... pick up his kids from school... I think that would be too hard*.' He also fears that his wife would find it even more difficult to cope with his crossdressing if he is out. As things stand, his wife '*can't understand*' or '*deal*' with it. In terms of being out, Charlie was attending a series of support

groups for trans people and he was going out shopping '*completely dressed up*.' For this interview, which took place face-to-face, he came fully cross-dressed.

For Gabriella, there are '*literally two separate worlds*' – crossdressing and the rest. At the time of the interview, she was not out to anyone at all. She says that her mother is '*vaguely aware of something*,' but she avoids the conversation altogether: '*I want to mention LGBTQIA+ to the family… but I don't think this is going to happen yet*.' In practice, she lives two separate lives, one with her mother and one all by herself, with crossdressing as the main unspoken boundary. Similarly, she tries to keep things away and separate in her workplace. Last time she was in a relationship, she was out to her partner: '*I told her straight up*.' On a day-to-day basis, she is mostly out '*in fem*,' especially when it is '*fairly early*' and there are less people out. For Gabriella, being out involves careful planning and '*blending in*,' in the sense of merging with the other in such a way as to not attract attention. Throughout the interview, she mentions going to some LGBTQIA+ meetings in the nearby towns to socialise and to connect with people.

Grace was out to her wife and some of her friends but not to her adult children. She describes her wife as accepting and supportive; however, not being out to her sons is a severe limitation to how much she could dress up. While she was not out in her workplace, she was applying for other jobs '*in the female mode*.' A major part of her life is having an active role in the running of a LGBTQIA+ charity, a role which involves organising events, socialising and supporting other trans people. Being out in public means for her passing and blending in: '*one of the things I like to do is to go out and to not get any second looks, and by and large that tends to happen*.'

To continue, Mary was out as gay and as a crossdresser to her family and friends. She describes her family as '*relieved*' that she is a '*crossdresser as opposed to a trans woman*.' Overall, she says that she feels '*very comfortable*' being out as a woman in public spaces. Lucy was out to her mother and her wife, but not to her children or in the workplace. She describes her wife as less supportive and understanding than her mother. For this reason alone, she often changes clothing to go out at her mother's place. Not being out to her children is both a limitation and a vulnerability for her: '*that's the only chink in my armour*.' She thinks that coming out to her children would give her the go to come out in her workplace. In terms of

being out, she regularly goes out to art galleries and meets her friends '*dressed like this*.' Differently to all other participants, she feels that she does not need to pass in public spaces as she has '*a perfect right to be like this*;' so she effectively '*stopped worrying*' about passing or blending in a long time ago.

Sam used to cross-dress a lot more in the past, going out as female and even questioning transition. All stopped before he got married and became a father; yet in the present he seems to be returning to crossdressing again. He came out to his mother about a year ago and, like Lucy, he is using his mother's place to cross-dress and keep his clothing. Sam says that he found it '*awkward*' to come out to his mother at first, but overall, it was '*quite nice to... share my private world with someone who loves me*.' At the moment of the interview, he was only crossdressing at his mother's place: '*I pick a particular pose in the mirror to like... to try to appear more feminine to myself*'. The major difficulty for him is that his wife is not aware of anything, fearing about the repercussions his crossdressing could have on their marriage and children.

Theme VII: Levels of openness, acceptance and visibility

All participants have experienced significant periods in their lives when crossdressing has been unacceptable for them, their families and friends and the social context of their time. Not accepting and not being accepted for their crossdressing has resulted in numerous survival strategies to help them express that which is forbidden. These strategies, in turn, come to signify different levels of acceptance, openness and visibility.

Not taking responsibility for it. Charlie describes having sexual fantasies where he is '*forced into feminisation*' by another woman. He explains it as '*a way of being made into the person you want to be, without being taken responsibility of doing it yourself*.' This is a good example of a situation where the participant accepts who he is, but he seems to struggle to own it. For Charlie, then, the crucial difference between acceptance and ownership is taking responsibility for yourself.

Minimising it. This strategy can be observed at a discursive level and has appeared in moments where the participants maybe struggled to accept their crossdressing or, if they accepted it, they struggled with the lack of acceptance from others. Alex, for example, says:

'*the world has got bigger problems than the bloke walking around in a dress*.' Similarly, Charlie points out that '*there are bigger things than sort of wearing female clothing*.' When recalling her first memory of crossdressing, Grace says: '*at that point, I didn't think I was transgender. I just thought it was something interesting to do. It was a good laugh*.' For Lucy, minimising her crossdressing was linked to her fear of being rejected by prospective partners. In her words, '*I thought if I've only dabbled a little bit… there's nothing to tell, but once you've fully done it... they might not want you*.'

Hidden and subtle crossdressing. A couple of participants describe wearing female underwear and clothing underneath their male day-to-day clothing, particularly in the workplace. In other cases, their hidden crossdressing involves make-up or shaving their body to look more feminine. At work, Charlie's crossdressing involves '*using make-up, very subtle, mascara, foundation*' as well as female underwear under his male uniform. Gabriella talks about her long-time desire to wear a bra at work, but she is afraid that it might be easily noticed by others. Mary, on the other hand, has made full use of the opportunities created by working at home during the pandemic. She now finds it much easier to hide her crossdressing in online meetings, for which she would wear a skirt, a jumper and a gender non-specific t-shirt while keeping her nails out of view. In other circumstances, such as when meeting her family, she would '*tone it down*.' Other ways to cross-dress in situations where acceptance might not be there is by being, what Lucy calls, '*discreet*,' by making sure you avoid being outed to people whom you are not ready to come out yet: '*I even thought, as you have to wear a mask on a train, I even thought I could catch a train from the local station with my mask on, because nobody would know*.' For Charlie, this means going out cross-dressed in big cities where he could be '*anonymous*.'

Doing it under a different label. Some participants started their crossdressing as a female underwear fetish. For them, having a secretive fetish had fewer consequences than being and assuming a diverse gender identity, which may have social and political consequences. Other participants started their crossdressing as a joke in a socially accepted manner, both for the participants and their families or friends. Charlie's crossdressing depiction of the Rocky Horror Night and St Trinian's Night is a good example in this sense. He says, '*it was just for having a laugh, but then… I suppose inside, secretly, it felt good… it felt right*.' Charlie desired a very social and visible way of doing it, which was shared and enjoyed by those who were

important to him. Another way of doing it is under the label of '*androgynous*,' which was Lucy's way of '*hiding in plain view*' up until she was in her 30s. Her androgynous look was closely associated with listening '*to the right sort of bands that allowed you to dress like that*.' She knew that in order to cross-dress, she needed a label known to others, which was not necessarily authentic or accurate.

Passing. Passing means being successful at presenting as a cisgender woman in a social and public context, while not passing means unsafety and fear of possible humiliation and violence, it means getting second looks and appearing suspicious. Grace, for example, says that '*my wife is quite happy for me to go out as a woman because I do pass pretty well*.' Yet, for this passing to happen successfully, she has acquired strategies to help her blend in. One such strategy would be letting her friends do the talking for her because her voice is something that would give her away: '*he does all the talking, people just assume that I am his wife and you know nobody seems to drop us or bat an eyelid*.' Anna feels like '*people could tell that I am not a real woman*,' which has a direct impact on how things are for her when she is out cross-dressed. For Anna, passing offers her the ability to '*blend in more easily*,' while not passing means that '*people would stare at me a bit more*.' Similarly, Gabriella says that passing '*makes you blend in more*,' it makes you fit in. For Mary, in turn, passing is not only about crossdressing but also about learning how to play-act and how to conform to the '*acceptable norms of your time*,' including the norms of heteronormative masculinity, as she also had to pass as a man in her youth.

4.5 Super-ordinate Theme III: Tension, anxiety and struggle

Theme VIII: When expression is not an option.

Experiencing a lack of acceptance about crossdressing has been a common theme in the stories of all participants. This relates to the difficulties all of them have encountered in their interpersonal relationships with parents, spouses, prospective partners, children and/or in the workplace. It further relates to the difficulties they have encountered in the public sphere when using, inhabiting or navigating heteronormative binary gendered spaces, particularly when using sex-separated public restrooms and when shopping for female clothing and accessories. This lack of acceptance is most exemplified by stigma, prejudice, abuse and other difficult emotions such as fear, shame, guilt and frustration. It is a theme which is pervasive throughout

the interviews, either directly or indirectly. Indeed, many aspects described by the participants are direct results or indirect responses to experiencing a lack of acceptance and/or the fear of it.

Alex, for example, describes the climate surrounding crossdressing as '*tense*,' both from the outside, '*people are so sensitive about transgender issues*,' as well as from within the crossdressing community, where he believes '*there is too much sense of fear*' and an unrealistic anticipation that '*people are out to attack you… be unkind to you*.' For Alex, the fear is present but the actual risk of abuse is less so. Charlie captures the lack of acceptance indirectly by talking about how he believes things should be: '*I want to be whatever I want to be and... everyone to know and... it would not be an issue*.' Yet, he cannot be who he wants to be for he still encounters '*lots of issues at home*' and in society as a whole. He goes on to compare the social acceptance of crossdressing with the level of acceptance of other sexual and gender identities, hoping that '*at some point crossdressing might be more in that line, but I think that's going to take a while for that point to get there*.' For Gabriella, most of her crossdressing is without difficulties: '*not a problem at all.*' However, the lack of acceptance is ever-present within the efforts she puts in keeping her crossdressing difficulty-free and within the limitations that come with these efforts: '*if you are going to make an effort, you can't do it half-hearted*.' Everything is fine, then, '*as long as you do… as long as you do enough*.' Doing enough may mean for Gabriella living a double life, trying hard to blend in and choosing very wisely when and where to go out, always being mindful of her spatial surroundings: '*I have to be careful logistically*.'

Mary, on the other hand, expresses this lack of acceptance directly and openly: '*overall, I wanted to take part in your research because I wanted to give you an example of somebody who has been having a hard time dealing with it*.' For some of the participants, Mary included, the lack of acceptance becomes stigma, humiliation and judgement. Mary says that '*people still see crossdressing as a sign of failure… a defect in some way… or as a perversion*.' On a similar note, Lucy talks about how crossdressers are often portrayed in society: '*I said I was a transvestite and she instantly thought I must be wearing a miniskirt and fishnet stockings, leaning against a lamppost, you know? propositioning people*.' For both participants, the words 'crossdresser' and 'transvestite' may still hold negative connotations, especially for older members of society, as these used to be '*terms of abuse*' and *'dirty words'* when they were

growing up. Similarly for Anna, '*lots of people are still judgemental, homophobic or trans-phobic*.' Grace acknowledges that things have '*changed a lot now*' towards a more accepting and less abusive society, stating that: '*I generally think that most people wouldn't bother too much these days*.' Yet, the risk of stigma, abuse and public humiliation is present, especially when she is not able '*to pass*' as easily as she would have wished: '*I don't know what it would be like to go out and to be 6 foot 6 tall, still hoping of wearing makeup and the dress, maybe that would be a bit more difficult*.'

Mary further describes these difficulties caused by the lack of acceptance as '*microaggressions towards you*' that can '*really inhibit you*.' For her, this is the way '*society makes you... very aware... (of) their disapproval*.' Evidence of public microaggressions has been present for almost all the participants. Mary mentions getting '*a second or third look*,' sometimes '*a fourth look*.' She is aware of people's suspicion towards her and of what they might be thinking: '*is this… who… what is this person?*' Like Gabriella, she recalls times when she was called 'sir' while presenting as female and wearing a dress. In turn, Anna talks about people who are staring, especially young people who are '*giggling after passing me*.' Gabriella also mentions '*inquisitive younger boys*' giggling and asking her if she was gay. On a similar note, Grace says that when she started out crossdressing she was warned about children by other crossdressers: *''Beware of children!' because... the little kids, who've got no inhibitions, suspect that you are not female, they've got a point going: 'Hold on, there is a fellow there in a wig and a dress!'* Teenagers, children, groups of men, inebriated men, working class men, 'thugs' and women in female toilets have all been nominated as examples around whom one should be particularly vigilant.

Almost all participants describe abusive incidents and moments when they feared they might get abused. For some participants, these have started early on while they were in primary and secondary education. Both Lucy and Mary experienced bullying during this time. Mary was bullied for not conforming to the social expectations of gender, especially to what was considered 'masculine' in the 60s and 70s. Anything other than 'masculine' was seen as '*weak, homosexual, queer… sassy or pansy*.' Lucy recalls that she was not bullied for being trans, '*I don't think they've guessed that*,' but for not being *tough* and *very big*. As they became adults, and they started to come out and to go out cross-dressed, they encountered other types of challenges. Sam remembers hearing people make '*rather derogatory comments*' while he was

out with his friends. Similarly, Alex experienced derogatory comments; yet, he feels that these were '*negligible*' and '*hardly worth mentioning*' compared to what he expected. His viewpoint is that '*people are rude anyway*,' and if they are not abusive towards your crossdressing, they '*would be for another reason*.' Further, Charlie recalls having to manage '*a few hackles'* and people shouting at him. Oftentimes, he felt the need '*to be big enough and ugly enough to sort them out*,' to stand up for himself. Differently for Gabriella, the risk of a social situation turning abusive is always managed by precise logistics and timing, in order to keep herself safe. In particular, she feels safe knowing that trans abuse is nowadays classed as a hate crime.

Public spaces where the risk of abuse is present includes female toilets and shops. When it comes to using female public toilets, there is a difficult choice to make between risking being abused in a male toilet or risking feeling like a '*fraud*' who might '*upset*' and '*offend*' someone in a female toilet. For Lucy, Alex and Gabriella, using female public toilets has, at points, been difficult, Lucy saying '*I was terrified that some woman would shout at me in the queue*.' Regarding shops, Mary says that she experienced shop and charity staff being hostile and rude towards her when she wanted to buy female clothing. She also experienced abuse and discrimination in her workplace. When she came out to her colleagues as gay things were '*fine*', but when she later came out as trans, and started using make-up and wearing female shoes at work, she received a lot of abuse: '*this is me, a sort of middle-aged person being shouted at for wearing… for having makeup and women's shoes to the office*.' She believes that because crossdressing is '*so visibly obvious... visibly different*,' it receives much more hostility and discrimination than other sexual and gender identities.

Being a diverse gender and/or sexual identity in a society that is not accepting may put a strain on the participants, their well-being and their interpersonal relationships. Mary describes this aspect in the following terms: '*I'm aware that LGBT people, generally, have more problems with mental health. I think it's because we've always felt we've been outsiders, feeling marginalised and feeling in some way inferior to the rest of society. Well, society makes you feel inferior to them, I would say.*' Some participants have talked at length about how they struggled with mental health and the impact counselling has had on them. For Charlie, for example, the lack of acceptance meant that he has often tried to repress his feelings and desires: '*I just really flushed it all down, tried to... erm... bury it*.' The times when he tried to suppress feelings are directly connected for him with depression, whereas the times when he fully

expressed his gender identity helped him to '*release those feelings*' and be '*healthier mentally*.' Not being able to express himself also meant that he was '*constantly, constantly thinking about dressing up, what I could do, how I could do things*.' It further meant moments when crossdressing becomes '*an addiction or something like that*,' something that he could not control but which was, nonetheless, linked with cycles of unbearable shame, purging and starting all over again. When he was caught crossdressing by his wife they accessed couples counselling for support. He described the experience negatively: '*the counsellor just sort of knocked it off as an escapism [Ihm]... which didn't really help*.'

For Grace, the lack of acceptance is responsible for having '*all of this at the back of my mind thinking: there's something wrong with you*,' which manifests itself in cycles of happiness, shame, guilt, self-hatred, purging ('*yes, I'm back to normal*') and starting all over again ('*oh, she's got a nice blouse… oh, how would that look on me?*') In her particular case, having a supportive and accepting wife has helped her in dealing with these feelings more swiftly. Mary talks about the '*angst… the anxiety*' she felt about crossdressing when she was young, being at different points '*quite obsessed with it*.' The impact of the lack of acceptance and stigma she endured is described as a '*lot of internal transphobia, in my case left from... left from those days*.' Mary talks about her struggles for which she accessed therapeutical support from a gender clinic: '*I'm very glad that the Gender Clinic has actually... has been giving me therapy over this time because I've been able to work through it*.' Similarly, for Anna, counselling helped her to accept her crossdressing, in particular '*to understand what I want or what I need to do.*' Sam describes a period in his life when he became a '*fatherly figure*' to his brothers after his father left them, a period which coincided with him becoming more aware of his gender identity: '*I wasn't just quite happy… I self-harmed, and I... I had thoughts about killing myself, I think, you know, it's all of it… it still centres around gender*.' He eventually accessed counselling support; yet, he found the experience '*a negative thing because the therapy wasn't… gender specific, it was just well-being specific*.'

Theme IX: Experiences of shame, loss, guilt and frustration.

In the interviews, shame has been implied and expressed in body language and language through facial expressions, metaphors, colloquialisms and indicative words such as 'awkward,'

'weird,' 'guilty,' 'flaky,' 'embarrassed,' etc. Whether imposed by others or internally felt, all the transcripts contain extensive feelings denoting shame and descriptions of shame.

The feelings of shame have started early on for a couple of them, as they were growing up in times when being feminine was not acceptable. One of Gabriella's early memories is a discussion with her mother about wearing feminine footwear, which was '*completely taken off the menu*,' her mother saying: '*don't be stupid, of course you can't*.' Sam recalls how he felt about the possibility for his mother to find his female clothing while still living at home: '*it would have been disastrous, you know, like the worst thing ever if she discovered this*.' Others felt shame in relation to their partners and spouses who do not accept their crossdressing. Alex describes his ex-wife's reaction to him wearing feminine underwear as '*no! that's a bit too strange!' you know, 'it's a bit too weird!*' When later he met his ex-wife while cross-dressed, '*she looked quite horrified, to be honest when she walked past*,' to such an extent that now '*if I go to see her, I will consciously avoid crossdressing*.' Others have shown feelings of shame when talking about their children and the impact their crossdressing might have on them. Mary, for example, describes herself in relation to her children as '*a flaky individual who they don't know from one day to the next if it is a man or a woman*.'

All participants described moments when they either felt or feared experiencing shame when crossdressing in public. Lucy remembers an episode in her youth when a woman was '*rudely staring*' at her, on a train platform, and asked her: '*I'm trying to work out if you're a boy or a girl*.' Lucy recalls her feelings as: '*I laughed, I probably felt embarrassed*.' As she developed her androgynous identity into a full-feminine identity, she started being aware that '*people would laugh*' about her crossdressing and that she would mostly be '*up for ridicule*' because of it. In her own words: '*My name is David, and on Sundays I call myself Jane and everybody laughs*.' Like Lucy, various participants speak of a heightened discomfort associated with being stared at. Anna, for instance, commented: '*I always feel like people are going to look at me weirdly*.' In order to avoid such situations, some participants put effort into making sure they pass and blend in just enough to avoid the other's look. For example, anticipating that she would be noticed for her crossdressing, Gabriella is choosing times and spaces to go out when it is less crowded: '*I can be back by 10 o'clock… before most people are even up*.' Leaving this logistic of safety and predictability means for her that '*sometimes you have to brave it*.' Alex recalls an incident when he was called '*half-man… half woman*' by someone in

a restaurant, leaving him hurt but '*not down completely*.' For Charlie, shame is mainly expressed by being '*too busy not making eye contact with people walking down the street*,' and for Gabriella, by keeping '*your head down and get on with your own… keep yourself in your own world, like pretty much everyone else*.'

Most participants have felt shame about their crossdressing identity and expression, and one way to protect themselves from shame was to keep it a secret or invisible. For Charlie, crossdressing was mostly done '*in secret... ehm... mostly at home, away from... anyone at all*,' constantly anxious and fearful about being caught: '*I was feeling scared of being caught*,' and constantly fighting with himself about it, thinking, '*this is silly! I have to stop doing it*.' At its lowest point, for Charlie, crossdressing was something '*bad*,' something to be repressed and forced down, while at its highest point, crossdressing was just '*a stupid show or stare*.' Grace speaks of her '*guilt*' and '*self-hatred*,' of feeling that '*there's something wrong with me*.' For her, these difficult moments of self-judgment and suffering represent '*probably the worst thing about being transgender*.' On a similar note, Sam speaks of feeling '*a bit pathetic*' by being a crossdresser, admitting that '*I still have this issue like I should be ashamed of it*.' For many participants, crossdressing has also been sexually motivated and associated with sexual arousal and fetishism, which prompted further shame. As Anna recalls, '*I would be scared that people would see me as a pervert*,' adding that she would often feel '*a little bit ashamed*' after enjoying herself sexually.

Guilt, as well, has been present for almost all the participants, primarily arising from the tension between their gender identity and their family responsibilities. Many participants have expressed concerns about the impact their gender identity has or may have upon their spouses, partners and/or children. For some, guilt is the outcome of an impossible choice between being themselves and caring about the people in their lives. When speaking about her child, Lucy describes this tension as follows: '*I'd have no shame, but I would just be worried I might hurt him in some way, and I would be so upset with myself*.' Mary talks about feeling guilty for being trans, thinking that her gender identity is incompatible with her position as a '*stable figure*' for her children. By staying in male mode at home, Charlie is making a sacrifice '*to preserve my home life from possible complications*.' Similarly, Grace talks about years when she put '*the feminine side on hold as we raised a family*.' Because of the stigma associated with it, she continues, crossdressing was not seen as meaningful but, on the contrary, as

something '*a bit selfish*' and '*self-indulgent,*' which prompted for her numerous feelings of guilt and shame over the years. All participants have, to a certain degree, minimised the importance of their crossdressing when they had to think about their families.

Loss and sadness have also been expressed by some participants as a result of the limitations and the difficulties that have impacted their crossdressing, at different moments in their lives. Anna and Grace talk about feeling sad and unhappy when the circumstances did not permit them to cross-dress, while for Gabriella, going out and not crossdressing always feels like a missed opportunity: '*I ask myself why?*' In a similar vein, Sam describes feeling '*quite unhappy*' for continuously having to '*box crossdressing off*.' For Sam, and equally for Lucy, there is a connection between crossdressing, youth and looking good. Sam comments that '*I don't look as good as I used to look, that upsets me, to be honest*,' while Lucy describes the loss of her hair and her androgynous look as a huge loss: '*I couldn't bear looking like a male*.'

Besides a sense of loss and sadness, there is also frustration and anger. Anna expresses her frustration about people's negative comments towards her ('*it is a bit annoying*'), about moments where she could not cross-dress and about the periodic purges of her wardrobe that followed ('*it was frustrating to do it, I was very stressed not to do it*'). Regarding the social limitations imposed upon his crossdressing, Sam feels '*frustrated by how far I can take it*.' Grace admits that she often feels '*a little bit of frustration*' when she cannot cross-dress, moments which are, in some parts of the interview, painful: '*you have to suffer a lot*', while in other parts of it, not that painful: '*it's not too bad, not too bad*.' She personally copes with frustration by throwing herself into other things in order to '*take my mind out of it*.'

4.6 Super-ordinate Theme IV: Aspects of being-in-the-world

Theme X: A story of being and ways of being.

The theme of being aims to illuminate how the participants are in the world, especially how they seem to relate to the world and their sense of belonging and authenticity.

Gabriella describes herself as *'generally a bit of a mouse really*,*'* which means that in whatever way she expresses her gender, she tries to keep her '*head down... keep things on a straight and narrow*.' This is both an issue of fitting in and of safety. In other words, '*it's all about fitting in... blending in*' for which she makes quite an effort and no half-measures are

allowed. For Gabriela, fitting in means not being different or exceptional, it means sacrificing parts of her individuality in order to gain a sense of acceptance and belonging. As she says, '*you're just another person... you're just another person going about your business... and you've got every right to go around your business, just as the same as everybody else*.' This is further associated with feeling '*like you are belonging... as you did the right thing*.' Conforming to social norms gives her a sense of belonging and of moral approbation. This, however, may not happen when she is not complying with the expected norms, such as having a public male presentation when buying female clothing: '*it does look as though you're in the wrong part of the shop*.' For Gabriella, crossdressing is linked with having and owning stuff, '*I see the dress, I've got to get it*,' and with her relationship with money, '*I've treated myself with a new pair [of shoes] for my birthday*.'

Anna's way of being is intertwined with her professional identity, '*I am a scientist*,' which means she is '*very pragmatic in life*' and '*just a bit square*.' The impact her gender identity has had on her being becomes apparent when she describes herself as follows: '*I'm quite shy in general... a bit introverted... and yeah, I don't like to open too much... actually even some of my close friends told me that I am a bit difficult to read because... ehm.... I think because I always try to hide those... feelings about my gender and crossdressing*.'

For Lucy, when she was young, being visible meant abuse, humiliation and bullying, which left her wanting to be invisible: '*I didn't even look at myself in the mirror*.' Years later, she became, through her long hair and androgynous looks, an object of desire: '*that's a real good-looking boy there... my goodness... I kept looking in the mirror*.' Her desire to cross-dress in a forbidden world meant learning from an early age that she had to dissimulate and be subversive in order to be able '*to hide in plain sight*' who she really was. When it comes to her position in this world, she describes herself as '*a bit of a loner actually... outside of it; well, that's another thing being androgynous, you don't know where to fit, so I've always been a bit of a loner... but I'm a gregarious loner.'* One significant aspect in her life is having to live with the complexities and difficulties of her family life. This raises important questions about how your own circumstances may determine how you think about yourself. In Lucy's words, '*I wonder if anybody would be perfect if they were in a very imperfect situation*.'

For Grace, crossdressing blends with her suspicion that she may be neurodivergent. She describes herself as being '*quite obsessive about things... and the lads see me as a bit eccentric*

and a bit mad.' She further adds that: '*I knew there was something different about me*' because of it. This raises important questions of how the two intersect. Throughout the interview, she mentions a few times that she finds her story with crossdressing '*unique*' and '*unusual*' within the trans community. Existentially, crossdressing sits in her life at the crossroad between being herself, society and the responsibilities towards her family. In her words, '*it's society pressures if you like, for one of a better way to put it, and also having family, which has stopped Grace from being at the forefront*.' Now that she is approaching retirement, she feels that she has done her duty towards her children and that maybe it is finally time to be herself: '*it's now time to relax a bit and express the real me, which is female, I suppose*.' In addition, for Grace, crossdressing means a way for her to be supportive and understanding towards others, it means being a kind of '*agony Aunt*' for other trans people, as part of her role in a LGBTQIA+ charity.

For Charlie, there seem to be two ways of relating to the world, one '*practical*' and one '*intimate*.' The *'practical'* is described as '*the day-to-day level*' of things. Here, the focus falls on *'coping'* and *'getting on and dealing with it,'* which means organising, planning, finding solutions and resolving issues. This links very well with his system of values where the family is being given the most importance alongside with being a '*good*' husband and father and a '*hard-working*' individual. The practical level, then, is also the material level, of having a good financial situation and of making sure his family is having its basic needs met. When asked who he is when he is not cross-dressed, he simply says, '*it's just family! family!*' At the intimate level, Charlie swallows '*things down,*' which means ignoring, repressing and dismissing his emotions. He describes it as: '*I am not emotional or romantic, but I am a good dad*.' The intimate is the level where he seems to struggle the most, as his gender identity has a profound impact on the relationship with himself, his own body and with significant others. Thus, the focus changes from the functional to the emotional and, perhaps, to the meaningful – that is, to all the elements that seem to be missing at the practical level. As he says, '*everything in our lives is fine, uhm... apart from intimacy*.'

Mary, on the other hand, focuses on the impact her socio-cultural environment has had on her: '*I was confused and repressed and it really goes back... I think that goes back to... my upbringing and sort of being very English and repressive*.' For Mary, crossdressing represents something that has always been denied: '*childhood onwards, it has always been denied*.' She acknowledges that in the last 20 years things have changed towards more freedom for trans

individuals. On this note, there is perhaps some regret that she was not born in a more tolerant society and time, and perhaps some envy as well: '*I look off to my children and young people today and think 'lucky you!*' Overall, crossdressing offers her authenticity, while she positions herself on the more extreme side of it: '*I'm more to one extreme than somebody else might be*,' blurring the boundaries between crossdressing and living full-time as a woman. In regard to wearing male clothing, she says that: '*I don't really belong in these, and you feel you're wearing it because you have to*.'

Alex talks about *'rethinking lots of things about life'* in his mid-40s, which felt like an existential turning point. This has come with profound changes in many areas of his life, such as getting a divorce and being single, exploring his crossdressing and sexuality, going for therapy, changing his name, changing his professional career, studying for another degree, etc. He describes this as a way of '*exploring myself and trying to work out who I am*.' For Alex, this means authenticity and freedom of expression and being. People, he says, '*find me more authentic, because I'm not scared to reveal what I think or who I am*.' However, this could be put in contrast with other moments throughout the interview which reveal quite a complex relationship between crossdressing, authenticity and freedom of expression. An interesting moment is when he talks at length about his journey from having erectile dysfunction, getting a circumcision to resolve it and then using the doctor's advice to wear much softer underwear as a justification to wear female underwear permanently. Yet, later in the interview, there is the opposite – his courage to come out to everybody at work, to put himself out there, to take control of the narrative and his image and to use it for his own benefits. In his words, '*I need to take ownership of this and control this, so I need to put this out there before someone puts a picture of me out there*.'

Sam describes his life in the following terms: '*I have a son. I have a good job, ehm... I... you know, we have a nice house, a nice car... I have... I've built an existence... around me*.' Still, he is critical of this way of being, saying that: '*it's all served as sort of a distraction, I came… I came in... moving in together was a distraction, getting married is a distraction, having a baby is a distraction, getting a promotion is a distraction*.' This raises important questions about authenticity, belonging and meaninglessness. There is tension between being yourself and authenticity (which is unacceptable and difficult), between not being yourself and becoming what you think others want you to be: '*I created an identity that people expected to*

see.' This tension has sometimes become unbearable for him and has involved, at different times, unhappiness, self-harm, suicidal thoughts or giving up on crossdressing: '*I tried to create what... everyone thought I should be... as a normal man... and just bury who I thought I was*.'

Theme XI: Their social world: being with others.

This theme aims to describe how participants relate to other people in their lives, particularly when it comes to their family life, romantic life, social life and life in the workplace.

Family of origin. A common experience for the participants while growing up was the lack of space for the full expression of their gender while living at home. There is a pervasive sense of shame and fear of getting caught. Mary, for example, recalls being caught by her mother numerous times. None of the participants considered coming out to their parents or the possibility of being accepted by their parents at that time. Because of this, crossdressing only started to develop after the participants left their parental homes. At the moment of the interview, not all of them were out to their family of origin. In practice, this means for them living separate lives or making sure they are in their male identity when visiting their family of origin.

Romantic life. There is quite a lot of heterogeneity between the participants stories; some of them are married, some are divorced, some are dating men, some are dating women, or both, while some are not interested in dating at all. At the time of the interview, half of the participants were married to a cisgender woman. Grace's partner was described as supportive and accepting, Sam was not out to his partner, while for Charlie and Lucy, things seem complicated, as their wives find it hard to be supportive and accepting of their crossdressing. When it comes to those who were single, Gabriella, for example, says that she is not interested in dating, Anna mentions encounters with both men and women, while Mary mentions only dating men. Alex, in turn, was dating a cisgender woman who is accepting of his crossdressing.

As we can see, there is a wide spectrum of diverse and unique relationships with very complex dynamics and histories. For most of the participants, crossdressing becomes intertwined with their romantic life from the very beginning, amplifying their fear of rejection, insecurity and loneliness. As Alex describes this: '*it cuts down the amount of women that are going to be interested in you*.' On a similar note, Lucy feared that because of her crossdressing

people would reject her and it would '*put some women off*.' She describes the starting of her romantic relationship in terms of a deal, saying that: '*I thought if somebody can take my shit, I'll take their shit*.' Reflecting back, she now believes that it was an unfair deal: '*to be frank, she's put me through a lot more than I put her through*.' Sam, as well, thought that *'no one is going to be interested in me if I cross-dressed.'* Because of this, he gave up crossdressing before getting together with his wife. He describes their encounter as follows: '*I found her moderately attractive… ehm I... I had... I had a confidence issue and thought I couldn't do better if I am honest*.' Lastly, Mary finds that a lot of gay men '*are quite hostile to the idea of crossdressing*,' particularly she finds herself '*having to persuade the men I was seeing to let me cross-dress with them*.' She describes at length her past relationship with a gay man who is also crossdressing; yet, in his case, '*it's about fetishism, it's purely... it's a fetish*.' For her, this was confusing '*because he didn't like me… well, he didn't like me crossdressing, he didn't want the... he didn't like the idea of me transitioning*.'

Family life. Because of fear of rejection and other possible complications, some participants have postponed sharing this side of themselves with their partners. Yet, there is a strong desire to be open and to live their family life differently. One key theme here is the way partners and spouses have responded to crossdressing. Again, there was a variety of responses, from acceptance to the opposite of it. On the accepting side, Grace and Alex are both able to share their crossdressing with their partners. However, for Grace, this is not without limitations. She describes being aware of how much further she can take her crossdressing before it would become harmful and difficult for her wife. Not having surgery, for example, is her compromise for being accepted: '*that's my licence, really*.' On the rejection side, the lack of acceptance and support has been a source of dissatisfaction for the participants, which has sometimes contributed to relationship breakdown and divorce. Charlie says of his wife that *'her way of dealing with it is just to ignore it, that she does not want to know anything about it*.' This reaction has impacted their relationship on multiple levels, perhaps the most visible being in terms of intimacy where it seems to accentuate unresolved issues from the past.

Many participants talked not only about their experiences of being partners but also about their experiences of being parents as well. Overall, there is much tension between crossdressing and being a parent, especially when crossdressing may not be acceptable or accepted. Five out of eight participants have children, and the common fear for them has been

how their coming out is going to impact their children. Grace, for example, is used to play a specific gendered parental role to her children and, without it, she does not know how to be a parent outside of '*the tough dad that would encourage them to do weight training and things like that*.' She believes that coming out would be a shock to them and that it might impact them, particularly the youngest child, negatively.

Similarly, Lucy feels that her youngest child needs a '*macho*' male role model, someone who is '*stable*'. She supposes that he would be upset if he sees her '*like this,*' or if he finds out by himself. The risk of causing harm to her child is the source of a lot of guilt, anguish and self-judgement. Regarding her other child, she thinks that he would probably be unaffected by her being a crossdresser and that this would actually bring them closer. She further thinks that if she had daughters, it would have been '*bloody sight easier*' to be out, as boys seem to struggle more with it. Mary is the only one who is out to her adult children. She says that it was much easier for her family to accept her sexuality and crossdressing than the prospect of her transitioning. Regarding her children, she says that '*the possibility that I would spend the rest of my life as a woman was something they couldn't really cope with*,' her children seeing in this '*a sense of loss*.' Not transitioning and not appearing too female when she sees her family is her compromise for being accepted: '*just have to not wear lipstick when you go to see them and take the nail varnish off, and you'll pass just about*.' Sam feels trapped and paralysed with fear to come out to his wife, as this may mean divorce and, with it, the possibility of not being able to see his child. He describes the prospect of divorce as an act of abandoning his child: '*because my dad left, I don't wanna be the dad that leaves my son... the history is repeating itself for a different reason*.'

Social life. Most of the participants describe quite a complicated relationship with the other and the social world. One side of this is experiencing the other as imposing, limiting, judgemental, unsafe or abusive. This has been most pervasive while they were growing up, in their early days of crossdressing; yet, for some, it is still present today. Indeed, the social is not always prohibitive and restrictive. Many of them enjoy being out and interacting with people, and some even have a full social life while dressed up. One key theme present within the interviews, however, has been their relationship with the larger LGBTQIA+ community and other trans people.

For some participants, being part of the community seems to have quite a significant and positive impact on their lives. For Anna, it makes her crossdressing '*normal*' and '*less lonely*,' while offering a safe space to socialise and to develop. For Gabriella, the community offers her events which she usually attends to socialise and dress up. Lucy finds herself crossdressing mostly among other trans people who are her '*sisters*' and friends. Grace finds herself lucky to have a supporting partner and, as part of her role in a LGBTQIA+ charity, she likes to '*offer some relief*' to those who are struggling with their partners. For other participants, however, being part of the community does not necessarily have a positive impact on their lives. Alex, for example, says that he chooses to live without much connection to the trans community as he associates it with being '*too heated up on politics*.' He believes that being part of the community would have had a negative impact on him, adding that '*I might not have done this journey if I'd listened to all this fear about how people are treated*.' For different reasons, Sam also stopped going to social meetings and events with other crossdressers as these did not fulfil his needs.

Life in the workplace. With the exception of Alex, all participants were not out in their workplace at the time of the interview. The workplace represents a space in which they have to present as male. For Alex, being out at work makes him connect and interact more with his female colleagues than before. He finds that women are much more open to him crossdressing, and some would even say to him: '*if you want any tips, if you want to dress with me, you know, you want me to help you with your makeup and stuff... that's fantastic!*' Some male colleagues have had a more restrained reaction, '*yeah, that's alright mate, don't worry about it*,' while some of them even admitted to wearing female underwear in different contexts, which was surprising for him to hear.

For the rest of the participants, there was a sense of separation between crossdressing and their professional lives. This was very clear for Anna and for Gabriella, the latter describing it as: *'I just keep things locked out, concentrate on what I'm doing... and then just switch back when I get home*.' Even though they would wear female underwear underneath their male clothing, they would feel limited and restricted to do more than this. Some participants, however, would want to alter this separation in order to be able to do more while at work. Charlie would want to come out at work. He started doing things like using make-up and wearing female underwear in the eventuality of being noticed and caught by others. In his

words: '*you are doing things to get caught, pretending you are not going to get caught but... secretly hoping you do... then is out*.' On the other side of the spectrum, Lucy does not want to come out at work because she would first like to come out to her children. Thinking about it, she said that she feels safe to come out at work: '*probably if I wanted to come out at work, it'd be quite a good job to do it*.'

Theme XII: Freedom puts it all into perspective.

For most of the participants, the discussion about freedom in the context of crossdressing starts very early in their youth. At a young age, freedom means access or, more precisely, having access to female clothing and having the privacy and intimacy to wear them in secret without being caught by parents or siblings. These are all stories of secrecy, constant fear of being caught, loneliness and isolation, as crossdressing was not something that was talked about or shared. For Alex, for example, this meant having access to other people's underwear, stealing them, collecting them and then getting rid of them for fear of being caught. For Lucy, it meant having access to her mother's dresses, while for Anna this access was restricted altogether by not having '*many opportunities to be alone for a long time*.' For Sam, in turn, all was about keeping his room tidy so that his mother would not have to clean it: '*I kept my room tidy, I kept myself to myself... and it allowed a certain freedom*.'

As the participants became adults, they started to find themselves in a context where they had to push to have more freedom in regard to their gender expression and identity. Crossdressing is, here, in-between their need for expression and social norms, norms which are not always favourable. Doing something that appears to violate the social rules of your time requires significant effort and risks. Sam describes it as a gradual process: '*the more you do it, the more courage you have to do it*,' highlighting how much courage you need to go out dressed as a woman. For Alex, it is about '*taking risks, getting used to it, becoming comfortable... small steps*,' highlighting the quest for safety and the efforts it takes to secure this safety. For Lucy, all is about making and breaking the rules: '*I sort of break all my own rules about being discreet, you know? The more I do, the more I push it*.'

For many participants, crossdressing in itself means freedom. In Mary's words, '*I feel more... much freer when I am cross-dressed*.' Similarly for Anna, crossdressing is being able to do stuff that she could not do as a man. She feels that as a woman she is free to be creative

and to experiment. For Alex, crossdressing keeps surprising him, and a lot of things that were impossible to him are now possible. One example in this sense is his ability to do public speaking, which was unavailable to him in the past but which now comes '*from just being myself and presenting myself*.'

And yet, freedom seems to be more of a constant tension, something to work hard for and to push for in the background of lack of acceptance, stigma and difficulty. If fighting for freedom is difficult, so is the lack of freedom in their lives. A lack of freedom is harmful to an individual, yet the individual exercising their freedom may be harmful to others. Alex captures this when he says: '*I would describe myself in the way that I see fit, I'm not wishing to offend anyone, but if I say that I'm a transvestite, please don't tell me that I'm not*.' Later on, when discussing his ex-wife who does not accept his crossdressing, he says that: '*this doesn't mean so much to me that I would wish to cause harm to someone else, and I think I can quite easily avoid that*.' The same dilemma is also present for Mary whose family felt harmed by the idea of her transitioning, and for Lucy and Grace who fear that by coming out they may harm their children. Anna thinks she is free as long as she does not bother or hurt anyone, which highlights the existential dilemma at the core of it. The reality is, as Alex describes it, that for many people, crossdressing means not only freedom, but also having to constantly consider '*other people's feelings more*.' Alex's way to resolve this dilemma has been to remain single and childless. In his words: '*I feel lucky... lucky is the wrong word, but I feel more able to be open and be myself because I haven't got children. If I was married and if I had children, I think the simplicity which I now suggest... that this crossdressing is... goes away*.' Also for Alex, having the freedom to cross-dress undisturbed is a privilege for him: '*I can largely go about my life dressed in whatever I want, and it isn't a big deal. I'm very lucky*.'

4.7 Summary

Crossdressing has been described by the participants as wearing the clothes of '*the other gender*,' which is different from the gender/ sex assigned at birth. The focus was on the internal and individual aspects of crossdressing and on the observable and social aspects of it. At an individual level, crossdressing is seen as an expression of one's female side, as '*taking comfort from wearing the clothing of the opposite sex*' and as deriving pleasure from this experience. For many participants, crossdressing is an expression of their true selves and an integral part

of their identity. Overall, they have associated crossdressing with inner peace, authenticity, happiness and positivity: '*the most important thing for me is a feeling of inner peace*.' At a social level, crossdressing is about being seen, recognised, treated and/ or referred to as a woman. It is about taking the identity of a woman, performing it and being recognised as such: '*I want everyone else to treat me as a female*.' For some of them, it means wanting to pass as a '*natural*' woman, or simply to be referred to as one.

Compared with being transgender, being a crossdresser brings two elements of differentiation: temporality and frequency. Crossdressing is seen as temporary and reversible, '*made of part-timers*,' while being transgender involves more '*permanent life changes*.' The frequency of crossdressing varied among participants, with many experiencing a gradual increase over time, while others had episodes of stopping and resuming the activity: '*now that the younger son moved back, Grace had to be curtailed*.' Life circumstances, such as family responsibilities and working situations, significantly influenced the frequency and manner of crossdressing for the participants.

Crossdressing is a '*means of expression*' and an extension of who the participants are; it is also an identity or an important part of their gender identity: '*it's just me... that's me*!' The participants view gender as an evolving journey, with some questioning transition or further exploring their preferences in gender expression. Their gender identities ranged from male to non-binary, genderfluid, transgender and 'confused,' with each describing their unique experiences. The female mode and the male mode, however, are experienced separately: *'I can't be both people at the same time*.'

Some participants identify as male, while acknowledging their feminine aspects, and others struggle with the concept of being female, despite expressing and performing femininity: '*I am not really a woman, but I'd say I'm womanly.*' Overall, the participants feel happier, more comfortable and more attractive when they are expressing their femininity, which enhances their confidence and spontaneity in social interactions. Being a man, however, is often associated with social roles and responsibilities towards their families and in the workplace. Their maleness is practical, functional and recognisable to all: '*I am not emotional or romantic, but I am a good dad*.'

The participants have extensively referenced the societal expectations and standards related to gender identity, with examples of how these expectations and standards dictate their behaviour and appearance. *'[The] female is seen as supporting, nurturing, caring... male is seen as assertive, commanding, dominant, competitive, fighting, winning*.' Within our society, public spaces are tightly controlled and dictated by gender norms and stereotypes, but the participants are finding ways to subvert these norms and stereotypes through the use of humour, by attending specific venues, inhabiting particular spaces or adopting recognisable identities: '*you could express the fact you're androgynous as much as you can get away with*.'

The participants' understanding and expression of crossdressing have been influenced by the social attitudes and norms of those times when they were growing up and developing as adults, mostly from the 1960s and 1970s, with changes in language and concepts impacting their identities. The participants have responded to these constant social changes differently, with some feeling comfortable with past gender categories, such as '*tranny*' and '*transvestite*,' and with others adapting to new gender identities, such as '*transgender*' or '*non-binary*.' What it means to be a female has also been influenced by those times: '*being brought up in the 50s and 60s, there was a stereotype and women appearing in a certain way. I think that lodged in the back of my head*.'

In terms of sexuality, 5 self-identified as heterosexual, 2 as bisexual and 1 as gay. Except for one participant, who exclusively dated men, all were with or interested in female partners. Their sense of being sexual potentially changed, but only when they were cross-dressed and only in relation to other men: '*a lot of us actually do see men differently when we are expressing our female side*.' Some participants, however, expressed limited interest in sex altogether, often feeling indifferent or uninterested in sexual activities.

Self-acceptance and ownership are ongoing and complex processes for the participants, with crossdressing becoming a significant part of their identities and lives with time: '*it's taken me a long time to get to this point in life*.' They have expressed feelings of inner peace and identity integration over time. Indeed, society's increasing acceptance and openness towards transgender individuals have positively impacted their self-image and self-acceptance, although social stigma, judgement and prejudice still persist: '*I was terrified that some woman would shout at me in the [restroom] queue*.'

Coming out and being out is crucial for identity formation and expression, providing there are avenues for validation of their crossdressing and self-affirmation. The participants' experiences of coming out vary, with some being fully out to their families, friends and in the workplace, while others staying hidden, in the closet, in certain aspects of their lives: '*I want to mention LGBTQIA+ to the family… but I don't think this is going to happen yet*.' Support from family, children and friends also varies, with some participants finding full acceptance, while others facing limitations due to a lack of support and understanding. Not being accepted for their crossdressing has resulted in various strategies to cross-dress discreetly, which further signifies different levels of openness and visibility. One such strategy is wearing female clothing underneath the everyday male attire or '*using make-up, very subtle mascara*.' Another strategy is passing as a cisgender woman, which is important for their safety and acceptance in public spaces. Passing helps them blend in and avoid attention: '*he does all the talking, people just assume that I am his wife and, you know, nobody seems to drop us or bat an eyelid.*'

The participants have experienced a lack of acceptance in various aspects of their lives, including interpersonal relationships, public spaces and the mental health system. They have experienced difficulties in their relationship with parents, spouses, partners, children and in the workplace, facing stigma, prejudice, insults and abuse. Particularly, they have experienced challenges in navigating heteronormative spaces, such as when using sex-separated restrooms or when shopping for female clothing and accessories. Within the crossdressing community, there is a pervasive sense of fear and anticipation of abuse, although the actual risk of abuse varies. When the abuse happens, it is usually coming from young people, groups of men, women in female restrooms and children: '*beware of the children, because… the little kids, who've got no inhibitions, suspect that you are not a female*.' All participants have reported instances when they experienced stigma, humiliation and judgement, with negative connotations associated with terms such as '*crossdressing*' and '*transvestite*:' '*people still see crossdressing as a sign of failure… a defect in some way… or as a perversion*.' These instances started in their school years and continued well into their adulthood. The lack of acceptance has affected the participants' mental health, leading to struggles with depression, self-hatred, and cycles of shame, guilt and frustration. Shame and guilt were common among participants, often related to their crossdressing identity, their presence in public spaces and the impact of their crossdressing upon their families: '*I still have this issue like I should be ashamed of it*.'

In terms of being, the participants have experienced a lack of space for gender expression at home, leading to secrecy and fear of being caught, with crossdressing often starting after leaving their parental homes. Participants' romantic lives vary, with some married to supportive partners and others facing complications or rejection in dating due to their crossdressing. Fear of rejection and possible interpersonal complications led some participants to postpone sharing their crossdressing with their partners. Those who shared their crossdressing experienced mixed responses, ranging from acceptance to rejection, which impacted their relationships and family dynamics. One particular tension was between crossdressing and parenting, between being a female and performing femininity and being a '*stable*,' '*macho*' male role model for their children: '*the tough dad that would encourage them to do weight training and things like that*.' In relation to their children, 5 out of 8 participants experienced guilt, anguish and self-judgement, some of them dreading the prospect of their children ever finding out about their crossdressing.

The participants had complex relationships with the social world, experiencing judgment, prohibitions and restrictions, but also finding support and community within the larger LGBTQIA+ family. The presence of a community makes their crossdressing activities '*normal*' and '*less lonely*.' Most of the participants were not out at work, maintaining a clear separation between their professional lives and crossdressing, though some expressed a desire to be more daring and open.

When it comes to freedom, this was experienced differently in youth and adulthood. At a young age, freedom was associated with access to female clothing and with privacy to wear them in secret without being caught by parents and extended family: '*I kept my room tidy. I kept myself to myself... and it allowed a certain freedom*.' In their adult age, the participants are pushing to have more freedom in gender expression, with crossdressing being seen as a means of personal freedom in the face of societal norms and expectations: '*I sort of break of my rules about being discreet*.' For many participants, crossdressing in itself is freedom. By means of crossdressing, they feel free to be creative and to do things that they could not do as men.

CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION

In the following section, I will evaluate and discuss the research findings within the context of the existing literature on the subject, particularly existential philosophy and critical gender-queer philosophy and theory. This will help me reach a meaningful and in-depth understanding of the lived experience of crossdressing. To achieve this, I will discuss each of the subordinate themes individually. While it is not my intention to repeat that which has already been discussed in the analysis, I will, however, make reference to all subordinate themes, for a better clarity of argument.

5.1 Super-ordinate Theme 1: From expression to identity through time

Theme I: Crossdressing as expression, meaning and identity.

Crossdressing, defined in its simplest way, refers to being, becoming, imitating and performing the opposite gender which is different from the gender you were assigned at birth. This is the way most of the literature talks about it and closer to how the participants describe it. An important thing to notice about this definition is that it assumes a specific gender system to function and exist at all, which was reinforced linguistically throughout the interviews by putting the male and the female in binary opposition. Some participants, however, resisted naming the binary, as, indeed, I did when I defined crossdressing for the purpose of this research. This raises the question about whether crossdressing can exist outside a binary system of gender, and if so, what it would look like within a different system of gender. These, however, will remain open questions for future research.

From a critical socio-cultural perspective, a way to make sense of crossdressing is to see it as the exception to the rule of the heteronormative gender-sex binary system. In this sense, Garber (1992) sees in crossdressing a '*category crisis*,' referring to '*a failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits border crossing from one (apparently distinct) category to another*' (p.16). The essence of crossdressing seems to be the distinction and the boundary between at least two gender identities, the border of which needs to be crossed. Once a boundary is established between two gender identities, there will always be acts of crossing them. As Garber makes it clear, specific cultural, social and

political contexts are necessary for such acts to produce cross-identities, which brings us back to the literature review on how crossdressing and its history have appeared.

But how does this function in practice? In a sense, crossdressing can be described as a '*gender modulator*,' of some kind (Halberstam, 1988, p.23), that can sometimes subvert or challenge the gender binary system, but also can reinforce and reproduce it. This is the case because any gender-crossing includes and validates the existence of the system it aims to challenge and erode. In other words, crossdressing can function as an exception to queerly subvert and challenge the gender system, but also as an exception that is always already constituent of the rule – i.e., of heteronormativity. Thus, any gender-crossing operates as the very exception that proves the regularity of the M/F binarity (Halberstam, 1988). However, as many trans scholars argue, not every gender-crossing is queerly subversive (see Prosser, 1998; Rubin, 2003; Stryker & Whittle, 2006). This has also been apparent within the interviews, where not all gender-crossing was intended or seen as subversive by the participants.

It is important to note, however, that the norms behind the M/F binary gender-sex categories are not equally matched; they do not apply equally to male-to-female crossdressers and women. A crossdresser individual is expected to perform and do gender in a way that other women are not. Hodshire (2018) reminds us that *'when cisgender women don't shave their legs, that is considered to be feminist, but when transgender women don't shave their legs, their gender is policed'* (p.8). Furthermore, this duality is an unequal one, and feminist-critical voices have highlighted the sexism and the misogyny present within this system against the female component (for an overview, see Dahl, 2015). The female component is defined by what is excluded from the masculine one, not only as *the other* but as the *inferior other* (de Beauvoir, 1997 [1949]). As I have shown in the analysis, for the participants this was apparent in the lack of equality regarding the changes and transgressions allowed under the system. To be more precise, women have claimed many of the clothing articles considered masculine and traditionally 'reserved' for men, but this is not true in reverse. In fact, men claiming clothing traditionally 'reserved' for women (the dress, the skirt, etc.) has been met with social stigma (Edwards, 2016). From this perspective, I suggest that crossdressing may be a reminder that clothing (as many other objects) does not have a 'natural' and implicit gender, and that the act of wearing clothing is as normal as it is banal. The act of veiling the flesh in fabrics is not a transgression; rather, the transgression comes from the meaning attached to the act. As many

participants have pointed out, clothing is just a piece of fabric, and without strict and stable social rules for gender, there might be, in fact, no crossdressing.

To continue within a critical socio-cultural perspective, for all participants, crossdressing is not a solitary and private activity, it is rather intrinsically social. It is very important for them to be seen, recognised, treated and referred to as a woman by others, whether or not they identify as one. This appears to show that gender identities are equally private, intimate and deeply personal, but also subject to cultural, social and political technologies of doing and undoing, transformation and preservation, construction and deconstruction. Crossdressing, as Tseëlon tells us, is 'a *vehicle for constructing and deconstructing identities'* (2001, p.103). If this is the case, crossdressing enables us to see how masculinity and femininity are constructed as 'authentic' and 'real,' as stable and constant identities that can be recognisable and recognised socially. If crossdressing arouses social disapproval, it may be because it forces one to realise that real/natural masculinity and real/natural femininity do not exist, forcing us to look deeper into the uncertainty and randomness underneath our social and cultural structures.

Moving on from the socio-cultural lens to the intersection between the personal and the public, crossdressing can also be seen as an assemblage of components that are both one's own and not one's own. Wittig, for example, quotes the French polymath Pierre Beaumarchais as saying: '*who is this me I'm concerned with, but a shapeless assemblage of unknown parts*' (1996, p.109). Equally, all participants in this study are developing, in their different ways, their own (and at the same time not their own) female/feminine assemblages. Their body is like a '*microlandscape*' (Gellner, 2009), a place for creativity, hesitation and experimentation, a place where knowledge is produced. This highlights the body's plasticity and potentiality, as well as the myriad of possible prosthetic/non-prosthetic modifications of its contours and identities (Haraway, 1991; Preciado, 2018 [2000]). For a crossdresser, this can refer to the use of wigs, fake breasts, breast forms, corsets, tucking, lashes, nail extensions, hip pads, etc. On this note, crossdressing can be a way of '*becoming minoritarian*' (Braidotti, 2004), in the sense of entering the social and political space inhabited by the female other. We can also see crossdressing as a way to confront gender. For Leguil (2016), this means to '*confront strangeness in oneself*' (p.59), or in other words, to become the other. Similarly, for Cixous

(2010), confronting gender means a non-exclusionary '*self-permission*' to manifest the always already female presence within oneself together with the masculine one.

Lastly, when thinking about crossdressing, there is a clear focus on the observable external behaviour. Crossdressing starts by being a practice, and then the behaviour becomes a category and an identity for certain people. The visible has been the starting point for the participants and, for them, observable components include accessories, make-up, gestures, postures, behaviours and the act of dressing up. It is equally important to reflect upon what crossdressing means for someone, and to also focus on their *being-in-the-world*. Emerging from the interviews, crossdressing is about expression, desire, comfort, emotion, authenticity, meaning, identity and freedom. Crossdressing is also associated with values such as inner peace, authenticity, openness, happiness, honesty and positivity. As such, it becomes a mobile for self-discovery, imagination and creativity, enlarging your world and finding things about yourself that you were previously unaware of. Crossdressing becomes a way to enjoy yourself, to relax, to connect with yourself or simply to escape your daily existence. Therefore, I argue that it becomes a meaningful and particular way of being, with yourself and with your body.

Theme II: Gender as an open journey.

One cannot start any discussion about crossdressing without implicitly talking about gender, as for many participants, crossdressing has been a label for gender identity and expression. By discussing crossdressing, they also describe how gender is thought of and how gender gets done and undone within their social context. Reflecting on this, there seem to be many ways of doing and understanding gender which coexist within their discourses, as there is tension, incompatibility and paradoxes between them. Returning to the literature review, Siann (1994) describes three major paradigms to our understanding of gender and sexuality: *essentialist, socialisation* and *structuralist*, which seem to also trace how the participants describe it.

One first approach identified in the interviews starts from the assumption that our gender fits into two distinct, opposite gender categories which are fairly distinguishable, fixed and stable throughout our lives: male/female, masculine/feminine. This would correspond to the *essentialist* paradigm which incorporates medical biological determinism alongside the assumption that gender identity categories reflect innate characteristics of the human condition.

In a heteronormative and binary system, like the one that is prevalent within Western culture and society (Distiller, 2022), these two gender categories are almost taken for granted as normal, natural and implicit, as the default, assuming the presence of a biologically determined gender-sex and sexual desire (Marinucci, 2010). On similar theoretical grounds, there are psychoanalytic and psychodynamic concepts (Chodorow, 1978; Fenichel, 1930; Lentz, 2004; Leuzinger-Bohleber, 2009) which reference a different type of knowledge but has the same effect of complementing and reinforcing the essentialist paradigm from above. This would correspond to the *socialisation paradigm* which explains gender through the ways children learn from their parents about the social expectations and behaviours associated with each gender (Kerchove, 2001). This is the second approach identified in the interviews. Indeed, some participants made references to crossdressing as being connected to having an emotionally distant mother or an emotionally abusive and distant father; or as failing to resolve the Oedipal conflict in the expected manner (i.e., by identifying with the father and desiring the mother) towards both identifying and desiring the mother. This way of thinking about gender comes very close to the *essentialist paradigm* as it depends on a heteronormative epistemology of the human body – in other words, it depends on a binary anatomical cartography of the body in which men should internalise and identify with masculinity, and women should internalise and identify with femininity.

How does all of this function in our society? According to the participants, gender functions through the ways in which society regulates and dictates gender norms and the boundaries between them. As discussed above, the boundary between genders is very important for the act of crossdressing. The more distinct and stable these gender-sex categories are, the stricter the boundary is. And yet, this has been so strict, within both the essentialist and socialisation paradigms, that anything outside of these mutually exclusive possibilities has only been seen as unnatural, pathological and disabled (Preciado, 2018 [2000]). However, following Bonnie and Vern Bullough (1993), the strictness of the boundary may not necessarily depend on one's gender but on our need for certainty and clarity, grounding and definition, at any given time in a society. The authors talk about crossdressing being allowed at moments when social norms can be safely relaxed, such as holidays, festivals and important moments in one's life (e.g., weddings). This is further explained by Girard (2001 [1972]) as having to do with the change of any outbreak of uncertainty and human undifferentiation into certainty, in order to avoid social anxiety, tension and violence. Any outbreak is regularly changed into certainty

through constant repetitive operations and patterns of success, as well as through the repetition of norms, codes and scripts socially vested as natural and divine. These norms and scripts are often integrated into myths and symbolic representations as conveyed through rites. From this perspective, it would seem that gender itself can be such a myth and a rite to avoid human undifferentiation which may cause anxiety and violence if left unchecked. In this sense, some participants have experienced and observed that there seems to be a constant need for society to put people in narrow boxes of gender. This also means that, with time, we internalise these norms, as they end up becoming gender stereotypes, but also how to feel when respecting or not respecting them, which becomes an integral part of who we are. One becomes aware of these norms and exclusions from a very young age, particularly within one's bounded family space, as there are pressures to respect them, penalties for breaking them and rewards for conforming to them.

On the other hand, gender norms function through the gendering of objects, things and spaces (Pettinger, 2005). Among many examples from the interviews, the clothing store is such a regulated and institutionalised space where definitions of femininity and masculinity are constructed and reconstructed according to strong binary gender norms and the exclusion these produce. As Rocha et al. (2021) have shown, in this retail space, store owners and employees often serve as the overseers of social exclusion. We can find similar regulatory controls of space for crossdressers, and other non-normative gender individuals, in public toilets, hairdressers, locker rooms, prisons, hospitals and nursing homes (Alpert et al., 2021; Doan, 2010; Edney, 2004; White & Jenkins, 2017).

The third and final approach identified in the interviews moves beyond a binarity of identities towards an understanding of gender as a cultural, social and political construct that the individual manifests through the repetition of performative acts in both time and space. This refers to a *structuralist* way of understanding which argues that gender, sex and sexuality are not independent truths but part of their contextual history and their social, cultural and political settings (Butler, 1990, 1997). This view mirrors Sartre's idea that '*existence precedes essence*,' in suggesting that identity cannot be found in human nature or predetermination. Gender is, then, '*what is done, rather than who one is*' (Spinelli, 2014, p.32). With this approach, it becomes possible to talk about a variety of gender identities and narratives as being open and evolving, fluid and in-becoming, always in constant formation and always subject to

revision (Butler, 1990; Jagose, 1996; Halperin, 1990). This perspective is reflected by the participants in this study when they are describing their active and ongoing process of reflection and questioning of their gender identity, a process which is left open and which may never stop.

Within this perspective, our gendered self is outside ourselves. As Butler argues, *'what I call my own gender appears perhaps at times as something that I author or, indeed, own; but the terms that make up one's gender are, from the start, outside oneself, beyond oneself in a sociality that has no single author'* (1990, p.1). Gender, then, seems to be crafted through learning, imitation and appropriation, by desiring discourse fragments, symbols, images, meanings and myths which are available for us in our social context. Desire, in this sense, is facilitated by another who gives value to objects and things, especially when, naturally, individuals '*desire intensely, but they don't know exactly what they desire, for no instinct guides them*' (Girard, 2001 [1972], p.15). In existential terms, one is always one's desire, one's possibilities, one's choices, rather than a pure in-itself, an actual entity. As Sartre writes, *'the most individual way of being is solely the interiorisation and enrichment of a social possible'* (1958 [1957], p.97). However, these social possibles, like gender and sexuality, are themselves dictated by whatever discourse is dominant within our society, in our case by heteronormativity and the male gaze (Nun & Biressi, 2003; Walkerdine, 1989). On this note, many participants seem to model their physical appearance in a way that aligns with the body attributes of the social constructs of femininity as exhibited by the archetypal cisgender woman, a woman who is accepted and recognised as 'proper' and 'beautiful' by society. Like the biological woman, the crossdresser is constituent of the heteronormative M/F matrix, and thus both are compelled to cite female gendered norms in order to qualify for personhood in a society. Following Butler (1990, 1997), this means that the crossdresser does not exist because they are recognised, but because they are recognisable by the Other as being one. This act of recognisability, however, subjects the crossdresser's body to repeated temporary stylisations by means of clothing, make-up and wigs, as well as gestures, movements and acts, that over time produce, or should produce, the appearance of a 'natural' feminine look. This 'natural' look is very important for the participants. Not adhering to this, or choosing other types of femininity, may come with further layers of staring at, shaming, humiliation and abuse, on top of those that come with being a crossdresser. The crossdressing body, then, becomes, what Sartre (2004 [1940]) calls, an *analogon*, a mental image based on an ideal of femininity that is visible in public life and it

is utilised, accepted and known by the heteronormative Other. As Stone (1962) explains, the knowing of the other's gender is primarily a silent knowing, established by one's appearance. In his words, '*as the self is dressed, it is simultaneously addressed*' (p.83). This very silence seems critical for the participants in this study who want to pass and whose ideal selves are established by and through a successful gender appearance.

Theme III: New and old ways of being sexual.

Compared to gender identity, there has been less fluidity, multiplicity and variability in terms of sexuality for the participants. Overall, sexuality has been experienced by them as something more akin to a given, something they may struggle to accept, express or make sense of, but clearly something impossible to suppress. In other words, their experience of sexuality and of their sexual body has been different compared to how they relate to gender and their gendered body. Interestingly, while there were descriptions of them seeing men differently while being cross-dressed, and while they imagined themselves being with men romantically and/or sexually as part of their crossdressing identity, there was no reported change in being sexual with women. Crossdressing sexuality does not seem to change in the same way as trans sexuality might change when individuals undertake their transitions. For example, 64% of trans feminine individuals in one US study (Katz-Wise et al., 2015), and 43% in an earlier study (Lawrence, 2005), reported significant shifts in their sexual orientation, while 14% completely switched from exclusive attraction to women to exclusive attraction to men (see also Doorduin & Van Berlo, 2014). Equally important, people who engage in crossdressing can have any sexuality, as evidenced by the participants and the literature on crossdressing and trans individuals (Barrett, 2007; Stryker, 2008). It is worth noting that this also includes people who, for different reasons, may not be interested in being sexual and/or intimate with other people at all – as it is indeed the case for three participants in this study.

One area where sexuality and crossdressing converge is on the issue of fetishism. The word 'fetishism' comes from the French writer Charles de Brosses and his work on native Africans' religious worship of different material objects believed to have supernatural powers (2017 [1760]). From a psychoanalytic perspective, fetishism is '*the force of magical thinking that suture together subject and object via the discourse of needs*' (Morris & Leonard, 2017, p.185). Freud's account places male fetishism in a traumatic experience of sexual difference,

in that moment when the male child takes the last object he saw before seeing his mother's genitalia and castration. According to Bersani and Dutoit (1985), this account points to desire's fundamental *mobility* and *resistance* to conventional desiring patterns. The male child is so traumatised by the event that his desire is cut off from objects that are normatively desired (i.e., the genitals) and moves on to other objects (i.e., a piece of clothing) that are not usually invested with sexual desire. Through fetishism, then, desire is centred on the discovery of new, unwanted and unconventional objects of desire that lie outside normative gender-sex categories and frameworks. Needless to say, such non-normative objects of desire have had, like crossdressing, a similar history of pathology and lack of acceptance, both within a psychoanalytic framework as *perversions* and within mainstream psychiatry as *paraphilias*. On this point, Rubin (2007) explains that certain sexual expressions are made more valuable than others. From her analysis, if marriage, reproduction and love are not involved, almost all sexual behaviour is considered bad. Because of this, fetishism has been considered inferior to other sexual practices and it has often been de-classified in favour of others. Other authors would say that, as a result of heterosexism, any non-normative type of sexual attraction struggles to gain acceptance within the social spaces of the majority of Western cultures (Lenihan et al., 2015). For some participants, the fetishism surrounding crossdressing has also been seen negatively, as a *perversion*, which made things even more difficult for them to accept. From a different perspective, emphasising the positive aspects of it, the fetishist is '*a hero of uncertain desire, of undecidability*' (Bersani & Dutoit 1985, p.72) – a queer hero of some kind who, by its own existence, dismantles the hierarchies and expectations built into our sexual and erotic relationships (see also Bersani, 1995, 2009). This is said on the background of the ability of the person who engages in fetishism to maintain some degree of agency and individuality over their own desire and, thus, be able to continuously seek out new objects of desire.

Within the interviews, fetishism appears to reunite many types of experiences, which may have different meanings. Half of the participants talked about having a secretive fetishistic sexual interest. This was mostly present in the first part of their lives (youth), and it became less prevalent as crossdressing became accepted as a gender identity. Yet overall, all participants described their interest in female clothing and underwear as objects of desire. This may include using the objects in a sexual way or wearing them or both. The object of desire may also be displaced on another person, an 'external love-object' of some kind (Grosz, 2001),

wearing the object. As an example, two participants stopped wearing female clothing and underwear at some point, but enjoyed seeing their female partners wearing what they would have liked to wear, but felt they could not. Once crossdressing was more accepted, however, they started wearing them and, in some cases, they, as females, became the object of their desire. As some scholars argue, with acceptance the sexual, fetishistic urge fades away, but the desire to continue to cross-dress remains (Buhrich, 1978; Gallo, 2016; Newring & Draper, 2008).

Another area where sexuality and crossdressing converge is on the issue of homosexuality. For Lenihan et al. (2015), this is described as sexuality and gender collapsing into each other. In short, it relates to the fact that some participants have been considered 'gay' due to their gender expression. This is a reference to the connection between homosexuality and crossdressing, a longstanding association that continues from medieval times to the present day (for an overview, see Bristow, 1997). Within the interviews, some participants described fearing and questioning that they might have been 'gay' or being considered as such by others. According to Bourdieu (2001 [1998]), in the unconscious of our societies, the feminine man is a homosexual, while homosexuality is filed under femininity and effeminacy. In other words, the front is noble and masculine, while the back is shameful and feminine. This is based not only on homophobia but also on the social subjectivation and 'inferiority' of women. The male homosexual and the woman, Bourdieu notes, *'are separated from men by a negative symbolic coefficient'* (2001 [1998], p.93), they are always in an inferior symbolic situation within their social, cultural and political '*habitus*,' or space. Overall, then, there seems to be stigma for fetishistic interests and for being or appearing 'gay' as a male-to-female crossdresser. Equally, as one participant remarked, there may also be stigma for having a romantic relationship with a trans feminine person as a gay man.

Reflecting further on the issue of sexuality and crossdressing, one question remains: Can socially accepted crossdressing still be sexual? For the participants, the felt social stigma from sexuality came to haunt their crossdressing. There are many negative connotations and stigma associated with crossdressing that are coming from previous prejudices around sexuality. The forbidden/perverted and the shameful in sexual attraction may add further stigma to crossdressing. As one participant pointed out, crossdressing is associated with perverted sexuality and frivolous sexuality, often in a derogatory way and as a judgement on certain

sexual behaviours and practices. This brings to the front the idea that, in a way, one is not allowed the freedom of sexual expression, to own their sexuality or to use it (Preciado, 2018 [2000]). In terms of crossdressing, there is a history of vulnerability in rapport with sexuality. As discussed in the literature review, starting with the 1960s in the US, and particularly with the activism of Virginia Prince, the sexuality of the male crossdresser has been sanitised from any sexual practice that is not heteronormative, while those who diverged from the norm were altogether excluded from any cultural form of 'organised' and 'respectable' crossdressing. Through the exclusion of sex and sex work, masochism, bondage, sadism, homosexuality and fetishism, a normative *transvestite consciousness* has been formed throughout the years (Bullough & Bullough, 1993), one that may still persist in our society. Finally, it is worth pointing out that as people may have multiple gender expressions, they may also have multiple sexual interests which may interact with their gender expressions, or they may not, and that not all sexuality has to be gendered, genital or phallocentric.

Theme IV: Time brings it all together

Within the analysis, time has been expressed in a chronological and linear manner, particularly when important memories associated with crossdressing have been recollected. From an existential point of view, according to Laing (1960) and Spinelli (1994), the past is not a causal determinant of the being's present self-construct – as a transvestite, homosexual or any-kind-of-sexual, for example – but a selective interpretative construct intended to validate or support a being's present self-construct. As such, time has been expressed by making references to a specific age, developmental stage, education, holidays, years or time periods. For Laing (1964), we are attaching ourselves to periods of time (e.g., youth), entities (e.g., name, profession, personality) and random events in our life which provide us with a sense of *'permanency,'* of things being part of our *'nature.'* As such, we are longing for a past to rely on and to determine who we are and what we should do. This may bring us a sense of *'continuity in time and a location in space'* (Laing, 1960, p.41). Indeed, there was tension in the interviews, between the changing and evolving nature of crossdressing and the elements that remain the same to provide a sense of continuity.

Secondly, from the analysis it became apparent that identity needs time to synthesise as a narrative and that it may rely on the language and the concepts available in one's time.

Concepts which, in the case of gender and sexuality at least, have changed repeatedly over the course of the participants' life. One way to make sense of this is to refer to Groth's (1996) idea that our *lived time* can be so dramatically different from our *lived body* that we may not know what time the world is. While we have access to the body we have and to our lived time, we do not have access to our existential body or the lived body. For this very reason, it can take one years to fully grasp what has changed and what time they are. We can indeed accept the new world, or we can refuse the changed world. This raises profound questions about our passing through time. How, for example, do we adapt our identities and meanings as the norms and connotations around us change? What do we do with what we have interiorised and has, in a way, become part of us?

Returning to the participants, there were many references to eras when they were growing up and developing as young adults, eras that are no longer present. It seems that they formed parts of their identities with concepts, symbols, meanings, images and myths that are no longer present or understood by others in the same way anymore. Whether we are talking about the fashion of the 1960s or how gender was seen in a specific time, many gender categories have long been forgotten. For example, a non-normative gender and/or sexual individual from the 1970s and 1980s would most likely have learned about their difference through the force of insults such as 'tranny,' 'faggot,' 'dyke,' 'poofter,' etc., which were available at that time. According to Butler (1993, 1997), these insults worked because there was an underlying discursive system that gave the *Other* power over them, the power to hurt them, the power to interpellate them as *subjects.* Even though the status quo around gender-sex normativity has not really changed, the way one is recognisable today seems to have changed. The linguistic and discursive features associated with a stigmatised group have, in part, changed. Following Adorno (1981 [1962]), this refers to a bygone past in the process of dying, ready to be 'museumised,' describing '*objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship*' (p.175). For Adorno, and equally for Halbwachs (1980 [1950]) and Turner (1995), time is not only an individual experience but a social experience as well. In a way, our memories of the past are '*dependent on a social network of shared experiences which are reinforced, changed or lost*' (Turner, 1995, p.256), particularly through the interaction with younger generations both present and the yet-to-come. In a society of rapid change, nostalgia permits older individuals to yearn for familiarity and continuity with their own past. It could

also be nostalgia when some participants prefer the label 'transvestite' instead of 'crossdresser' and 'homosexual' instead of 'gay.'

Still, nostalgia is one way of understanding the use of the past. According to Freeman (2010), crossdressing that uses old references might be like a '*temporal drag*,' a bringing of the past into the present. She describes it as '*a practice of archiving culture's throwaway objects, including the outdated masculinities and femininities from which usable pasts may be extracted*' (preface, xxiii). When dressed in female clothing, the crossdresser tells not only the contemporary story of their own female gender, but also a prior story of gender, a story about a long-forgotten form of gender – for example, the story of how women used to be when the participants were growing up. Love (2007), coming from a Freudian perspective, explains that the subject might relive a past that they could not live at the time; in other words, they may re-enact events that they could not give any meaning to when they were young. In the case of the participants, this may be a drag back towards the queer-crossdresser child/teenager that they were not allowed to be.

Lastly, reflecting on the nature of time for the crossdresser, it can be said that not only gender and sexuality seem to be culturally and socially constructed, but time as well. Queer Theory's work on time seeks to replace our reliance on logics of chronology and repetition with logics of anachronisms – that is, of time accidents, latencies and contaminations – which are not regulated by the dominant heteronormative life experience and expectations: such as birth, relationship, marriage, production, reproduction, consumption and death (Dinshaw, 2007; Edelman, 2004; Freeman, 2010). For Freeman (2010), as well as for Bourdieu (1977 [1972]) and Zerubavel (1981), belonging is a matter of timing, of inhabiting and managing a society's cultural norms *'about the temporal lapses between getting and giving such that they seem inborn'* (p.4). On this note, it is only through the embrace of culturally and socioeconomically enforced hetero-time rhythms that the individual may feel like a legible, acceptable embodiment. However, the time of the participants when they are cross-dressed was, at the moment of the interview, a time that is outside the heterotemporality of the family life. It is a time found on the edges of labour, production and reproduction. This may explain why the participants seem to experience time differently between their male and female identities. While the male identity is orientated towards meeting others' expectations, being and presenting as a woman is about the activity itself, an activity that takes place at a tempo

that it is out of step with the forward-movement and future-facing of family life. Indeed, as Brintnall et al. (2018) argue, the pauses and the interruptions in the routinised time sequence of everyday life are often the way in which gender and/or sexual dissidents experience time.

5.2 Super-ordinate Theme 2: Milestones in acceptance and ownership

Theme V: The road from acceptance to ownership

The concept of acceptance can have many meanings, but when it refers to a minority, it means *'the process or fact of being received as adequate, valid, or suitable'* (Collins Dictionary). Within the literature on gender and sexual minorities this often comes across as *self-acceptance* and *social acceptance*. Self-acceptance appears remarkably close to ownership, perhaps self-acceptance may be seen as the first step into owning who you are. Maslow (1970 [1943]) mentions *'acceptance of the self'* as a component of '*self-actualisation*,' of becoming more and more who one fundamentally is. Still, both self-acceptance and ownership could be said to represent the building blocks of identity formation, of an ongoing and complex journey of becoming (Pierce et al., 2003). Within the analysis, for all the participants there was a positive trend of crossdressing becoming a larger, more significant part of their identities and lives with time. This seems to support previous studies about crossdressing where it has been described as a progressive developmental phenomenon which includes different activities that may occur in phases over a lifetime towards living more and more as a woman (Benjamin, 1967; Docter, 1988; Prince, 1976).

Reflecting on the concept of self-acceptance, it seems that it is shared, visible and, to a degree, a social process. As Eribon argues, *'individual subjectivity is always collective'* (2004 [2000], p.xvii). For this reason, self-acceptance becomes difficult, almost alienating, in isolation, loneliness and secrecy. According to Rogers (1961), self-acceptance is frustrated by a behaviour in which individuals try to pursue values which will bring social approval, affection and esteem. Once you feel some inner relief at solving the puzzle of your gender identity, you suddenly discover that you are part of a socially stigmatised group which may be required and obliged to remain discreet (Hanley-Hackenbruck, 1988). This duality has resulted in the creation of parallel, secret spaces and worlds where the participants performed, and some are still performing, their desired cross-gender identity.

We can overall say that self-acceptance is at odds with being born in a time when crossdressing is not acceptable, which has been the case with the participants in this study. In this case, you are denied the opportunity to experience yourself in certain ways, either by yourself or with others. Studies show that there is a link between the degree of social acceptance and self-acceptance (Anthony et al., 2007; Leary & Downs, 1995; McGuire et al., 2016). For the participants, being children and teenagers meant having no space, resources and acceptance for their gender and/or sexual expressions. Thus, their self-acceptance required things to be first normalised, to become a habit, to feel 'normal' and 'ordinary' rather than extraordinary and transgressive. It requires time, space, resources (access to the internet, for example) and freedom for it to happen. There is, indeed, a risk of ending up being solely defined by others, with no expression of yourself and your needs. On the other hand, there is the need of feeling that you belong, that you are accepted, or at least tolerated, and that you have a right to be in a space among others. This captures the irreconcilable dilemma at the heart of being a part of a gender/sexual minority, as expressed within the interviews.

Moving on from self-acceptance to social acceptance, it seems that things have improved gradually over the past decades, when it comes to crossdressing and trans issues. Milestones in this sense include the legalisation of homosexuality in 1967, the implementation of the *Gender Recognition Act* in 2004 and the exclusion of crossdressing from ICD-11 in 2018. Here is where the impact of visibility of the LGBTQIA+ community becomes crucial; the positive impact of seeing other people coming out and being out, and expressing their identities (Billard, 2022). As one participant pointed out, the more visible something is, the more normalised it is. The majority of the participants felt that today's young transgenders are more knowledgeable than ever before, and that they do not just have to wait for better times to come. Online communication, for example, makes it easier for the participants to contact their peers, to post informational enquiries about their journeys or to maybe experiment with their gender/sexual identities; to discover, first and foremost, that there are others in the world just like them (Cavalcante, 2016).

Theme VI: Queer milestones: Coming out and Being out

As said above, only cisgender and heterosexual ways of being have been considered 'natural' and 'normal.' One is assumed as such from birth, unless they proved to be otherwise (Butler, 2004). For the LGBTQIA+ community, this has created a new language surrounding how one accepts, communicates and expresses their difference in terms of their gender/sexual identity and expression. This is how concepts such as coming out, being out or, the opposite, being in the closet or being closeted have appeared (Namaste, 1994; Thoits, 1992). Coming out describes a transformative process of self-affirmation, of recognising and accepting one's difference by sharing or divulging this difference to self, others and community (Plummer, 1995). This sharing, however, is not only made through one's shared speech act. One could also come out in silence, by wearing nail polish or leaving a magazine lying around, or could be outed by someone else's speech act (Eribon, 2004 [2000]). Returning to the participants, both coming out and being out have been important elements in the process of forming and expressing their identities. These have been associated with openness, validation, normalisation, confidence, honesty and, as one participant said, with making *'the world a better place.'* This stands in similarity to early scholarly investigations on the positive effects of coming out for crossdressers and transgender individuals (Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2019; Eliason & Schope, 2007; Gagne et al., 1997; Levitt & Ippolito, 2014). Moreover, being referred to as a woman by others and being out in the open, surrounded by people with whom they can share their crossdressing, are two aspects highly desired and valued. Here, the coming out story seems to be, as Ahmed (2006) argues, a *coming to* story, a story of *'arriving near other bodies, as a contact that makes a story and opens up other ways of facing the world'* (p.105).

From an existential perspective, coming out is a personal act, an act that mirrors Sartre's (1963) idea of *'original choice'* – the choice that an individual can make of themselves and their life at a particular moment. This is a choice which, in part, involves an individual's whole future. As Sartre argues, in the '*fatal instant*' of the act, '*one is still what one is going to cease to be and already what one is going to become. One lives one's death, one dies one's life. One feels oneself to be one's own self and another'* (p.2). Yet, the act of coming out also hints at the sexual-gender power structures which *'precede and condition any decision we might make about it, insulting us from the start, as it were, by prior power'* (Butler, 1997, p.6). After all, the closet out of which one *comes out* is a heteronormative space that keeps marginalised

identities under the norm of patriarchy and its insistence on normalcy and homogenisation (Sedgwick, 1990). For some scholars, then, the emergence of the crossdresser *out of the closet* might equally, and paradoxically, be accompanied by its disappearance *inside the closet* (Namaste, 1994; van der Berg, 2016). One is out and visible as a crossdresser only if there are other crossdressers who are inside and silent. Equally, one is out only if they place themselves inside dominant and accepted definitions of gender and sexuality (Fuss, 1991; Namaste, 1994; Sedgwick, 1990). While there is, indeed, an impossibility to situate oneself outside the dominant discourses of power, one can nonetheless propose '*a new relational right*' that could '*enrich their lives by changing their own schema of relations*' (Foucault, 1997, p.160). In this sense, coming out can increase distancing in some friendships but closeness in others, while being out may open new creative and artistic ways of being and expressing yourself.

Reflecting on being out or in the closet, it seems that each one of the participants is navigating a complex map of temporalities, spaces and people with different degrees of visibility, social acceptance and self-acceptance. According to Eribon (2004 [2000]), the choice to be yourself comes with new and fragmented temporalities and spaces – the temporality and the space of one's family, of one's friendships, of one's workplace, and so on. One can come out in one space and temporality but not in another. One space is an aid, another is an impediment, in one space I feel safe, in another I feel threatened. The decision to come out could then reappear in one's every new situation in life – when seeing a new doctor, for example, or when being admitted to a care home. In a heteronormative culture that reproduces itself every day, non-normative gender individuals come out not once but repeatedly to anyone who will presume their identity (Brintnall et al., 2018). For the participants, coming out is not a definitive, one and for all act, it is not done only once; rather, it is the beginning of an interminable process and analysis. As Eribon writes, '*doubtless there is no [individual] so open that he or she has not, at one moment or another, made compromises with the closet*' (p.113). In other words, all participants constantly navigate and negotiate, in their different ways, between their need for expression and their fear of prejudice and discrimination, between their need for self-affirmation and their anxiety about other people's ability to cope with their crossdressing identity.

Theme VII: Levels of openness, acceptance and visibility

Following up on the ideas discussed in the previous theme, coming out and being out come with different sets of rules for different fragmented contexts which can exist simultaneously. These coexisting degrees of visibility, acceptance and ownership create, in turn, different strategies and behaviours to come out (e.g., keeping yourself safe and taking your time), as well as different types of crossdressing, of being out. On one hand, any form of increased visibility in the public sphere is making crossdressing more accepted and acceptable for the participants. This is the case because social life itself entertains, as Brighenti (2017) points out, a special relationship with presence, luminosity and visibility, while visibility, in turn, is strongly connected with identity recognition. Not accepting and not being accepted for their crossdressing has, on the other hand, different effects. Taylor (1994) argues that social misrecognition '*can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted and reduced mode of being*' (p.25) – a mode of being which, I add, often finds its state in invisibility. For the participants, the lack of acceptance has resulted in numerous survival strategies and constant alternations between the visible and the invisible to help them express that which may appear to be socially forbidden. As resulted from the analysis, these strategies can go from minimising the importance of crossdressing in one's everyday life to passing and blending in with the female other; from doing/performing crossdressing underneath the more visible masculine clothing to doing/performing it under a different and more accepted label – that is, instead of being a crossdresser, one may be like an androgynous musician or an eccentric artist.

For the participants, the importance of their crossdressing seems to change with the context and the space in which they find themselves. Overall, crossdressing is highly important when it comes to their own happiness, creativity, expression, authenticity and freedom. It is also important if it takes as its object of reference society, their place in society and their relationships with the unknown other in quotidian situations. To be recognised by the other as a woman, at least temporally, is vital for their sense of self. However, when it comes to the participants' sense of normative duty and responsibility towards their spouses, children and/or co-workers, the importance of crossdressing is all too often minimised at the expense of some 'bigger' and more important problems in life.

Many participants in this study place particular emphasis on being read by society as a 'real' and 'natural' woman within well-established heteronormative constructions of the feminine. They seem to want to (re)produce a familiar feminine appearance while avoiding the negative repercussions of appearing strange, unfamiliar and excessive. To realise this, the accent falls on passing and blending in with the female other. But this comes with tension as well. If passing means not only one's ability to be read and interpellated as the gender of one's experience, but also the act of '*becoming unnoticeable and unremarkable'* as well (Cromwell, 1999, p.39; see also Allen, 2014), it may well be that the successful passing or blending in of a crossdresser may largely render their crossdressing identity invisible. Green (1991) finds in this a *visibility dilemma*, where not only society forces the crossdresser individual to pass, but one's invisibility as a crossdresser is directly proportional to one's successful passing as a woman. In order to be successful as a woman, then, the crossdresser is, in fact, not supposed to be visible at all. Referring to trans people in general, van der Wal (2016) points out that '*the livelihoods and relationships of many trans men and women depend on maintaining the secret of their trans status*' (p.52). On this note, being read and interpellated as a crossdresser may imply to some of the participants that they have failed to be a woman, and that they are 'just a man in a dress;' in other words, someone to be looked at, talked about and perhaps stigmatised. As Namaste (2000) rightly observes, not being able to pass can result in harassment, assault, violence and discrimination. However, passing requires a tremendous amount of care and effort for the individual to keep their crossdressing difficulty-free. Being close to people, for example, is dangerous for a crossdresser. As one participant pointed out, the mirage of passing only works if one is seen from a distance and, in some cases, is not speaking, as their voice would give them away. Passing, then, comes with continuous processes of concealment and lack of acceptance, especially when the result is not the one desired (i.e., presenting as a natural female).

5.3 Super-ordinate Theme 3: Tension, anxiety and struggle

Theme VIII: When expression is not an option

The findings of the current study suggest that experiencing lack of acceptance about crossdressing has been a common and pervasive theme in the stories of all participants during the course of their lives, as all have described past difficulties, current issues, but also fears and

concerns about their future. This lack of acceptance has been expressed in a multitude of contexts and to different degrees, from very subtle indirect evidence of it to outright social discrimination and abuse. There are notable differences in terms of duration, frequency and intensity, as well as in the way it has impacted the participants or the way they have responded in these situations. Yet overall, all participants have encountered difficulties in their interpersonal relationships with parents, spouses, prospective partners, children and/or in the workplace; and they have also been subjected, to different degrees, to familial rejection, identity invalidation (e.g., misgendering), stigma, abuse, social harassment, humiliation, ridicule or psychological distress, at some point in their lives.

The lack of social acceptance of trans people has been conceptualised by Hill and Willoughby (2005) as *transphobia*, *gender bashing* and *genderism*. Transphobia is described as an act of disgust, fear, hatred, disbelief and/or mistrust towards those who do not conform to society's gender-sex norms and expectations. Gender bashing, in turn, refers to the violent assault, abuse and harassment of gender nonconforming people, while genderism refers to the ideology that underpins the rejection of gender nonconformism. It is worth mentioning that these are meditated not only by differences in gender, but also by differences in class, race, faith, dis(ability) and sexuality (Crenshaw, 1991).

There are a multitude of studies and reports about the alarming levels of transphobia people might be subjected to on a daily basis. For example, a 2021 survey by TransActual in the UK found that 85% of trans people have experienced transphobia from family members, 73% from colleagues at work and 72% when trying to access goods and public services. In an earlier study, Krell (2017) highlights that trans women experience heightened levels of transphobia in comparison to trans men, mainly because of the difficulties in resisting a hierarchical binary that places men/masculinity at the top and devalues women/femininity. Other scholars have used the concept of *trans negativity* to account for the overall negative beliefs and behaviours towards individuals who are perceived correctly, or incorrectly, as trans (Morrison et al., 2018). In a 2015 study by Bauer and Scheim, 96% of the participants reported overhearing family members, friends and strangers alike, saying that they are not 'normal.' Within the present research, many participants have said that crossdressing is still perceived by many around them as a sign of social and personal failure, a pathological condition, a defect and a perversion. Living in such a climate of lack of acceptance comes with fear, anxiety and

tenseness around trans-related issues, both inside the community and outside of it. There is a perceived lack of freedom and limitation to be oneself, to express oneself and to be open about oneself, while there is significant effort invested in keeping oneself safe and protected from abuse. For example, at least two in five transgender people adjust their clothing and the way they present themselves because they fear abuse, discrimination and harassment (Trans Report, 2017).

Some participants in this study have raised concerns about accessing medical services, especially in the future, as they age and retire. They were worried about not being able to express their gender identities while being in hospitals and care homes. This is echoed in another TransActual survey (2021), where 45% of trans people reported that the healthcare staff did not have a good understanding of their specific health needs, in the year prior to the survey. Other participants have highlighted public toilets and shops as spaces where they may not feel safe. As documented by a growing number of scholars, trans people and crossdressers experience toilet inaccessibility, harassment and violence for allegedly using the 'wrong' toilet (Jones & Slate, 2020; Patel, 2017; Cavanagh, 2010). The 'wrong' toilet statement is positioned within a historically and culturally specific gender power structure. In the UK, the first public toilets for women were installed only 40 years after those for men, in 1891 for women and 1851 for men. At the time, the lack of toilet access for women was grounded in the idea that a woman's place was the home, rearing the children (see Kogan, 2007). For many feminists, then, today's toilets for women is a hard-won social and political occupation of public space, a symbol of progress, unity, solidarity and safety within a male-orientated public sphere (Greed, 2010; Ramster et al., 2019). Some feminists would even argue that trans women are 'male-bodied transgenders' who, if allowed to use female-only toilets, may sexually assault and rape women (Jeffreys, 2014). However, as Ahmed argues, this violent and deliberate misgendering of trans women as physiologically males enables trans women to be positioned as '*perpetrators rather than victims of male violence*' (2016, p.25). When it comes to using gendered public toilets, the participants in this study report having to take a difficult choice: between risking being abused in a male-only toilet or risking feeling like a 'fraud' or a 'perpetrator' who might upset and offend someone in a female-only toilet. By being caught in this paradox, I argue that the crossdresser and the trans individual are, in a way, not allowed to be socially legible. If we follow Blumenthal (2014) and Cavanaugh (2010), the toilet is a social space where one's

private self and one's public self are (re)negotiated. It is a necessary space where one's identity is put to test through experiences of fear, anxiety, shame and/or embarrassment. Equally, it is a space where one can confirm their gender identity and be bodily in a way that is congruent with one's gender identity.

Having a diverse gender and/or sexual identity in a society that is not accepting may put a strain on the participants, their wellbeing and their interpersonal relationships. One important theory in transgender health research is *minority stress theory*, which posits that the hostile and stressful social environment in which gender diverse people find themselves is the primary cause for their mental health problems (Meyer, 2003). Compared to the general, cisgender heterosexual population, the LGBTQIA+ people suffer from higher rates of loneliness, depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts and behaviours (Henderson et al., 2022). Yet, emerging studies suggest that within the LGBTQIA+ population itself, trans individuals are significantly more likely to report depressive symptoms and suicide attempts than their gay, lesbian and bisexual counterparts (Pease et al., 2022; Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2014; Sue et al., 2006). They are also more likely to experience familial rejection and identity invalidation, which can further impact body image, substance use and eating behaviours (Mitchell et al., 2021; Delozier et al., 2020). During the interviews, some participants have talked at length about how they struggled with mental health concerns. The times when they tried to suppress their feelings are directly connected with depression and obsessive thoughts, constantly thinking about ways to cross-dress again; whereas the times when they expressed their gender identities helped them be healthier mentally.

Theme IX: Experiences of shame, loss, guilt and frustration

The difficulties of being part of a gender and sexual minority often lead to complex negative emotions that all participants have had to avoid or acknowledge, express or suppress, understand and process or, on the contrary, struggle with. A large part of the literature on LGBTQIA+ individuals highlights complex, difficult emotions that accompany discrimination, abuse, social rejection, lack of safety, living in fear or fearing living in such conditions (Anderson, 2009; Giordano, 2018; Kim et al., 2011; Stafford, 2012). This has been captured by the participants when expressing and describing feelings of guilt, shame, anger, loss and frustration in connection with their gender and sexuality. A great deal of these emotions seems

to have been experienced in response to real, anticipated, or imagined rejection by others, or at a moment of failure to live up to the gender expectations that others have built around them as men.

Guilt, in particular, has been experienced by many participants, primarily arising from the tension between their gender identity and their family responsibilities as husbands, fathers and brothers. Guilt refers to the negative evaluation of what one does according to a well-established standard. It is, as Williams puts it, '*rooted in hearing, the sound in oneself of the voice of judgemen*t' (1993, p.89). Many participants have expressed concerns about the impact their gender identity, particularly the act of doing/performing gender, has, or may have, upon their spouses, partners and children. For them, guilt is the outcome of an impossible choice between expressing themselves as crossdressers and caring about the people in their lives as males. Caring seems to be coordinated by culturally normative gender expectations that they remain masculine and male-bodied persons. In a way, it may seem as if they have a duty to their loved ones to remain as such.

Another emotion which was prevalent within the interviews was shame. Critical queer theorists argue that shame is the emotion of many individuals whose gender and sexual identities and expressions stray away from the social gender-sex norms. Shame is an inscription, a marking, of the gender-sexual normative order into the mind, body and subjectivity of the gender and sexual nonconforming individual (Mercer, 2018; Giordano, 2018; Halperin, 2009; Morland, 2009; Eribon, 2004 [2000]). From an existential perspective, shame attests to a dimension of my existence which takes its origins in my exposure to the gaze of another individual and their power to name (Sartre, 1963 [1952]; 2003 [1943]). By feeling shame, I discover that I am more accessible to others than I am to myself, that I am someone about whom, and to whom, something insulting can be said. I discover that I am read aloud – that I am '*deciphered, designated*' (1963 [1952], p.41) – without being able, or not knowing how, to first read myself. This self which I am ashamed of is conferred upon me by the gaze of the Other. As Sartre argues, '*I am ashamed of myself as I appear to the Other*' (2003 [1943], p.222). Yet, it is through experiencing shame that I come to know myself. In his words, '*I need the mediation of the other in order to be what I am*' (p.289). All participants in this study, in their different ways, seem to have negotiated their gender identity in relation to shame and the gaze of the Other, referring to instances where they were stared at and/or verbally insulted.

Following Sartre, both the staring and the insult have the power to reinforce various gender identities, forms of character and hierarchies. In a way, the effectiveness of the Other's gaze as an instrument of power and control is intimately tied to the social and historical factors which envelop the structure of looking and being looked at (Foucault, 1990 [1976]; Elias, 1998). On this note, de Beauvoir (1997 [1949]) argues that the female body is not a woman's own but an instrument and value for others, a body which will always escape and survive her. For this very reason, becoming a woman is an extended journey through shame. A similar argument is made by Fanon (2008 [1952]) when discussing race in colonial contexts. In his words, '*the black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man*' (p.83). Equally, I argue that the crossdressing body is more likely to be rendered object and, as such, it is more likely to have less social power to return, defy or deflect the Other's gaze. This is because certain normative conditions render crossdressing subjects disempowered within social relations. If gender is indeed an essential segment of one's identity, shaming someone based on their gender identity could go even as far as putting into question their very status as persons, leaving them nowhere to be, but also nowhere to hide (Butler, 1990; 1997). Furthermore, not belonging to any established gender dichotomy may further render trans people culturally unintelligible, thus more easily exposed to violence and humiliation, and more easily divested of their protective rights and dignities (Stoffel, 2018).

5.4 Super-ordinate Theme 4: Aspects of being-in-the-world

Theme X: A story of being and ways of being.

The theme of being is another existential theme which aims to demonstrate how the participants have been in the world with crossdressing. Referring back to the analysis, all participants have started from common ground, in the sense that all have been assigned and declared male at birth, and all have started, at least in the first part of their lives, to fashion male identities. Examples of what it meant to fit in as male included having facial hair or developing muscles, playing specific musical instruments or participating in sports and, in some cases, feeling the pressure to appear tough or even more violent and abusive towards others who were not white, British, male, cisgender or able. In this case, one coping mechanism was to become invisible and undifferentiated from others, either by doing all they could do to fit in or by keeping their head down as much as possible. Another mechanism was to become

more visible by focusing attention on something which was strongly associated with maleness that they could excel at (e.g., choosing a very masculine profession or hobby). On this background of maleness, their crossdressing desires remained secret, shameful and repressed, alongside their fear that they might be perverted and not normal.

From this position, I argue that starting to accept and express yourself as a non-normative gender individual means a profound modification in the way you are in the world. Crossdressing may come with a different social condition than the one you used to have as a heterosexual white male. It can make you stand out and visible. No longer a *'little mouse,'* as one participant said, but a fully visible and political individual who goes *'against the grain.'* According to Dillon (2010), being political means fighting for your rights, privileges and a place in society; it means fighting to be and present yourself in a certain way. Through crossdressing, what may otherwise be considered private, secret and intimate in one's life may now become public, social and politically contested. All of a sudden, *the personal is political* (Hanisch, 1970). This well-known dictum of the women's movement of the early 1970s comes close to capture this change in some of the participants' lives.

Existentially, accepting and expressing your crossdressing is a change in condition which comes with different levels of freedom, visibility, power, vulnerability, authenticity, privileges and threats. In this sense, parallels can be made between the cross-dressed body and the female body (de Beauvoir, 1997 [1949]), the black body (Fanon, 2008 [1952]) or the queer body (Ahmed, 2006), as they may share similar struggles. These bodies can all be seen as being disorientated bodies in space whose involvement in the cisgender (white) heteronormative world is often called into crisis. Following Ahmed's insights, to be disorientated primarily means that instead of residing in a space with objects which I can reach – and instead of actively extending myself in space through these objects; as, for example, Husserl expected (2002 [1945]) – I am rather *'an object among other objects*' (p.160). According to Ahmed, '*racism stops black bodies from inhabiting a space by extending through objects and others*' (2006, p.iii). In this space, the white bodies are made to feel more at home than others because they can inhabit whiteness. Following Ahmed's insight, I argue that if the world is made cisgender and heteronormative, then the male-to-female cross-dressed body at home is the one that can inhabit well-established heteronormative constructions of the feminine; hence the necessity for passing. Yet, once a woman, the crossdresser may also experience their body as a woman does

– that is, as a consequence of the process of internalising the view of it under the gaze of the male other (see de Beauvoir, 1997 [1949]). Equally then, the naturalisation of the cisgender heteronormative world in two binary gender-sex categories, as a world that looks familiar and already given, may disorient some cross-dressed bodies in such a way that they struggle to know where to find objects and others. For some participants, the social encounter with other crossdressers and non-normative gender individuals often feels safer in the transitory spaces they usually inhabit; that is, '*on the move, passing through, on inhabiting a space for a short period of time*' (Knopp, 2007, p.23).

So, in a way, one's position of disorientation comes with an existential anxiety which can make you connect with *not-being-at-home* in the world (the 'unheimlich,' in Heidegger's words (1962 [1927]). Equally, others may stop understanding you and relate to you altogether; they may even react violently to the uncertainty that your being provokes to them. But on the other hand, one's position of disorientation comes with a certain liberatory and radical freedom where other ways of being become possible. This was also explicit in some of the participants' stories. Following Arendt (1958), the crossdresser is not just made into a subject – as de Beauvoir, Fanon and Ahmed would have it – but they are also able to disclose themselves as free subjects within a '*space of appearance*' (p.200) created by speech and action. Within this space, the individual is able to incite attention to themselves by freely disclosing an identity that does not abide by the institutional gender frameworks that pervade society or its privileges. In Arendt's thought, every individual is able to insert who they are into the world and, thus, create a completely new beginning for them and for all others around them; a beginning which also provides them a certain type of power within that space. On this note, I argue that the moment you choose to express yourself differently may feel like you do not belong, which may be very hurtful, but it also offers the freedom to create new ways of being which would not have been possible by conforming to the initial status quo. In a more general sense, individuals may be striving for acceptance and belonging, but also for authenticity, uniqueness and individuality. This has been the case, as some participants have emphasised the particular character and the uniqueness of their stories, even within the small crossdressing community. There was an expressed need for individuality, difference and uniqueness. In an existential way, we are free and responsible for creating our own lives and living those lives in ways that feel authentic to us (Sartre, 1969; 2003 [1943]).

Theme XI: Their social world: being with others.

This theme describes how participants relate to other people in their lives, particularly when it comes to their family life, romantic life, social life and life in the workplace. '*Being-with-others*' or '*being-there-with*' (*Mitdasein*) is indeed a fundamental constituent of human existence, which comes to crystallise the possibility for the '*being-there*' (*Dasein*) to historicise itself, to measure up to a common destiny and a civilisation (Heidegger, (1962 [1927]), highlighting the role of social contextuality and intersubjectivity in one's existence.

What came across from the analysis is that for many participants there is a disjoint between what one's body is for the self and what one's body is for the other, particularly between one's sense of gender as a woman and one's duty to their family as a brother, husband or son. As Rubin (2003) and Richards (2016) note, this disjoint is a key element in transgender and non-normative gender individuals' lives. A disjoint which comes with constant confusion and struggle around how best to negotiate these two poles in one's life. One option is not telling the other that you are a crossdresser, which has consequences, often invisible and not expressed. In this case, your whole world becomes organised around a secret, keeping it within one's limits and power of control, which may be very limiting and exhausting. Another option is to share it with others, which also may have different consequences depending on their response. This has led to situations where the crossdressing is known but no one dares to talk about it, or it is known but not visible. As such, in order not to cause disruption to their family relationships, some participants would often switch genders when visiting family members. Furthermore, their gender identity has oftentimes led to uncertainty, shock, confusion and conflict within their families. Some earlier studies on the family context of a gender crossing/transition have offered similar conclusions (Lenning & Buist, 2012; Lev, 2004; Stotzer et al., 2014; Zamboni, 2006). Other scholars have suggested that the adjustment process itself is similar to the one of grief and grieving, where the initial anger and sense of betrayal felt by family members could eventually result in the acceptance of one's 'new' gender (Emerson, 1996; Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). However, as we have seen in the analysis, the other's acceptance may come with limitations and compromises. Not taking further steps towards transitioning and having surgery, for example, can be a compromise for being accepted. Another significant aspect here is represented by the relationships the participants had with their children. Here, there were many fears about coming out to their children and

what impact their gender identity may have on them. According to Haines et al. (2014), this concern that one's gender-crossing or transition will affect the child may actually be common among trans parents. Parenting within the heteronormative family life is gendered, while motherhood and fatherhood are linked with essentialist notions of gender. While a male-to-female crossdresser can pass as a 'real,' 'natural' woman within society at large, can she be a 'real,' 'natural' mother within family life? This is one question among many that a crossdressing parent may struggle to answer on the background of the apparent disjoint between the 'normal' and the 'common' heteronormative family and their own queerness and crossdressing.

Moving from the immediate family to the social environment at large, the other is presented as both being and not being problematic. For example, as I have shown in *Theme VII: Levels of openness, acceptance and visibility*, closeness comes with the risk of being read as a crossdresser, which can be unsafe. Safeness, on the other hand, comes with distance and with being read as a 'natural' or 'real' woman. This so-called 'passing' is felt as a necessary practice for many transgender individuals and crossdressers (Garfinkel, 1967; Namaste, 2000; van der Wal, 2016). As Bogardus argues, '*where there is little sympathetic understanding, social farness exists. Where sympathetic understanding is great, nearness exists*' (1941, p.106). This is the case, as the participants are looking for spaces where they can be close to others and where they can share their identities with others. For some, this has meant connecting with other trans people and accessing trans spaces and services or being part of the trans/crossdressing culture. This offers the space to create oneself in the light of already existing and visible crossdressing models available in society and history (Lev, 2007). Overall, being part of a community has had a meaningful and positive impact on some of the participants' lives. This is in line with other studies and systematic reviews on the positive influence of trans community connection (Barr et al., 2016; Jackson et al., 2017; Lev, 2007; Puckett et al., 2019; Raj, 2007; Sherman et al., 2020).

Theme XII: Freedom puts it all into perspective.

The theme of freedom is the last existential theme and it aims to reflect on how the participants as a gender/sexual minority have experienced freedom within their lives. From an existential point of view, following de Beauvoir (2004 [1946]), the individual is '*at the same time a freedom and a thing, both unified and scattered, isolated by his subjectivity and nevertheless co-existing at the heart of the world'* with others (p.258). This captures the potentiality one has for freedom and the tension that freedom brings to the crossdressing individual. One way to experience freedom corresponds to the period of time when they were children and teenagers, living with their parents. At that young age, freedom means access or, more precisely, having access to female clothing, as well as having the privacy and intimacy to wear them in secret without being caught by parents, siblings or extended family. This secrecy, constant fear of being caught, loneliness and isolation are common aspects for a young LGBTQIA+ person who is not able to come out to their parents (Sullivan & Wodarski, 2002). For all the participants, crossdressing was not something that was ever discussed, shared or accepted while they were growing up. In the literature of family studies, for example, this type of freedom may refer to the physical privacy of the individual '*from surveillance and unwanted intrusions upon one's space by the physical presence, touch, sights, sounds or odours of the others*' (Burgoon et al., 1989, p.132). According to Foucault (2004 [1999]), the parental surveillance and monitoring of children's gender, sex and sexuality functions as a disciplinary form of power which aims to produce 'normal' and gender-sexual subjects. As he remarks, '*the family space [is] a space of continual surveillance... Parents must keep a lookout all around their children, over their clothes and bodies. The child's body must be the object of their parents attention*' (p.245). This parental surveillance primarily models its form and criteria on the level of illness and medical reason. The parents who are close to the children's bodies are also '*diagnosticians, therapists and agents of health*' (p. 250). When the child is caught, the family may resort to withdrawals of privileges and freedom, isolation, grounding, time-out or corporeal punishment. And if these fail, the family may hand the child over to doctors, therapists, psychiatrists or priests, in order to 'transform' or 'correct' them (Taylor, 2012). As the literature shows, unfortunately, this is the common story of many transgender and non-normative gender individuals (Ehrensaft, 2011; Yadegarfard et al., 2014).

As the participants became adults, and they left the family space, their relationship with freedom changed. They started to find themselves in a social context where they had to push to have more freedom in regard to their gender expression and identity. Crossdressing is here caught between their need of expression and individuation and the social norms around them, which are not always favourable. On this note, we can recognise two complementary understandings of freedom: *freedom to* do what we want to do and *freedom from* having to do what society tells us to do. Following the work of MacKinnon (1989) and Rubin (1993), the first is centred on the expansion of gender rights and individual modes of gender-crossing expression, while the latter revolves around the need to free oneself from, or to at least negotiate, the social mandates on how you should use, perform and own your body. For the participants, these two freedoms are always in tension. Doing something that appears to violate the social gender norms of their time often requires from them significant effort and high levels of risk. From an existential perspective, these efforts are worth taking in the fight to shape one's possibilities and to grasp oneself. In a sense, freedom itself is action and constant choosing (Gabriel, 2013). Equally, it is refusal, curiosity and innovation; a going beyond what everybody does and expects. In Sartre's words, freedom is '*the small movement which makes of a totally conditioned social being someone who does not render back completely what his conditioning has given him*' (1969). Overall, freedom remains, for all participants, a constant tension, something to work hard for and to push for on the background of lack of acceptance, stigma and difficulty, because if fighting for freedom is difficult, so is the lack of freedom in their lives.

CHAPTER VI. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

6.1 Summary

Crossdressing remains a complex idea at the intersection of gender and sexuality, practice and identity, the personal and the political, the social and the private, the internal and the external, the visible and the hidden. Without implying that this is an exhaustive list of intersections, these have been some of the lenses and coordinates that have guided and illuminated both the analysis and the discussion about crossdressing. Throughout this summary, I will bring back the main points discussed within this thesis.

There are, indeed, multiple lenses from which one can look at crossdressing. One way has been to focus on the multiple roles crossdressing may play in the sexual and gender economy of our society, and then filter them through different critical lenses; particularly, historical, discursive, feminist, post-colonialist, trans and queer. As we have seen, crossdressing can reinforce the heteronormative gender-sex system or it can challenge it by being part of its gradual evolution. This is important as gender norms change all the time. Another way has been to keep the focus on the individual and the way they make sense of their experiences of crossdressing. From the analysis, this has brought forward an abundance of different responses and meanings. Overall, crossdressing is about expression, desire, comfort, emotion, authenticity, openness, happiness, honesty and positivity. It can be a mobile for self-discovery, imagination and creativity, an avenue for enlarging your world. It can equally be a way to enjoy yourself, to relax and to connect with yourself, or simply a way to escape your daily existence. Crossdressing is indeed a private and solitary activity, yet an intrinsically social one. It is very important for the participants how they are seen, how others relate to them and how others address them while cross-dressed. From this perspective, crossdressing is a meaningful and particular way of being – that is, a way of being gendered, a way of being sexual, and a way of being with your body, yourself and others. As a process, crossdressing starts by being a practice, and then the behaviour becomes a category and an identity for the participants. In this way, it becomes a meaningful and particular way of being, with yourself and with your body.

All participants started from common ground: all were assigned and declared male at birth and all started, at least in the first part of their lives, to fashion and perform male identities.

Accepting and expressing yourself as a non-normative gender individual, however, means a profound modification in the way you are with and in the world. Existentially, accepting and expressing your crossdressing is a change in condition, a way of becoming minoritarian, which comes with different levels of freedom, visibility, power, vulnerability, privileges and threats. For example, crossdressing comes with difficulties around your need for belonging and acceptance, which can be put under significant pressure, but also with freedom and new possibilities, which can be satisfied through the need for individuality, difference and uniqueness.

Furthermore, it seems that each one of the participants is navigating a complex map of temporalities, spaces and people with different degrees of visibility, social acceptance and self-acceptance. These coexisting degrees of visibility, acceptance and ownership create, in turn, different strategies and behaviours to come out and be out, as well as different types of crossdressing, from the most visible to the most subtle or hidden forms of it. From these behaviours, particular emphasis has been put on being read by society as a 'real' and 'natural' woman (whether or not they identify as one) while, at the same time, avoiding the negative repercussions of appearing strange, unfamiliar and excessive. In other words, all participants constantly navigate and negotiate, in their different ways, between their need for expression and their fear of prejudice and discrimination, between their need for self-affirmation and their anxiety about others' ability to cope with their crossdressing identity. On this latter note, the current research's findings suggest that experiencing lack of acceptance about crossdressing has been a common and pervasive theme in the stories of all participants during the course of their lives. This lack of acceptance has been experienced in a multitude of contexts and to different degrees, from very subtle to outright social discrimination and abuse. The difficulties of being part of a gender and sexual minority often lead to complex emotions that all participants have had to experience, and which may accompany discrimination, abuse, social rejection, lack of safety, living in fear or fear living in such conditions. This has been captured by the participants when expressing and describing feelings of guilt, shame, anger, loss and frustration in connection with being a crossdresser in our society.

Of course, one cannot start any discussion about crossdressing without implicitly talking about gender, sexuality and identity. For many participants, crossdressing has been a label for their gender identity and expression. By discussing crossdressing, they also describe

how gender is thought of and how gender gets done and undone within their social context. Reflecting on this, there seems to be many different ways of doing and understanding gender which coexist within their discourses, as there is tension, incompatibility and paradoxes between them: from two distinct, opposite gender roles to fluidity and gender as an open spectrum. Compared to gender identity, however, there has been less fluidity, multiplicity and variability in terms of sexuality for the participants. For many, sexuality is experienced as something akin to a given, something impossible to suppress and change. Significantly, there are negative connotations and stigma associated with crossdressing that are coming from previous prejudices around sexuality. For example, what was considered perverted and shameful in sexual attraction has been added to the act of expressing your sexuality while cross-dressed. Other areas where sexuality and crossdressing converge, often in a negative manner, are on the issue of fetishism and homosexuality.

Finally, it seems that what reunites gender, sexuality and identity is time, and it was perhaps unexpected to see how profound its implications were in regard to crossdressing. What has become apparent within the analysis is that a crossdressing identity needs time to synthesise as a narrative while it relies on the language and concepts, symbols, meanings, images and myths available in one's time. Concepts which, in the case of gender and sexuality at least, have changed repeatedly over the course of the participants' life. There were many references to eras when they were growing up and developing as young adults, eras which are no longer present. Time is also experienced differently by the participants when cross-dressed. The time of the crossdresser is, in part, a time experienced outside the heterotemporality and rhythms of their family life, and outside labour, production and reproduction.

6.2 Significance and validity

Reflections on the strengths and significance of the study

Building on previous research efforts into the gender and sexuality of trans and non-binary people (Richards, 2011, 2016; Richards and Barker, 2015; Sheldon, 2018; Vitelli, 2015), the purpose has been to research the lived experience of crossdressing by putting emphasis on the meanings crossdressing has had for each of the eight participants. This stems out from the gap within existential thinking and the larger literature on crossdressing in which the crossdressers' voices are missing. Furthermore, this research seeks to add to the current

discussions and debates around gender and sexuality within the field of existential psychotherapy by opening it up to include crossdressing as well.

Overall, this research offers the prospect of seeing crossdressing differently, not as a pathology but as an expression of human diversity and creativity. It traces, through the words of the participants, how gender and sexuality have been thought of, felt, experienced, (re)interpreted, departed from or (re)created. This is a departure from previous studies where crossdressing implies something dysfunctional about gender and sexual development and being, and more in line with recent developments in the field which seek to depathologise crossdressing. This is also in line with current guidelines from the British Psychological Society (2019) and BACP (2019), which state that diversity in gender and sexuality expression is not indicative of a mental disorder.

The knowledge that has been produced within this thesis explores in depth how people understand and experience the phenomenon of crossdressing. The research is both current and historical; it is an existential research intervention into how eight people within a particular time period, space and culture make sense of their gender/sexual identity as crossdressers, in the unique context of the contemporary UK. Therefore, the research opens a window into the lived experience of people whose identities have formed at the crossroads between multiple labels; some of these labels are emerging, some are current and some are already extinct: eonism, transvestism, crossdressing, transgenderism, non-binary, gender-fluid, androgyny, etc. On this note, the research can be seen as a reflection on gender/sexual identity formation and its relationship with time, visibility, freedom, culture and space, particularly with the way people use the available discourse fragments, symbols, images, meanings and myths to make sense of their being and their gender and sexuality. As such, the research is equally about continuity as it is about fragmentation of identity across time and space, self-actualisation or the lack of it, nostalgia, regret, opportunity, creativity, loss, change and stagnation.

The overall ethos of this research has been that knowledge about crossdressing should remain open. As the literature review and discussion show, a concept such as crossdressing is also a culture, an accumulation of knowledge, history and emotions which continues onwards. With this in mind, the research does not seek to generalise or to provide definitive answers; instead, it focuses on individual experiences of crossdressing, specific to an idiographic

approach. From the beginning, the purpose has been to focus on the lived experience of crossdressing, while allowing complexity, paradoxes, tensions and contradictions around the concept to manifest themselves without, however, trying to resolve them. As such, I have been solely interested in a homogeneous sample of people who fulfil a certain criterion – that is, in people who identify as crossdressers. This is much in line with IPA which does not seek to find definitive answers and does not claim to generalise these results to a much wider population (Smith et al., 2009). One of the strengths of this research, then, arises from the fact that it does not focus on *what* crossdressing is or *why* crossdressing occurs, but on the *how* of crossdressing. Throughout this thesis, I offered examples of how crossdressing is felt like, lived, experienced, understood and thought of through the participants' voices.

Reflections on reliability/validity or trustworthiness of this study

To reflect on the reliability/validity of the current research, I now refer to Smith et al.'s (2009) and Yardley's (2000) criteria which include 'sensitivity to context,' 'commitment and rigour,' 'transparency and coherence,' and 'impact and importance.'

Sensitivity to context

A way to demonstrate sensitivity to context is to be aware of the social-cultural milieu in which the research is situated. This justifies my need to provide extensive historical and cultural resources within the literature review, sources that extend much wider than the immediate and present psychological and clinical perspectives on the phenomenon. By doing this, I aimed to illuminate the socio, cultural and political setting of the research and some of the historical, linguistic and normative realities that may be present within crossdressing. As such, given the long history of pathology and stigma that members of the LGBTQIA+ community have been subjected to, it was highly important that this research would be done in an exploratory, empathetic and respectful manner, in a way that does not judge, other or stigmatise the participants. Secondly, Yardley (2000) emphasises that the relationship between the investigator, the participants and the research topic may be essential. Within *Chapter 2.1 Epistemological Framework,* and within all the other self-reflexive chapters that are integral to this study, I have described my own perspective and my own experience of doing the research, alongside my own position as an outsider/insider within this research. This offers some *distance*, as I do not identify as a crossdresser, but also some *closeness*, as the participants have

never been an 'other' for me, but more akin to members of a much bigger community that I am part of and that I regularly engage with both professionally and personally. While the knowledge I gained researching the topic in the context of theory has been essential for this study, I tried to *bracket off* this knowledge and to approach the interviews from a mind space of *not knowing*. To realise this, it was important not to have an interview schedule that aimed to confirm any previous assumptions about crossdressing, but to have an interview schedule that was as neutral and open as possible. I particularly liked the idea of my participants being 'experiential experts' (Smith et al., 2009). In other words, while I spent considerable time reading about the history and what various disciplines have said about crossdressing, only my participants know what it feels like and what it means for them to do it, and it was my aim to capture it and to present it within the analysis of the research's findings.

Commitment and rigour

According to Yardley (2000), these criteria correspond to the usual expectation for thoroughness in how the topic is researched, analysed and reported. Throughout the research, I provided a comprehensive description on how the research was planned and executed, along with the rationale for the decisions I made about this study. This has been documented within Chapters II and III. Furthermore, the concept of commitment also means continued engagement with the research topic. Besides my research, particularly through my profession as a psychotherapist, I work and engage with issues surrounding gender, sexuality and identity for members of the LGBTQIA+ community. I am, thus, indebted to my clients, peers, colleagues and supervisors who have shaped and opened up my way of thinking on the subject. Moreover, as I have already mentioned, there is my own experience of having a diverse gender and sexual identity and my ongoing journey with it, which has been the initial motivation to approach this area and to study it in the first place.

To continue, rigour refers to how complete the data collection and analysis are. In terms of phenomenological research, the focus is often on the depth of the analysis, as there is no need for saturation or for arriving at a representative sample. More specifically, rigour can refer to effective use of theory, contemplation and reflection in order to overcome superficial, 'common-sense' understanding. In order to accomplish this goal, Yardley (2000) suggests an '*extensive grounding in the philosophy of the methodological approach adopted and in the intellectual history of the categories and distinctions that have been applied to the topic*'

(p.120). The approach used within this thesis is phenomenological, existential, hermeneutical, interpretative and critical. Within the methodology section, I explained my grounding within these traditions of thinking and how they come together with IPA to support this current research. In terms of interpretations, following Willig's (2013) criteria for qualitative research, I tried to offer multiple and alternative interpretations from different areas of critical thinking, such as historical, existential, discursive, feminist, post-colonialist, trans and queer.

Transparency and coherence

These refer to how clearly all stages of the research process have been documented and presented. It can also be about the way various aspects of the research fit together and come together: the methodology of the research, the chosen method, the way the data was collected and analysed, the type of knowledge that was developed and presented, how the research was written, etc. This has all been documented at length within *Chapter II Methodology* and *Chapter III Research Design*, which include reflections about my own internal process while doing this research. Also, I have provided a thorough description of how the themes were developed and the rationale behind them (see *4.2. Themes*). Moreover, according to Smith et al. (2009), IPA must have sufficient idiographic engagement, and it should tell the reader something meaningful and important about each one of the participants and about the themes they share. On this note, there are some cases within the analysis, such as when describing the participants' gender identity and sexuality or their process of coming out, where I have chosen deliberately to offer a separate paragraph for each of them, which explores in more depth their unique context. In other cases, appropriate to the sample size and number of themes, I have offered quotes from as many participants as I could for each theme. Lastly, I have provided an example of a full transcript from one of the interviews, along with my annotations and comments and the table structure used to analyse them (*see Appendix IX. Analysed Interview*).

Impact and importance

The research findings will be of particular interest to psychotherapists, counsellors and counselling psychologists or other professionals (e.g. health professionals, charity workers, policymakers), scholars and researchers, people from the LGBTQIA+ community and anyone who is interested in this group or in issues surrounding identity, sexuality and gender. It is my hope that the current research provides enough depth, ideas and details to inspire anyone who

reads it in such a way as to expand their understanding of crossdressing; to offer a sense of what it means to have a diverse gender/sexual expression and identity in this society, or more awareness about the complexities that thinking about gender and sexuality entails.

Besides the theoretical impact of a research, there might also be an inherently political dimension to research and theory and, by extension, to the current study as well. This is because all our discourses and actions come from a socio-cultural context and may serve certain social and ideological purposes (Yardley, 1997). In the context of this research, there is an intrinsically political aspect of not seeing crossdressing as a pathology, and my research aligns with the efforts from the LQBTQIA+ community and the clinical, social and psychological field to depathologise it. Another political aspect would be which labels you choose to use or not to use when describing certain gender and sexual identities. For example, the term 'transvestite' is no longer used anymore. Still, some of my participants used it when talking about themselves. They seemed happy to self-identify as such but they were mindful of not using it to define someone else. This is relevant, as the same thing seems to be happening with the term 'crossdressing,' which is the term I chose for this research. It seems that the term 'crossdressing' is also disappearing and is being replaced by the umbrella term 'trans' or 'transgender,' or by other gender labels. Through my use of the term 'crossdressing,' my goal was not to legitimise it to the detriment of other terms. However, I argue that the experience of individuals who self-identify as transvestites and crossdressers are valuable and important to be researched because their particular experiences might get lost when one uses a different terminology. My argument remains that by using this term, you access a population that already exists and that otherwise may remain invisible in other types of research when using other terms. As I already pointed out, the best way is to respect how people choose to identify and to explore with them their choices and the reasons for their choices.

6.2 Limitations and ideas for future research

A first limitation of this study is that there might be a difference in experience between people who choose to participate and those who do not, and also between people who use LGBTQIA+ services, where I advertised for the research, and those who are not. Furthermore, there are limitations inherent in both online and face-to-face interviews (see *3.2.2. Doing the interviews, face-to-face and online*). For example, face-to-face interviews will exclude all

participants who do not happen to live close to the location where you are interviewing. Online interviewing does not have this limitation; however, it may attract a different population as not everybody will be comfortable with the online format. Online interviewing makes things difficult for people who are not out to their families and who do not have the privacy at home to do the interview. It also excludes those who do not have the technical knowledge or equipment for an online interview. This has been the case with two participants whom I could not interview because of these issues.

Secondly, crossdressing is not a universal phenomenon, even if people who engage in similar activities have been documented throughout history and across the world (see *Chapter 1. Literature Review*). Instead, crossdressing may be one way of understanding and conceptualising what seems to be a universal phenomenon: men dressing up in female clothing, or vice-versa. Still, even if people seem to be doing the same thing, their meanings, motivations and their experiences may be entirely different. As such, while these findings may be insightful and informative, they cannot be applied directly to everyone who seems to be dressing up in feminine clothing. For example, I noticed that all my participants came from a white ethnic background. This raises questions about the experiences of people from other ethnic backgrounds who live in the UK. There is a possibility that they might be using different labels, or that crossdressing is seen and conceptualised quite differently by them. The intersections between crossdressing and ethnicity, culture and skin colour, alongside the experiences of women who cross-dress, would be excellent topics for future research.

Another limitation of this study is represented by terminology and language. As I already mentioned, the use of terminology and language is quite a sensitive and complex topic regarding diverse gender and sexual identities. This may also become significant when doing research, as the terminology and the language you use will have an impact on the participants. For example, whatever terminology you use there will be some participants who will be happy with it, while others may be put off by it. Furthermore, there are numerous other labels from the trans umbrella that may overlap with crossdressing, such as the experiences of people who are *non-binary* or *gender-fluid*. Also, there are the experiences of people who are involved in activities that would fit the description of crossdressing but who do not identify as such or choose not to use this term to describe themselves. It has been pointed out to me that my research will perhaps fail to attract younger participants simply because they are using other

terms to define themselves. This has proven to be true, as none of my participants are under the age of thirty. On this point, it is difficult to say if this is only because of the terminology or some other factors as well. All of these aspects would be good areas for future research.

6.3 Implications for clinical practice.

The current research further highlights the importance of language and terminology when working on issues surrounding gender, sexuality and identity. As I have shown throughout this thesis, a concept such as *crossdressing* is a culture, an accumulation of knowledge, history, connotations and emotions, and it is always under tension: the tension of who gets the power to define who and on whose terms. In line with the phenomenological ethos of existential psychotherapy, it is crucial not only to check with our clients about the language they prefer to use but also to explore why they prefer it and what it means for them. Furthermore, this research is another reminder that identity is not static but an accumulation of past, present and future fragments (for a similar conclusion, see Freeman, 2010). As such, it may be useful to ask our clients if the language they use has changed, or what other labels have they used to define themselves and why. Were these the same when they were growing up? Have they lost any labels along the way? This is important, because, as I argued, identity can be a narrative and an exploration, like a roadmap across time and space, populated with what our clients used to be, along with who they are now and who they may wish to become.

This research also highlights our relationship with time and space. For example, understanding crossdressing seems to depend on concepts that are specific to the contemporary debates surrounding gender, sexuality and identity within the Western world. This means that parts of someone's identity may be built on ideas, concepts, connotations, emotions that will not exist later on, or that are unknown in another culture, language and time. This may mean loss, nostalgia, frustration, invisibility, loneliness, but also potential to change, freedom and self-actualisation (see *Difficulty, Theme IV: Time brings it all together*). This, in turn, raises profound questions, such as the one put forward by some participants: who would I have been given different circumstances? This is particularly relevant, as some participants believe that they would have made different choices about partners, transitioning, coming out, etc., if the world they were brought up in would have been different, perhaps more accepting. Moreover, as things around us change, certain experiences may become unintelligible in the future. This

raises further questions about identity and change. For example, as things change, do we change our identity as well? Do we update it? On this latter note, it also seems that parts of our identity are like a compromise, as there can be differences between who someone wishes to be and who they feel they have the freedom and the resources to be. All of these aspects may be particularly relevant when working with clients with diverse gender and sexual identities who are questioning their identities, are thinking of coming out or are questioning transitioning.

Lastly, as we have seen throughout this research, gender and sexuality are complex, contradictory and fragmented narratives at the intersection of all dimensions of one's existence (van Deurzen, 2010), alongside the intersectionality of social class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, (dis)ability, culture and religion (Crenshaw, 1991). Within the interviews, these additional dimensions often inform each other as they would do in the counselling room. Now, any way one chooses to think about gender is based on certain implicit assumptions, and they will favour certain implicit power structures within knowledge, society and language at the expense of others. The way one favours to think about gender will have implications on what one considers to be acceptable or not, moral or immoral, common or uncommon, good or bad, and ultimately what is permissible or not, as well as what is legal or not. It will have implications about what can be discussed or kept silent, questioned or unquestioned (see Foucault, 1990 [1976]). All these aspects will enter the psychotherapy room, and there is an opportunity here to provide a safe space and to be curious and open to explore them and their meanings and implications for our clients. As discussed within this thesis, gender remains an area of constant tension, change, adjustment and negotiation within our society. This is highly relevant because, as I argued, an identity requires resources and knowledge to form. One needs time, space, information and representation to understand, reflect, accept and express who they are. These resources may be limited due to the sociocultural context one finds themselves in and further exacerbated by difficult interpersonal and family relations. The therapy hour can offer exactly that: time and a space of safety and acceptance where one can understand, reflect, accept and express who they are.

6.4 Research impact on my psychotherapy practice

It is no easy task to put into words how doing this research, and being so invested into it, has shaped my psychotherapeutic practice over the years. One reason that may justify this difficulty to articulate is that there is so much to untangle between who I am, being a researcher and being a practitioner. For me, at a certain level, there seems to be no difference between them, as they all are who I am. In other words, how I am, how I practice and how I do research are coming from the same thing – they are different contextual representations of myself. In simple terms, there is a lot of emotional and conceptual overlap between how this research has been done, with all the thinking behind it, and how I practice. I imagine both of them evolved simultaneously from the same values and desires. Looking back, if instead of a thesis, I would have done a documentary, a film, a sculpture, or even a montage, on the same subject, it would have been the same core transposed within a different medium. This may explain why this question has been so elusive to me, unable to grasp it enough to articulate an answer. For me, it's not how one has impacted the other, but rather how one may actually be the other as a different expression of myself.

One clear benefit of expressing yourself through different mediums, in this case doing psychotherapy and research, is that you reflect on your methods and your motivations, and you develop the language and the conceptual thinking to be able to articulate them further. Doing this research has been enriching in terms of understanding myself and finding words, examples and concepts which can describe and support that which may have been just a feeling, an intuition, or an emotional response to something. Without this research, perhaps a lot more would have remained unaware, unarticulated or unconscious. Writing this thesis has helped me to be more aware, and more integrated and purposeful. By purposeful, I mean knowing what matters to you and why, choosing it and owning it whenever possible. This research seems to have organised and focused my thoughts and my way of thinking, which has been of great benefit to my practice.

From a different perspective, what I have learned researching and writing this thesis has also managed to find its way into how I practice. For example, I said earlier in previous chapters (*Chapter I* and *Chapter V*) that crossdressing is a myth, a symbol, a history and a story. This is not only true for crossdressing, but for most of the words we know and use;

everything has a genealogy, and within my practice, I got to experience it not only with familiar topics, such as gender and sexuality, but in its universality. The critical lens that I tried to bring within this thesis is also present within my practice. By critical lens, I mean trying to bring to the surface what has been obscured or suppressed, such as embedded and hidden power structures and relations, through the power of interpretation, or by asking questions such as: whose voice is not present? who defines who and on whose terms?

I have learned to look for freedom and opportunity where initially only repression and rejection were visible, and to see constrain and repression where only privilege was visible. I have learned that nothing is ever 'given,' 'neutral' or 'natural.' Doing this research has made me even more suspicious of the words we use, their meanings and connotations, and more curious to hear the stories of these words: to be more phenomenological. By phenomenological, I mean a state of curiosity, of not knowing and inquisitiveness, which describes how I am with my clients and how the interviews for this research have been conducted.

Working on this thesis has also had an impact on the types of people I am seeing and working with. I have always wanted to work with people from the broader LGBTQI+ community, and this research has consolidated even further my decision to work with this group. It has become clearer to me how much I appreciate working with this group and how important it is for me to be connected with this group. Still, spending time to study a fraction of this community has helped me see connections and patterns with other categories of people, and to be curious about them as well. Research also teaches you methods of analysing and thinking about concepts, and these methods can be further employed for numerous other topics outside the scope of your thesis. As such, I have become more attuned and curious about illness, disability, neurodivergence, ethnicity, social class and any kind of human differentiation that my clients will bring into the therapy room.

Lastly, doing this research has often felt like a sustained exercise in visibility, which has not always been easy to manage or to own. It has made me more aware of the (social and public) spaces that I occupy as a researcher, as a psychotherapist and, perhaps, as a person as well. This means being more aware and transparent about my political stance and my own values, but also being more thoughtful about how I occupy different spaces. I write this thinking about how I occupy space within the therapy room and how I occupy space within this research.

Occupying a space can mean visibility (whether you own and accept it or not), transparency (as you will be seen and your work will be read), availability, presence and making yourself legible and comprehensible to others. Indeed, there seems to be anxiety within visibility, but there is also opportunity and possibility, which can easily be denied when one passes as hidden or invisible, underneath 'normality' or 'neutrality.'

To conclude, doing this research has made me more aware of what kind of psychotherapist I am and wish to be and why. It has required me to be more purposeful and to own more of myself. It has also expanded my horizons and added depth and complexity to the ways I am thinking and practising psychotherapy.

6.5 Instead of recommendations

As already discussed in *Chapter II. Methodology*, the object of phenomenological reflection and research is there to awaken a consciousness in the researcher and their capacity to imagine, to remember, to symbolise, to change and to interpret, but also to connect with their reactions and thoughts. In a way, in order to know something phenomenologically, we must, at least, imagine and feel that something for ourselves. As a method, it invites the researcher to forget/ bracket their knowledge and take the risk of dismantling their taken-for-granted and what is familiar to them. The question, here, would be: should it do the same for the readers of such research?

We often assume that this process only applies to the researcher and not the reader-spectator of this thesis as well. In a way, the crossdresser and their stories offer us a psychological, social and institutional archaeology of sexuality and gender (and implicitly of capitalism, heteronormativity, parenting, etc). Their memories and stories are not only personal~~,~~ but memories and stories which are buried in the unconsciousness and lived experiences of all people. These are highly socialised memories and stories which are familiar to us all. By avoiding offering recommendations, I would open the thesis's frame – that is to say, the phenomenological method of this thesis is applied further to the reader-spectator to take position, '*in terms of the things which matter to [them], and which constitute [their] lived world*' (Smith et al., 2009, p.11).

My main inspiration for this position comes from film studies and the research on how people interact and respond to images and films. According to Catherine Wheatley (2009), cinema can provide a comfortable, voyeuristic space which appeals more to our desire for anonymity, individuality and privacy, and less to our responsibility for the actions we see in the film – violence, rape, revenge, famine and so on. Other films, however, will provoke their spectators into awareness and ask them to become involved in the very expressions of happiness, trauma and distress evoked in the film. As such, a different way of doing cinema would be to have the spectator not passively exposed to the story of the film, but actively engaged with and responsible for what is happening in the film. As an example, the Austrian film director, Michael Haneke avoids presenting everything as knowable, calming, safe, easy to understand and without contradictions. In his films, the spectator is made complicit in the structuring of the film in order to respond responsibly to what they see (Funny Games, 1997; Caché, 2005; The White Ribbon, 2009).

Reading a book or watching a film is a very common action, yet reading a thesis or watching a film phenomenologically is allowing the work to affect us, to strike us. To read about the lived experience of crossdressing is to allow fragments of their recollections to jump at us and open in us new questions about our own gender and sexuality, our relationship with our family and partners, or maybe a major discomfort when it comes to our own childhood, sense of self or aspects of being. In other words, their stories are also our stories and we are equally responsible for the world they live in.

As such, I will refrain from presenting further recommendations and conclusions, and instead, invite the reader to take a phenomenological position or attitude vis-à-vis the lived experience of crossdressing and become involved in the research, neither too close (the reader does not have to cross-dress), neither too far away (the crossdresser's story is not just their story, but our story as well, and parts of their lived experience are things which matter to us and constitute our lived world). This is an invitation for the reader to experience crossdressing by what it touches in them and concerns them. In this way, the overall ethos of this research, that knowledge about crossdressing should remain open and evolving, is respected and passed on to the reader.

REFERENCES

Ackroyd, P. (1979). *Dressing up: transvestism and drag; the history of an obsession*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Acton, H. (2010). I am what I am? *Existential Analysis: Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis*, *21*(2), 351–364.

Adorno, T. W. (1981 [1962]). *Prisms*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Ahmed, S. (2006). *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Ahumada, L.C.B. de. (2003). Clinical notes on a case of transvestism in a child. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, *84*(2), 291–313.

Aizura, A. Z. (2018). *Mobile Subjects: Transnational Imaginaries of Gender Reassignment.* Duke University Press.

Allen, C. (1962). *A Textbook of Psychosexual Disorder*. London: Oxford University Press.

Alpert, A. B., Gampa, V., Lytle, M. C., Manzano, C., Ruddick, R., Poteat, T., Quinn, G. P., & Kamen, C. S. (2021). I'm not putting on that floral gown: Enforcement and resistance of gender expectations for transgender people with cancer. *Patient Education Counselling. 104*(10). 2552–2558.

American Psychiatric Association (Ed.). (1952). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-I*. Washington D.C.: American Psychiatric Association.

———. (1968). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-II*. Washington D.C.: American Psychiatric Association.

———. (1980). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-III*. Washington D.C.: American Psychiatric Association.

———. (1987). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-III-R*. Washington D.C: American Psychiatric Association.

———. (1998). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-IV*. Washington D.C.: American Psychiatric Association.

———. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-IV-TR*. Washington D.C.: American Psychiatric Association.

———. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-V*. Washington D.C.: American Psychiatric Association.

Amnesty International. (2015). *The state decides who I am - Lack of legal gender recognition for transgender people in Europe*. London.

André, N. (2006). *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti, and the Second Woman in Early Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Anthony, D. B., Holmes, J. G., & Wood., J. V. (2007). Social acceptance and self-esteem: turning the sociometer to interpersonal values. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. 92*. 1024–1039.

Arendt, H. (1958). *The Human Condition*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Argentieri, S. (2009). Transvestism, transsexualism, transgender: identification and imitation. In G. Ambrosio (Ed.), *Transvestism, transsexualism in the psychoanalytic dimension*. London: Karnac Books.

Aron, L. (1995). The internalised primal scene. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues, 5*, 195–237.

Awkward-Rich, C. (2017). Trans, Feminism or Reading Like a Depressed Transsexual. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 42(4). 819-841.

Bargh, A. J., McKenna K. Y. A., & Fitzsimons, G. M. (2002). Can You See the Real Me? Activation and Expression of the "True Self" on the Internet. *Journal of Social Issues. 58*(1). 33–48.

Baker, R. (1968). Drag: A history of female impersonation on stage. London: Triton Books.

Barker, M.-J. (2011). *Existential sex therapy. Sexual and Relationship Therapy, 26*(1), 33–47.

Barr, S. M., Budge, S. L., & Adelson, J. L. (2016). Transgender community belongingness as a mediator between strength of transgender identity and well-being. *Journal of Counselling Psychology, 63*(1), 87–97.

Barrett, J. (2007). *Transsexual and Other Disorders of Gender Identity A Practical Guide to Management*. London: CRC Press. Basow, S. A. (1992). Gender: Stereotypes and roles (3rd ed.). Thomson Brooks/Cole Publishing Co

Bayles, M. (2012). Is Physical Proximity Essential to the Psychoanalytic Process? An Exploration Through the Lens of Skype? *Psychoanalytic Dialogues, 22*(5). 569–585.

Beemyn, B., & Eliason M. (1996), *Queer Studies: A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, & Transgender Anthology.* New York: New York University Press.

Beigel, H. G. & Feldman, R. (1963). *The Male Transvestite's Motivation in Fiction, Research, and Reality. Advances in Sex Research, 1*, 198–210.

Benjamin, H. (1966). *The Transexual phenomenon*. The Julian Press.

Bersani, L. (1995). *Homos*. Harvard University Press.

———. (2009). *Is the rectum a grave, and other essays*. University of Chicago Press.

Bersani, L. & Dutoit, U. (1985). *The Forms of Violence: Narrative in Assyrian Art and Modern Culture*. Schocken.

Bieber, I. (1988). *Homosexuality: A Psychoanalytic Study*. Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc. Publishers.

Bieber, I., Dain, H. J., Dince, P. R., Drellich, M. G., Grand, H. G., Gundlach, R. H., Kremer, M. W., Rifkin, A. H., Wilbur, C. B., & Bieber, T. B (1962). *Homosexuality: A psychoanalytic study*. New York: Basic Books.

Blackmer, C. E. & Smith, P. J. (1995). *En Travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Blanchard, R. (1989). The concept of autogynephilia and the typology of male gender dysphoria. *Journal of Nervous Mental Disorders*. 177. 616-623.

Bogardus, E. S. (1941). *Sociology*. New York. Macmillan.

Boldrey, R. (1994). *Guide to Operatic Roles and Arias*. Dallas: PST.

Bolich, G. G. (2008). *Today's transgender realities: crossdressing in context*. Raleigh, North Carolina: Psyche's Press.

Bolin, A. (1994). Transcending and Transgendering: male-to-female transsexuals, dichotomy and diversity. In G. H. Herdt (Ed.), *Third Sex, Third Gender: beyond sexual dimorphism in culture and histor*y. New York: Zone Books.

———. (1996). Traversing Gender: cultural context and gender practices. In S. P. Ramet (Ed.), *Gender Reversals and Gender Cultures: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives* (pp. 22–51). London: Routledge.

Bourdieu, P. (1977 [1972]). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. (R. Nice, Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. (1989 [1979]). *Distinction. A social critique of the judgement of taste*. (R. Nice, Trans.). London: Routledge.

———. (2001 [1998]), *Masculine domination*. (R. Nice, Trans.). Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press.

Böhme, H. (2014). *Fetishism and culture: a different theory of modernity*. (A. Galt, Trans.). Berlin, Germany: Boston, Massachusetts: De Gruyter.

Braidotti, R. (2004). *Transpositions: on nomadic ethics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Brannon, L. (1996). *Gender. Psychological Perspectives*. Boston : MA.

Brentano, F. (1995 [1874]). *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. (A. C. Rancurello, Trans.). 2nd ed. London Routledge.

Brierley, H. (1979). *Transvestism: Illness, Perversion or Choice*. Pergamon, New York.

Brighenti, A. M. (2017). The visible, element of the social. *Frontiers in Sociology, 2*(17), 1-11.

Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2008). Ethics in qualitative psychological research. In C. Willig & W. S. Rogers (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology* (pp. 263–279). London: Sage Publications.

Brintnall, K. L., Marchal, J. A., & Moore, S. D. (2018). *Sexual Disorientations: Queer Temporalities, Affects, Theologies*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Bristow, J. (1997). *Sexuality (The New Critical Idiom)*. London: Routledge.

British Psychological Society (2021). *BPS Code of Human Research Ethics*. Retrieved from: https://explore.bps.org.uk/content/report-guideline/bpsrep.2021.inf180

Brown, D. G. (1960). Psychosexual Disturbances: Transvestism and Sex-Role Inversion. *Marriage and Family Living, 22*(3), 218–227.

Brown, K. (2018). We're All Born Naked: Boy Actors, The Construction of Gender, and Female Crossdressing in Shakespeare's Early Comedies. *ΑΚΦ THE ALPHA KAPPA PHI Review Annual Journal of Undergraduate Research in The Humanities. (14)*, Spring, 12-23.

Brumbaugh-Johnson, S.M, Hull, K.E. (2019) Coming Out as Transgender: Navigating the Social Implications of a Transgender Identity. *Journal of Homosexuality, 66*(8).1148-1177.

Buhrich, Neil. (1976). A heterosexual transvestite club: Psychiatric aspects. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, *10*(4), 331–335.

———. (1977). Transvestism in history. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease 165*(1), 64-66.

———. (1981). Psychological adjustment in transvestism and transsexualism. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, *19*(5), 407–411.

Buhrich, N., & McConaghy, N. (1977a). Can fetishism occur in transsexuals? *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 6*(3), 223–235.

———. (1977b). Clinical comparison of transvestism and transsexualism: An overview. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 11*(2), 83–86.

———. (1979). Three clinically discrete categories of fetishistic transvestism. Archives of Sexual Behaviour, 8(2), 151–157.

———. (1978). Two clinically discrete syndromes of transsexualism. *The British Journal of Psychiatry : The Journal of Mental Science, 133*, 73–76.

Bullough, V. L. (1974). Transvestites in the Middle Ages. *American Journal of Sociology, 79*, 1381-1394.

———. (1976a). *Sexual variance in society and history*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

———. (1976b*). Sex, society and history*. New York: Science History Publications.

———. (1987). A nineteenth-century case of transsexualism. *Archives of Sexual Behaviour, 16*, 81-84.

Bullough, V. L., & Bullough, B. (1993). *Cross dressing, sex, and gender*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Bullough, V. L., Bullough, B., & Smith, R. (1983). A comparative study of male transvestites, male-to-female transsexuals, and male homosexuals. *Journal of Sex Research, 19*(3), pp. 238–257.

Burgoon,]. K., Newton, D. A., Walther, I. B., & Baesler, E. J. (1989). Nonverbal expectancy violations and conversational involvement. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, 13*, 97-119.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.

———. (1997). *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York: Routledge.

———. (2004). *Undoing gender*. New York: Routledge.

Calogeras, R. C. (1987). The Transvestite and His Wife. *Psychoanalytic Review, 74*(4). 517–535.

Campanile, D., Filippo C-U., & Facella, M. (2017). *Trans Antiquity Cross-Dressing and Transgender Dynamics in the Ancient World*. London: Routledge.

Carr, E. C. (2001). The use of the telephone interview for research. *Journal of Research in Nursing, 6*(1), 511–24.

Cater, J. (2011). SKYPE – A Cost-effective Method for Qualitative Research. *Rehabilitation Counsellors & Educators Journal*, 4/2: 3

Cavalcante, A. (2015). I did it all online: transgender identities and the management of everyday life. *Critical Studies in Media and Communication. 33*(1). 109-122.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory*. London: Sage Publications.

Chiumento, A., Machin, L., Rahman, A., & Frith, L. (2018). Online interviewing with interpreters in humanitarian contexts. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being, 13*(1).

Chodorow, N. (1978). *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Churchill, S. D. (2007). 'Experiencing the Other within the We: Phenomenology with a Bonobo.' In L. Embree & T. Nenon (Eds.). *Phenomenology 2005. Volume 5. Selected Essays from North America*. (pp. 139–162). New York: Zeta Books.

Cixous, H. (1976). The Laugh of the Medusa. (K. Cohen & P. Cohen, Trans.). *Signs (1)*4. 875-93.

Clarke, A. E. (2005). *Situational analysis: Grounded theory after the postmodern turn*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Cohn, H. W. (1997). *Existential thought and therapeutic practice: An introduction to existential psychotherapy*. London: Sage Publications.

Colaizzi, P. F. (1973). *Reflection and research in psychology: a phenomenological study of learning*. Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt.

Coltart, N. (1985). The treatment of a transvestite. *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy. 1*. 65–79.

Constance, T. F. (2005). Introduction. In C. T. Fischer (Ed.), *Qualitative research methods for psychologists: Introduction to empirical studies* (pp. XV–XLII). Amsterdam: Elsevier Academic Press.

Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. L. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Crabtree, C. (2009). Rethinking Sexual Identity. *Existential Analysis: Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis*, *20*(2), 248–261.

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. Stanford Law Review, 43(6), 1241–1299.

Cromwell, J. (1999). *Transmen and FTMs: Identities, Bodies, Genders and Sexualities*, University of Illinois Press.

Dahl, U. (2015). Sexism: a femme-inist perspective. *New Formations*, *86*, 54–73.

de Beauvoir, S. (1997 [1949]). *The Second Sex*. (H. M. Parshley, Trans.). London: Vintage.

———. (2004 [1946). An Eye for an Eye. In M. A. Simons (Ed.). *Simone de Beauvoir: Philosophical Writings* (K. Arp, Trans.). Urbana: University of Virginia Press.

de Brosses, C., [2017 [1760]). On the worship of fetish Gods; Or, A Parallel of the Ancient Religion of Egypt with the Present Religion of Nigritia. In. Morris, R., and Leonard, Daniel. *The returns of fetishism*. Chicago. Chicago University Press.

de Lauretis, T. (1991). *Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities*. Indiana University Press.

Deakin, H., & Wakefield, K. (2014). Skype interviewing: Reflections of two PhD researchers. *Qualitative Research, 14*(5), 603–616.

Deleuze, G. (1995 [1969]). *Difference and Repetition*. London: Routledge.

Delozier, A. M., Kamody, R. C., Rodgers, S., & Chen, D. (2020). Health disparities in transgender and gender expansive adolescents: A topical review from a minority stress framework. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology, 45*(8), 842–847.

Delyfer, C. (2019). Introduction. Playing with Dress: Norms, Bodies and Identities. *e-Rea, 16*(2), online at: http://journals.openedition.org/erea/7512.

Derrida, J. (2017 [1967]). *Writing and difference*. University of Chicago Press.
Descartes, R. (1999 [1637]). *Discourse on method, and related writings* (D. M. Clarke, Trans.). Penguin Books.
———. (2008 [1641]). *Meditations on first philosophy: With selections from the Objections and replies* (M. Moriarty, Trans.). Oxford University Press.
Dillon, J. (2010). The personal is political. In Telling Stories? In S. Benamer (Ed.), *Attachment-Based Approaches to the Treatment of Psychosis*. London: Routledge.
Dinshaw, C. (2007). Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies 13*(2). 177–195.
Distiller, N. (2022). Thought Bodies: Gender, Sex, Sexualities. In: *Complicities. Palgrave Studies in the Theory and History of Psychology*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
Doan, P. L. (2010). The tyranny of gendered spaces – reflections from beyond the gender dichotomy. *Gender, Place and Culture (17)*10. 635–654.
Docter, R. F. (1988). *Transvestites and transsexuals: Toward a theory of cross-gender behaviour*. New York: Plenum Press;
———. (2004). *From Man to Woman: The Transgender Journey of Virginia Prince*. Docter Press.
Docter, R. F., & Prince, V. (1997). Transvestism: a survey of 1032 cross-dressers. *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, *26*(6), 589–605.
Dolezal, L. (2015). *The Body and Shame Phenomenology, Feminism, and the Socially Shaped Body*. Lanham. Lexington Books.
Doorduin, T., & van Berlo, W. (2014). Trans People's Experience of Sexuality in the Netherlands: A Pilot Study. *Journal of Homosexuality, 61*(5). 654–672.
Dozier, R. (2005), Beards, Breast, and Bodies: Doing Sex in a Gendered World. *Gender and Society, 19*(3), 297–316.
du Plock, S. (1997). Sexual misconceptions: A critique of gay affirmative therapy and some thoughts on an existential-phenomenological theory of sexual orientation. *Existential Analysis: Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis*, *8*(2), 56–71.
———. (2014). Gay affirmative therapy: A critique and some reflections on the value of an existential-phenomenological theory of sexual identity. In M. Milton (Ed.), *Sexuality: Existential perspectives* (pp. 141–159). Ross-on-Wye: PCCS Books.
Dzelme, K., & Jones, R. A. (2001). Male Cross-Dressers in Therapy: A Solution-Focused Perspective for Marriage. *The American Journal of Family Therapy, 29*(4), 293–305.
Eatough, V., & Smith, J. A. (2008). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. In C. Willig & W. S. Rogers (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of qualitative research in Psychology* (pp. 179–194). London: Sage Publications.
Edelman, L. (2004). *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham, N.C.: Duke
Edney, R. (2004). To Keep Me Safe from Harm? Transgender Prisoners and the Experience of Imprisonment. *Deakin Law Review. 9*(2). 328-338.
Edwards, T. (2006). *Cultures of Masculinity*. London: Routledge.
Ehrensaft, D. (2011). Boys will be girls, girls will be boys: Children affect parents as parents affect children in gender nonconformity. *Psychoanalytic Psychology, 28*(4), 528–548

Ekins, R. (1997). *Male Femaling: A grounded theory approach to cross-dressing and sex-changing: Grounded Approach to Cross-dressing and Sex-changing*. London: Routledge.

Ekins, R., & King, D. (Eds.). (1996). *Blending genders: social aspects of cross-dressing and sex-changing*. London: Routledge.

———. (2006). *The Transgender Phenomenon*. SAGE Publications.

Eliason, M. J., & Schope, R. (2007). Shifting sands or solid foundation? Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender identity formation. In I. H. Meyer & M. E. Northridge (Eds.), *The health of sexual minorities: Public health perspectives on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender populations* (pp. 3–26). Springer Science + Business Media.

Ellis, H. (2004 [1900]). Studies in the psychology of sex. Vol 2. Sexual Inversion. The University Press Limited.

Ellison, N., Heino, R., & Gibbs, J. (2006). Managing Impressions Online: Self-Presentation Processes in the Online Dating Environment. *Journal of computer-mediated communication, 11*(2). 415–441.

Emerson, S. (1996). Stages of Adjustment in Family Members of Transgender Individuals. *Journal of Family Psychotherapy, 7*(3), 1-12.

Eribon, D. (2004 [2000]), *Insult and the making of the gay self*, (M. Lucey, Trans.), Durham

Etherington, K. (2004). *Becoming a reflexive researcher: using ourselves in research*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2015). *Being Trans in the European Union Comparative analysis of EU LGBT survey data*. Vienna. Retrieved from http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2015-being-trans-eu-comparative-summary_en.pdf

Fanon, F. (2008 [1952]). *Black Skin, White Masks*. (R. Philcox, Trans.). New York: Grove Press.

Fausto-Sterling, A. (2000). *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*. London: Basic Books.

Fenichel, O. (1930). The Psychology of Transvestism. *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis. 11*, 211–227.

Fineman, M. F. (2009). The Sexual Family. In J. E. Fineman, J. E. Jackson, & A. P. Romero (Eds.), *Feminist and Queer Legal Theory: Intimate Encounters, Uncomfortable Conversations.* London: Routledge.

Finlay, L. (2011). *Phenomenology for therapists: researching the lived world*. Hoboken, Wiley.

Fisk, N. (1974). Gender dysphoria syndrome: The conceptualization that liberalizes indications for total gender reorientation and implies a broadly based multi-dimensional rehabilitative regimen. *West J Med,* 120, 386–4.

Fonagy, P. (2009). Psychosexuality and psychoanalysis: An overview. In P. Fonagy, R. Krause, & M. Leuzinger-Bohleber (Eds.), *Identity, Gender, and Sexuality: 150 Years After Freud* (pp. 1–15). Karnac Books.

Foucault, M. (1990 [1976]). *The history of sexuality. The Will to Knowledge.* (R. Hurley, Trans.). New York: Vintage Books.
———. (1991 [1975]). *Discipline and Punish. The birth of the prison*. Penguin.
———. (2004 [1999]). *Abnormal: Lectures at the College of France. 1974-1975*. New York. Picador.
Frances, A., & Wise, T. N. (1987). Treating a man who wears women's clothes. *Hospital & Community Psychiatry*, *38*(3), 233-234.
Frankl, V. (1955). *The Doctor and the Soul*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
Freeman, E. (2010). *Queer Temporalities. Queer Histories*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.
Fremi, S. (2014). *Gender crossing tales: A case for myth and metaphor* (Doctoral Thesis). University of Brighton, Brighton.
Freud, S. (1909). Analysis of a phobia in a five-year-old boy. *SE*, *10*: 1-149.
———. (1921). Group psychology and the analysis of the ego, *SE, 18*: 105–106.
———. (1989 [1937*]). New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. London: Norton.
———. (2004 [1973]). The Uncanny. In J. Rivkin & M. Ryan (Eds.), *Literary theory: an anthology* (2nd edition; 418–430). Oxford: Blackwell.
Ftacek, J. (2020). Jonathan Swift and the Transgender Classroom. *Journal for Eighteen-Century studies, 43*(2). 303-314.
Fuss, D. (1991). *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*. New York: Routledge.
Gabriel, G. (2013). Roads of Freedom. An Existential-Phenomenological Approach to a *Psychotherapy Journey. Existential Analysis, 24*(1), 95-105.
Gagne, P., Tewksbury, R., & McGaughey, D. (1997). Coming out and crossing over: Identity formation and proclamation in a transgender community. *Gender and Society*, *11*(4), 478–508.
Gallo, M. (2016a). A case study of cross-dressing: using a strategic therapy lens in couple's counselling. *The Family Journal*, *24*(1), 77–84.
——— (2016b). Treating transvestism: a counsellor's look at diagnosing and treatment of cross-dressers. *The Family Journal*, *24*(2), 195–199.
Garber, M. B. (1992). *Vested interests: cross-dressing and cultural anxiety*. New York: Routledge.
Garfinkel, H. (1967). *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
Gellner, P. L. (2009). Bodyscapes, biology, and heteronormativity. *American Anthropologist, 111*(4). 504–516.
Giami, A. (2015). Between DSM and ICD: Paraphilias and the Transformation of Sexual Norms. *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, *44*(5), 1127–1138.
Gillespie, W. H. (1956). The general theory of sexual perversion. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 37*(4–5), 396–403.
Giorgi, A. (1985). *Phenomenology and Psychological Research*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

———. (2008). Concerning a Serious Misunderstanding of the Essence of the Phenomenological Method in Psychology. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, *39*(1), 33–58.

———. (2012). The Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, *43*(1), 3–12.

Girard, R. (2001 [1972]). *Violence and the Sacred*. (P. Gregory, Trans.). London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Chicago: Aldine.

Glasser, M. (1979). Some aspects of the role of aggression in the perversion. In I. Rosen (Ed.) *Sexual Deviation* (pp.278–306). New York. Oxford University Press.

Green, R (1969). Mythological, historical, and cross-cultural aspects of transsexualism. In R. Green & J. Money (Eds.), *Transsexualism and sex reassignment* (pp. 13-22). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Greenson, R. R. (1966). A transvestite boy and a hypothesis. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis.* 47. 396-403.

Griffin, H. (2018). The masculine vaginal: working with queer men's embodiment at the transgender edge. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytical Association, 65*(6). 1009 –1031.

Groth, M. (1996). Existential Therapy on Heideggerian Principles. *Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis, 8*(1), 57–75.

Grosz, E. (2001). Lesbian Fetishism? *Identities: Journal for Politics, Gender and Culture, 1*(1). 113–134.

Haines, B. A., Ajayi, A. A., & Boyd, H. (2014). Making trans parents visible: Intersectionality of trans and parenting identities. *Feminism & Psychology. 24*(2), 238–247.

Hakeem, A. (2018). *TRANS: Exploring Gender Identity and Gender Dysphoria.* Welbeck Publishing.

Halbwachs, M. (1980 [1950]). *The collective memory*. New York: Harper & Row Colophon Books.

Halberstam, J. (1998), *Female masculinities*, Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Halperin, D. M. (1990). *One hundred years of homosexuality: and others essays on Greek love*. London: Routledge.

Haneke, M. (Director). (1997). *Funny Games*. Celluloid Dreams: Austria.

———. (2005). *Caché*. France 3 Cinéma: France, Austria.

———. (2009). *The White Ribbon*. Wega Film. Austria. Germany.

Hanisch, C. (1970). The Personal is Political. In S. Firestone & A. Koedt, *Notes from the second year: Women's Liberation*. New York: Duke.

Hanley-Hackenbruck, P. (1988). Coming out and psychotherapy. *Psychiatric Annals, 18*(1), 29–32.

Hanna, P. (2012). Using internet technologies (such as Skype) as a research medium: a research note. *Qualitative Research, 12*(2), 239–242.

Haraway, D. (1991). *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women. The Reinvention of Nature*. Routledge.

Hatchel, T. & Marx, R. (2018). Understanding Intersectionality and Resiliency among Transgender Adolescents: Exploring Pathways among Peer Victimization, School Belonging, and Drug Use. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. *15*(6):1289.

Hay-Gibson, N. V. (2009). Interviews via VoIP: Benefits and Disadvantages within a PhD study of SMEs. *Library and Information Research. 33*(105). 1756–1086.

Haynes, S. N., & O'Brien, W. H. (2000). *Principles and Practice of Behavioural Assessment* Boston: Springer.

Hawkes, T. (2002). *Shakespeare in the Present*. London: Routledge.

Heidegger, M. (1962 [1927]). *Being and Time*. (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). Oxford: Blackwell.

Hergenhahn, B. R. (1997). *An Introduction to the History of Psychology*. Brooks/Cole.

Hill., D. B., & Willoughby, B. L. B. (2005). The Development and Validation of the Genderism and Transphobia Scale. *Sex Roles*, 53, 531–544.

Hirschfeld, M. (1991 [1910]), *Transvestites: the erotic drive to cross-dress* (M. Lombardi-Nash, Trans.), Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books.

Hodshire, E. (2018). Nonbinary Identities and the Self: A Contemporary Analysis of Hedwig and the Angry Inch, Gender Identity, and Existentialism. *Cultural Studies Capstone Papers*, PhD, Columbia College Chicago.

Hogan-Finlay, M. (1995). *Development of the cross-gender lifestyle and comparison of cross-gendered men with heterosexual controls.* PhD thesis. Carleton University: Ottawa.

Hunt, Alan. (1996). *Governance of the Consuming Passions: a history of sumptuary law.* New York: St. Martin's Press.

Husserl, E. (2001 [1913]). *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*. (F. Kersten, Trans.). The Hague: Nijhoff.(2002 [1945]).

———. (2002 [1945]. The World of the Living Present and the Constitution of the Surrounding World that Is Outside the Flesh. In L. L. Lawlor & B. Bergo (Eds.), *Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, Northwestern University Press.

Iacono, L. V., Symonds, P., & Brown, D. H. K. (2016). Skype as a tool for qualitative research interviews. *Sociological Research Online, 21*(2), 103–117.

Icks, M. (2017). Cross-dressers in control. Transvestism, power and the balance between the sexes in the literary discourse of the Roman Empire. In D. Campanile, C-U. Filippo & M. Facella (Eds). *Trans Antiquity Cross-Dressing and Transgender Dynamics in the Ancient World*. London: Routledge.

Iwamoto, T. C. (2012). *Trouser Roles. The development of the role in opera from the seventeenth to twentieth century*, Thesis, Georgia State University.

Jackson, S. J., Bailey, M., & Foucault Welles, B. (2018). #GirlsLikeUs: Trans advocacy and community building online. *New Media & Society*, *20*(5), 1868–1888.

Jagose, A. R. (1996). *Queer Theory. An introduction*. Melbourne University Press.

Janghorban, R., Roudsari, R. L., & Taghipour, A. (2014). Skype interviewing: The new generation of online synchronous interview in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies and Health and Well-Being, 9*.

Johnson, E. P., & Henderson, M. G. (2005). eds. *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology. Durham*, NC: Duke University Press.

Katz-Wise, S. L., Reisner, S. L., White Hughto, J. M., Budge, S.L. (2017). Self-Reported Changes in Attractions and Social Determinants of Mental Health in Transgender Adults. *Archives of Sexual Behaviours. 46*(5).1425-1439.

Keegan, C. M. (2018). Getting Disciplined: What's Trans* About Queer Studies Now? *Journal of Homosexuality, 67*(3).384-397.

Kerchove, C. de. (2001). Dedoublement: the negotiation of gender in transvestism (Doctoral Thesis). Durham University, Durham.

Krafft-Ebing, R. von. (2011 [1886]). *Psychopathia sexualis: The classic study of deviant sex*. Arcade Publishing.

King, N., & Horrocks, C. (2010). *Interviews in Qualitative Research*, (1 edition). Los Angeles: Sage Publications Ltd.

Kirtio, L. (2012). The Inordinate Excess in Apparel: Sumptuary Legislation in Tudor England. *Constellations*, *8*(2), 17-29.

Knopp, L. (2007). From lesbian to gay to queer geographies: pasts, prospects and possibilities. In G. Brown, J. Lim, & K. Browne (Eds), *Geographies of sexualities: theory practices and politics*. (pp. 21–28). Chichester, UK: Ashgate.

Krell, E. C. (2017). Is Transmisogyny Killing Trans Women of Colour? Black Trans Feminisms and the Exigencies of White Femininity. *TSQ. 4*(2), 226–242.

Kübler-Ross, E., & Kessler, D. (2005). *On grief and grieving: Finding the meaning of grief through the five stages of loss*. Simon and Schuster.

Langdridge, D. (2007a). Gay Affirmative Therapy: A Theoretical Framework and Defence. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy, 11*(1–2), 27–43.

———. (2007b). *Phenomenological psychology: theory, research and method*. Harlow: Pearson.

Lawrence, A. A. (2005). Sexuality Before and After Male-to-Female Sex Reassignment Surgery. *Archives of Sexual Behaviour 34*, 147–166.

Långström, N., & Zucker, K. J. (2005). Transvestic Fetishism in the General Population: Prevalence and Correlates. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy, 31*(2), 87–95.

Leary, M. R., & Downs, D. L. (1995). Interpersonal function of the self-esteem motive: the self-esteem system as a sociometer. In M. H. Kernis (Ed.), *Efficacy, agency, and self-esteem*. (pp. 123 -144). New York. NY: Plenum Press.

Leguil, C. (2016). Penser le genre féminin par-delà les normes. *Études*, 5. 51-62.

Lehnert, G. (1994). Maskeraden und Metamorphosen. Als Männer verkleidete Frauen in der Literatur. Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann.

Lenning, E., & Buist, C. L. (2012). Social, psychological and economic challenges faced by transgender individuals and their significant others: gaining insight through personal narratives. *Culture, Health & Sexuality, 15*(1), 44-57.

Lenihan, P., Kainth, T. & Dundas, R. (2015). Trans Sexualities. In C. Richards & M. J. Barker (Eds.). *The Palgrave Handbook of the Psychology of Sexuality and Gender* (pp. 166–182), New York: Springer.

Lentz, R. S. (2004). *Reconceptualising Transvestites* (Clinical Dissertation). The California School of Professional Psychology, San Francisco.

Leuzinger-Bohleber, M. (2009). Psychodynamic and biographical roots of a transvestite development: Clinical and extra-clinical findings from a psychoanalysis. In P. Fonagy & R. Krause (Eds.), *Identity, Gender, and Sexuality: 150 Years after Freud* (pp. 43–74). Taylor & Francis Group.

Lev, A. I. (2004). *Transgender Emergence: Therapeutic Guidelines for Working with Gender-variant People and Their Families*. London: Routledge.

———. (2007). Transgender Communities: Developing Identity Through Connection. In K. J. Bieschke, R. M. Perez, & K. A. de Bord (Eds.), *Handbook of counselling and psychotherapy with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender clients* (pp. 147–175). American Psychological Association.

Lévinas, E. (2011 [1961]). *Totality and infinity: An essay on exteriority*. Duquesne University Press.

Levine, A. R., & Schwartz, J. M. (1999). Introduction: Psychoanalysis and sexuality. *Psychoanalytic Psychology, 16*(4), 499–501.

Levitt, H. M., & Ippolito, M. R. (2014). Being transgender: The experience of transgender identity development. *Journal of Homosexuality, 61*(12), 1727–1758.

Lewis, M. D. (1963). A case of transvestism with multiple body-phallus identification. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis,* 44, 345–351.

Liddiard, K. (2018). *The intimate lives of disabled individuals*. Routledge.

Love, H. (2007). *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Harvard University Press.

Luca, M. (2002). Containment of the sexualized and erotized transference. *Journal of Clinical Psychoanalysis*, *11*(4), 649–662.

Lukianowicz, N. (1959). Survey of various aspects of transvestism in the light of our present knowledge. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, *128*(1), 36–64.

MacKinnon C. (1989), *Toward a Feminist Theory of State*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Manen, M. van. (1990). *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*. New York: Routledge.

———. (2016). *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

Marinucci, M. (2010). *Feminism is Queer*. London and New York: Zed Books.

Maslow, A. H. (1954). *Motivation and Personality* (2nd ed.). New York: Harper & Row.

McConaghy, N. (1986). Why so few homosexual feelings reported*? The American Journal of Psychiatry, 143*(2), 266–267.

McGuire, J.K., Doty, J.L., Catalpa, J.M., & Ola, C. (2016). Body image in transgender young people: Findings from a qualitative, community based study. *Body Image*. 96–107.

McRuer, R. (2017). No future for crisps. Disorderly conduct in the new world order; or, disability studies on the verge of a nervous breakdown. In A. Waldschmidt, H.

Berressem, & M. Ingwersen, *Culture – theory – disability. Encounters between disability studies and cultural studies* (pp. 63 – 77). Verlag.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (2012 [1945]). *Phenomenology of Perception*. (D. Landes, Trans.). London: Routledge.

Medina, M. (2008). Can I Be A Homosexual Please? *Existential Analysis: Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis*, *19*(1), 129–142.

Middlehurst, L. R. J. (2013). *Reconceiving Cross-Dressing: Transphobia and Support for MTF Transgender People Socialising in Manchester's Gay Village* (Doctoral Thesis). Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester.

Milton, M. (2000). Is Existential Psychotherapy A Lesbian and Gay Affirmative Psychotherapy? *Journal for the Society of Existential Analysis, 11*(1), 86–102.

———. (2007). Being sexual: Existential contributions to psychotherapy with gay male clients. In P. E., V. Clarke, & J. Drescher (Eds.), *British lesbian, gay and bisexual psychologies: Theory, research and practice.* Binghamton: The Haworth Medical Press.

———. (Ed.). (2014a). *Sexuality: Existential perspectives*. Ross-on-Wye: PCCS Books.

———. (2014b). Sexuality: Where existential thought and counselling psychology practice come together. *Counselling Psychology Review*, *29*(2), 15–24.

Mitchell, L., MacArthur, K. J., & Blomquist, K. K. (2021). The effect of misgendering on body dissatisfaction and dietary restraint in transgender individuals: Testing a Misgendering-Congruence Process. *The International Journal of Eating Disorders, 54*(7). 1295-1301.

Mollow, A. (2012). Is sex disability? Queer and the disabled drive. In R. McRuer & A. Mollow, *Sex and Disability* (pp. 285 – 312). Duke University Press.

Money, J., & Ehrhardt, A. A. (1973). *Man & woman, boy & girl: Gender identity from conception to maturity*. Jason Aronson.

Moran, D. (2000). *Introduction to Phenomenology*. London: Routledge.

Morris, R. C., & Leonard, D. H. (2017). *The Returns of Fetishism. Charles de Brosses and the Afterlives of an Idea. Chicago*. The University of Chicago Press.

Murjan, S., & Bouman, W. P. (2015). Transgender – Living in a Gender Different from That Assigned at Birth. In C. Richards & M. J. Barker (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of the Psychology of Sexuality and Gender* (pp. 166–182). New York: Springer.

Namaste, K. (1994), 'The Politics of Inside/Out: Queer Theory, Poststructuralism, and Sociological Approach to Sexuality,' *Sociological Theory*, *12*(2), pp.220-231.

———. (2000). *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Nunn, H., & Biressi, A. (2003) Silent witness : detection, femininity, and the post-mortem body, *Feminist Media Studies, 3*(2), 193-206.

Owen, G. (2016). Is the trans child a queer child? Constructing normativity in Raising Ryland and I Am Jazz: A Family in Transition, *Queer Studies in Media & Popular Culture 1*(1), 95–109.

Peabody, G. A., Rowe, A. T., and Wall, J. M. (1953). Fetishism and transvestism. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 119. 339-350.

Person, E. S. (1999). *The sexual century*. Yale University Press.
Person, E. S., & Ovesey, L. (1974a). The transsexual syndrome in male: I. Primary transsexualism. *American Journal of Psychotherapy, 28*(1), 4 –20.
———. (1974b). The transsexual syndrome in males: II. Secondary transsexualism. *American Journal of Psychotherapy, 28*(2), 174–193.
———. (1983). Psychoanalytic Theories of Gender Identity. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis*, *11*(2), 203–226.
Petralia, P. (2011). Here, There and In-Between: Rehearsing over Skype. *Performance Research, 16*(3).113-116.
Pettinger, L. (2005). Gendered Work Meets Gendered Goods: Selling and Service in Clothing Retail. *Gender, Work and Organisation, 12*(5), 460–478.
Pierce, J., Kostova T., & Dirks K. (2003). The state of psychological ownership: integrating and extending a century of research. *Review of General Psychology 7*, 84–107.
Plummer, K. (1995), *Telling sexual stories: Power, change, and social worlds*, London: Routledge.
Preciado, P. (2018 [2000], *Counter-sexual manifesto*, (K. G. Dunn, Trans.). New York: University Press.
Prosser, J. (1998). *Second skins: The body narratives of transsexuality*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Puckett, J. A., Matsuno, E., Dyar, C., Mustanski, B., & Newcomb, M. E. (2019). Mental health and resilience in transgender individuals: What type of support makes a difference? *Journal of Family Psychology, 33*(8). 954-964.
Randell, J. B. (1959). Transvestism and transsexualism. A study of fifty cases. *British Medical Journal. 2*, 1448–1452.
Raj, R. (2007). Transactivism as Therapy: A Client Self-Empowerment Model Linking Personal and Social Agency, *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy, 11*(3-4). 77-98.
Ratliff, J. (1997). *Women in pants: Male roles for the mezzo-soprano or contralto voice*. Maryland: University of Maryland.
Reed, B., Rhode, S., Schofield, P., & Wylie, K. (2009). *Gender variance in the UK: Prevalence, incidence, growth and geographic distribution.* Gender Identity Research and Education Society.
Reed, G. M., Drescher, J., Krueger, R. B., Atalla, E., Cochran, S. D., First, M. B., Saxena, S. (2016). Disorders related to sexuality and gender identity in the ICD-11: revising the ICD-10 classification based on current scientific evidence, best clinical practices, and human rights considerations. *World Psychiatry*, *15*(3), 205–221.
Rich, A. (1980). Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *5*(4), 631–660.
Richards, C. (2011). Transsexualism and Existentialism. *Existential Analysis: Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis*, *22*(2), 272–279.
———. (2016). *Trans sexuality: A phenomenological-hermeneutic enquiry into the sexuality of trans and non-binary people - With implications for the practice of existential-*

phenomenological counselling psychology and psychotherapy (Doctoral Thesis). Middlesex University, NSPC: London.

Richards, C., & Barker, M.-J. (Eds.). (2015). *The Palgrave Handbook of the Psychology of Sexuality and Gender*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rocha, R., Veloso, A., Rossini, G., Collalto, B., Lopes, L, Batista, G., Falcao, R. (2021). The consumption experience of transgender consumers in the intimate apparel retail. Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy, 50th edition.

Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Rosenberg, T. (2016). *Don't Be Quiet, Start a Riot! Essays on Feminism and Performance*. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press.

Rowley, J. (2012). Conducting research interviews. *Management Research Review, 35*(3/4), 260–271.

Rubin, G. S. (1993). Thinking sex: Notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality. In M.A., Barale, M.A, Abelove, H, & Halperin, D. M. (Eds.). *The Lesbian and Gay Studies* Reader (pp. 3–44). New York: Routledge.

———. (2012). Thinking sex. Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality. In Rubin, G. S., *Deviations*. Duke University Press.

Rubin, H. (2003). *Self-made men: Identity and embodiment among transsexual men*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.

Rudd, P. J. (1999). *My Husband Wears My Clothes: Crossdressing from the Perspective of a Wife*. Katy: PM Publishers.

Salmons, J. (2015). *Qualitative online interviews.* London & Thousand Oaks CA: SAGE.

Sartre, J.-P. (1958 [1957]). *Search for a Method* (H. E. Barnes, Trans.). New York: Random House.

———. (1963 [1952]). *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*. (B. Frechtman, Trans.). New York: George Braziller.

———. (1969). The Itinerary of Thought. *New Left Review, 1*(58). 43–66.

———. (1995 [1946]). *Anti-Semite and Jew. An exploration of the etiology of hate*. (G. J. Becker, Trans.). Schocken.

———. (2003 [1943]). *Being and nothingness: An essay on phenomenological ontology* (H. E. Barnes, Trans.). London and New York: Routledge**.**

———. (2004 [1940]). *The Imaginary. A phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination* (J. Webber, Trans.) London and New York: Routledge.

Schimanski, I. & Treharne, G. (2019). "Extra marginalisation within the community": queer individuals' perspectives on suicidality, discrimination and gay pride events. *Psychology & Sexuality*, *10*, 31– 44.

Scottish Transgender Alliance. (2015). *Non-binary people's experiences in the UK*.

Scottish Transgender Alliance. (2010). *Public bodies and the public-sector duties relating to transsexual and transgender people: Report of findings and case studies* (p. 196). Retrieved from https://www.scottishtrans.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/psd_trans_report.pdf

Sedgwick, E. K. (1990). *Epistemology of the closet*. Berkely: University of California Press.
Seitz, S. (2016). Pixilated partnerships, overcoming obstacles in qualitative interviews via Skype: a research note. *Qualitative Research 16*(2). 229–235.
Seymour-Smith, S. (2015). Qualitative Methods. In *The Palgrave Handbook of the Psychology of Sexuality and Gender* (pp. 316–332). New York: Springer.
Shaffer, J., & Barclay, A. (1989). Strategic Therapy as a Treatment Approach in Transvestism. *Psychotherapy in Private Practice*, *7*(2), 97–102.
Shaughnessy, J. J., Zechmeister, E. B., & Zechmeister, J. S. (2011). *Research methods in psychology* (9th ed). New York: McGraw-Hill.
Sheldon, S. (2018). *Experiences of men who cross-dress. A phenomenological study*. Doctoral Thesis, John F. Kennedy University.
Sherman, A. D. F., Clark, K. D., Robinson, K., Noorani, T., & Poteat, T. (2020). Trans* Community Connection, Health, and Wellbeing: A Systematic Review. *LGBT Health. 7*(1). 1–14.
Siann, G. (1994). Gender, Sex and Sexuality. Contemporary Psychological Perspectives. London. Taylor and Francis.
Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2007). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods* (pp. 53–80). Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
Spelman, E. (1990). *Inessential woman.* Boston: Beacon Press.
Spinelli, E. (1994). *Demystifying therapy*. London: Constable.
———. (1996) Some hurried notes expressing outline ideas that someone might someday utilise as signposts towards a sketch of an existential-phenomenological theory of sexuality. *Existential Analysis, 8* (1), 2-20.
———. (2004) *The mirror and the hammer: challenging orthodoxies in psychotherapeutic thought*. London: Sage.
———. (2014). Being Sexual: Human Sexuality Revisited. *Existential Analysis: Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis*, *25*(1), 17–42.
Stafford, A. (2012). Departing shame: Feinberg and queer/transgender counter-cultural remembering. *Journal of Gender Studies, 21*(3), 301–312.
Stoffel, A. (2018). The Challenge of Unintelligible Life: Critical Security Studies' Failure to Account for Violence Against Queer People. *Politikon: The IAPSS Journal of Political Science*, *38*, 48-63.
Stoller, R. J. (1966). The mother's contribution to infantile transvestic behaviour. *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, *47*(2), 384–395.
———. (1968). *Sex and Gender*. New York: Science House.
———. (1971). The Term Transvestism. *Archives of General Psychiatry, 24*(3), 230–237.
———. (1984). *Sex and Gender: The Development of Masculinity and Femininity*. London: Karnac Books.
———. (1992). *Observing the Erotic Imagination*. Yale University Press.

Stone, G. P. (1962). Appearance and the Self. In A. M. Rose (Ed.), *Human Behavior and Social Processes: An Interactionist Approach* (pp. 86-118). New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Storr, A. (1957). The Psychopathology of Fetishism and Transvestism. *Journal of Analytical Psychology 2*, 153-166.

———. (1974). *Sexual Deviation*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Stotzer, R. L., Herman, J. L., and Hasenbush, A. (2014). *Transgender Parenting: A Review of Existing Research*. Los Angeles, CA: The Williams Institute.

Stryker, S. (1998) (Ed.). The Transgender Issue. *GLQ 4*(2).

———. (2008). *Transgender History*. Berkeley, CA: Seal Press.

Stryker, S., & Whittle, S. (2006). The Transgender Studies Reader.

Sullivan, M., & Wodarski, J. S. (2002). Social alienation in gay youth. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 5*(1), 1–17.

Suthrell, C. A. (2004). *Unzipping gender: Sex, cross-dressing and culture*. Berg.

Taylor, C. (1994). The Politics of Recognition. In A. Gutmann (Ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (pp. 25 – 73). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Taylor, C. (2012). Foucault and Familial Power. *Hypatia*, *27*(1), 201–21.

Taylor, S. J., Bogdan, R., & DeVault, M. L. (2016). *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Guidebook and Resource*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

The British Psychological Society. (2021). *BPS Code of Human Research Ethics*.

Thoits, P. A. (1992). Identity structures and psychological well-being: Gender and marital status comparisons. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 55*(3), 236–256.

Thorneycroft, R. (2021). Cripping Incest Discourse(s). *Sexuality and Culture. 25*(6). 1–17.

Tin, L-G. (2012 [2008]). *The Invention of Heterosexual Culture*. MA: MIT Press.

Tirohl, B. (2007). A Study of the Rights of Cross-dressers in the UK. *Journal of Gender Studies*, *16*(3), 277–289.

TransActual (2021). *Trans lives survey 2021: Enduring the UK's hostile environment*.

Tråvén, M. (2016). Voicing the Third Gender. The Castrato Voice and the Stigma of Emasculation in Eighteenth-Century Society. *Études Épistémè (29).*

Tseëlon, E. (2001). *Masquerade and Identities: Essays on gender, sexuality, and marginality*. New York: Routledge.

Tsoi, W. F. (1992). Male and female transsexuals: A comparison. *Singapore Medical Journal*, *33*(2), 182–185.

Tylor, A. (2015). M$M@Gaydar. Queering the social network. In M. Laing, K. Pilcher, & N. Smith. *Queer Sex Work*. London: Routledge.

van der Berg, E. (2016). The closet: A dangerous heteronormative space. *South African Review of Sociology*, *47*(3), 25–43.

van Deurzen, E. (2010). *Everyday mysteries: A Handbook of Existential Psychotherapy* (2nd ed). New York: Routledge.

van Dijk, T.A. (1997). Discourse as interaction in society. In T. A. van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse studies: a multidisciplinary introduction*. Vol. 2 (pp. 1-37). London: Sage.

Vitelli, R. (2015) Adult Male-to-Female Transsexualism. A Clinical Existential Phenomenological Inquiry. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology. 46*(1), 33–68.

Volcan, V. D. (1973). Transitional fantasies in the analysis of a narcissistic personality. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytical Association, 21*, 351-376.

Walkerdine, V. (1989). Femininity as Performance. *Oxford Review of Education, 15*(3), 267–279.

Warner, M. (1993). *Fear of a Queer Planet. Queer Politics and Social Theory*. University of Minnesota Press.

Wheatley, C. (2011). *Michael Haneke's cinema. The ethic of the image*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn.

Webster, L. (2019). "I am I": Self-constructed transgender identities in internet-mediated forum communication. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language, (256).* 129–146.

Weeks, J. (1977). *Coming out: Homosexual Politics in Britain, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*. London: Quartet Books.

Wesp L.M, Malcoe, L.H., Elliott, A. & Poteat, T. (2019). Intersectionality Research for Transgender Health Justice: A Theory-Driven Conceptual Framework for Structural Analysis of Transgender Health Inequities. *Transgender Health*. *4*(1). 287-296.

Wheeler, J., Newring, K. A., & Draper, C. (2008). Transvestic Fetishism - Psychopathology and Theory. In R. D. Laws & W. T. O'Donohue (Eds.), *Sexual Deviances: Theory, Assessment and Treatment* (2nd ed., pp. 272–284). London: Guilford Press.

Whitam, F. (1980). The prehomosexual male child in three societies: The United States, Guatemala, and Brazil. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 9, 87–99.

Whitam, F., & Mathy, R. M. (1986). Male Homosexuality in four societies: Brazil, Guatemala, the Philippines, and the United States. New York: Praeger, 1986).

White, C. R., & Jenkins, D. D. (2017). College students' acceptance of trans women and trans men in gendered spaces: The role of physical appearance. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services: The Quarterly Journal of Community & Clinical Practice, 29*(1), 41–67.

Wilkinson, S. (1988). The role of reflexivity in feminist psychology. *Women's Studies International Forum, 11*(5), 493–502.

Williams, B. (1993). *Shame and necessity*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

Williams, J. (2005). *Understanding Poststructuralism*. London: Routledge.

Williams, J. P. (2008). Symbolic Interactionism. In L. M. Given (Ed.), *The Sage Encyclopaedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (Vol. I). Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Willig, C. (2013). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology* (3rd ed.). Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Windelband, W (1980 [1894]). History and natural science. *History and Theory, 19*(2),165-168.

Wittig, M. (1996). Avatars. *L'Esprit Créateur, 36*(2), 109-116.

Wolfson, S. J. (1991). A Problem Few Dare Imitate: Sardanapalus and 'Effeminate Character.' *ELH, 58*(4), 867–902.

Woolfe, R., & Milton, M. (Eds.). (2010). Sexual identity: Affirmative practice with lesbian and gay clients. In *Handbook of Counselling Psychology* (3rd ed). Los Angeles: SAGE.

World Health Organization (Ed.). (1992). *The ICD-10 Classification of Mental and Behavioural Disorders: Clinical Descriptions and Diagnostic Guidelines*. Geneva: World Health Organization.

Wright, S. (2010). Depathologising Consensual Sexual Sadism, Sexual Masochism, Transvestic Fetishism, and Fetishism. *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, *39*(6), 1229–1230.

Yadegarfard, M., Meinhold-Bergmann, M. E., & Ho, R. (2014). Family rejection, social isolation, and loneliness as predictors of negative health outcomes (depression, suicidal ideation, and sexual risk behaviour) among Thai male-to-female transgender adolescents. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 11*(4), 347–363.

Yardley, L. (2000). Dilemmas in qualitative health research. *Psychology and Health, 15*(2), 215-228.

Zamboni, B. D. (2006). Therapeutic Considerations in Working With the Family, Friends, and Partners of Transgendered Individuals. *The Family Journal, 14*(2), 174-179.

Zerubavel, E. (1981). *Hidden Rhythms: Schedules and Calendars in Social Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

APPENDIX

Appendix I.

Research proposal

Title: A phenomenological-hermeneutic enquiry into the lived experience of crossdressing for adult male-born subjects in the UK.

The aims of the project:

- to contribute to the sparse literature on crossdressing;
- to describe the lived experience of crossdressing, using the participants' own words;
- to contribute to the development of an informed existential perspective on the phenomena;
- to start the discussion on how we approach crossdressing within existential psychotherapy.

Supporting literature and rationale

Crossdressing, as a behaviour, refers to the regular activity (but not constantly) of wearing clothing and/or makeup and accessories that are not traditionally associated with the sex they were assigned at birth (Amnesty International, 2015; Scottish Trans Alliance, 2015). Also, it can be used as a label or category to describe a gender or a sexual identity or both (Scottish Trans Alliance, 2015).

The literature on crossdressing comes from a variety of areas spanning from humanities and arts to social sciences and psychiatry. However, much of the clinical literature has focused on theories and pathology and less the on the actual lived experience of those who engage in crossdressing activities or their biographies (Lentz, 2004) or their voices (Richards, 2016). Furthermore, in many cases, the studies have utilised samples drawn from psychological clinics or patients which are then extrapolated to the whole population of crossdressing (Hogan-Finlay, 1995, p. 16; Lentz, 2004; Wheeler, Newring, & Draper, 2008).

Closer to our cultural setting, the Western cultures, and the American culture in particular (Bullough & Bullough, 1993, p. 15), have had a strong tradition of intolerance towards non-normative gender expression (Lenihan, Kainth & Dundas, 2015). Not surprisingly, crossdressing is present within the clinical discourse as a sexual disorder (in the DSM since 1952, in the ICD it has just been removed), while within a forensic and legal setting it is present as a ‘sexual crime’ – that is, in the same category with bestiality, necrophilia and incest (Aggrawal, 2009). In practice, this view of crossdressing as a mental health disorder might be responsible for why people who identify as crossdressers fear being abnormal (Shaffer & Barclay, 1989) or why they find it very hard to come out as a crossdresser (Tirohl, 2007).

As such, the question of how we understand and work with crossdressers remains open. Returning to the issue of psychotherapy, the literature relating to it is very limited for *trans* individuals (Lenihan et al., 2015) and even more scarce specifically for crossdressing. At the moment, there is no phenomenological study on crossdressing available that I am aware of. Moreover, by being a phenomenological study, it would focus on the lived experience of people, it would seek to obtain rich descriptive accounts of their lives and struggles, which can ultimately be insightful to inform how to work with such clients in the therapy room.

Method
The chosen method is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), as described by Jonathan Smith et al. (2009). In short, IPA blends phenomenological and hermeneutical features along with ideography and symbolic interactionism to obtain a '*detailed examination of individual lived experience and how individuals make sense of that experience*' (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p.179), which mirrors the overall aim of this study. Subsequently, IPA has been selected from the larger family of phenomenological methods as it is particularly suitable for exploring issues surrounding sexuality and gender (Seymour-Smith, 2015).

Design
I plan to conduct *semi-structured in-depth interviews* lasting between 60-90 minutes. Interviews will be conducted one-to-one in accordance with the model of the relationship between the researcher and the participant as described by Smith et al. (2009). A list of the interview questions can be found in *Appendix VIII*. Demographic data will also be collected; see Appendix VII for the demographic form.

Participants
The study aims to recruit 8 adult individuals who fulfil all the recruitment criteria. This size sample is characteristic of qualitative research, especially for IPA, which requires a purposeful selected sample. Considering that there are some difficulties in contacting potential participants, and that there is a lack of qualitative studies performed on the subject, the topic cannot be considered common as to justify further recruitment criteria based on demographic, cultural or religious factors.

Procedures
I plan to use recruitment adverts in charities and organisations which might be of interest for the target participants group (i.e., Elop-London, Islington Mind, Support U Reading, and The Beaumont Society) and online ads in online forums, online groups, print media and social media apps used by crossdressers (i.e., www.crossdresserheaven.com, https://tvchix.com, Transliving Magazine, https://crossdressing.co.uk, , and The Northern Concord Online Group and Magazine). I also plan to advertise the present study through email distribution to my own social and professional network and to forward it to any suitable colleagues and friends. At this stage, the respondents will be initially screened through self-identification with the participant's selection criteria that will be featured in the adverts. Furthermore, potential participants will be asked to contact the researcher via telephone or email. If this fails to attract a sufficient number of participants, a second recruitment stage is proposed consisting of snowball sampling. That is, the researcher will invite its participants to refer other potential participants from their social network. This method would be beneficial to find and access hard-to-reach population which otherwise would be difficult to approach.

Next, the potential participants will be contacted by telephone to discuss and explain the study, to confirm their eligibility and to discuss if they would be interested in taking part in the study. It will be essential to respond sensitively to any individual interested in the research who does not meet the exclusion and inclusion criteria. In this situation, individuals would be thanked; the limited focus of the study would be highlighted, and they would be encouraged to get in touch with the Gender Identity Research & Education Society. If participants are eligible and interested in participating, they will be sent written information regarding the study (Information sheet, *Appendix IV)* and a consent form (*Appendix VI).* After a mutually agreed timeframe, that gives the participant time to review the information, participants will be contacted again, and if they are happy to continue, a face-to-face interview will be arranged. The interview will take place in a neutral setting in a counselling room. At the beginning of the meeting, the

information from the Information Sheet will be reviewed, including consent, confidentiality and the process of withdrawal of consent. Furthermore, participants will be given the opportunity to ask questions. If the participant is content to continue, explicit informed consent will be sought by asking the participants to sign the consent form; they will also be given a copy for their own records. During this stage, they will also be asked if they consent to be contacted for possible follow-ups regarding their participation (Consent Form, Appendix VI). Next, the participant will be offered a short demographic questionnaire (Appendix VII). After this stage, the interview can begin, and it will be recorded digitally. After the interview, the participants will be offered a 20-minute debriefing and a debriefing sheet *(Appendix V)*. Furthermore, they will be given a date up to which they can have all their supplied data destroyed.

Analysis

The data, in this case, consists of semi-structured, in-depth interview transcripts generated from the responses by the participants. The depth and complexity of the analysis will move gradually through different layers of phenomenological description and interpretation to gain a dense and rich account from each participant. As such, the final product of the analysis is a table of themes that capture the phenomenon under investigation with the help of direct quotes from the participants.

Appendix II.

Application for Ethical Approval

No study may proceed until approval has been granted by an authorised person. For collaborative research with another institution, ethical approval must be obtained from all institutions involved. If you are involved in a project that has already received ethical approval from another committee or that will be seeking approval from another ethics committee please complete form '**Application for Approval of Proposals Previously Approved by another Ethics Committee or to be Approved by another Ethics Committee'**

UG and MSc STUDENTS: Please email the completed form to your supervisor from your University email account (...@live.mdx.ac.uk). Your supervisor will then send your application to the Ethics Committee (Psy.Ethics@mdx.ac.uk). You should NOT email the ethics committee directly.

PhD Students and STAFF: Please email the completed form to Psy.Ethics@mdx.ac.uk from your University email account (...@mdx.ac.uk)

This form consists of 8 sections:

1) Summary of Application and Declaration
2) Ethical questions
3) Research proposal
4) Information sheet
5) Informed consent
6) Debriefing
7) Risk assessment (required if research is to be conducted away from Middlesex University property, otherwise leave this blank. Institutions/locations listed for data collection must match original letters of acceptance)
8) Reviewer's decision and feedback

Once your file including proposal, information sheet, consent form, debriefing and (if necessary) materials and Risk Assessment form is ready, please check the size. For files exceeding 3MB, please email your application to your supervisor using WeTransfer: https://www.wetransfer.com/ this will place your application in cloud storage rather than sending it directly to a specific email account. If you/ your supervisor have confidentiality concerns, please submit a paper copy of your application to the Psychology Office instead of proceeding with the electronic submission.

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

Application No.:	Click here to enter text.	**Decision:**	Click here to enter text.	**Date:**	Click here to enter a date.

RISK ASSESSMENT *(complete relevant boxes)*:

Required:	☑ **Yes** ☐ **No**	**Signed by:**	☑ **Student** ☑ **Supervisor** ☐ **Programme Leader**
Date:	**18/11/18**		

LETTER/S OF ACCEPTANCE/PERMISSION MATCHING FRA1 (RISK ASSESSMENT) RECEIVED (SPECIFY):

	Date	From	Checked by
All	Click here to enter a date.	Click here to enter text.	☐ Supervisor ☐ Ethics Admin

Part	Click here to enter a date.	Click here to enter text.	☐ Supervisor ☐ Ethics Admin
Part	Click here to enter a date.	Click here to enter text.	☐ Supervisor ☐ Ethics Admin

DBS Certificate(s) Required? *(complete relevant boxes)*:

DBS certificate required?	**NO**	**Seen By:**	Choose an item.
DBS Certificate Number:	001618532191	**Date DBS Issued:**	**12/06/18**

1 Summary of application (researcher to complete)

Title of Proposal:	A phenomenological-hermeneutic enquiry into the lived experience of crossdressing for adult male-born subjects in the UK		
Name of Principal Investigator/Supervisor	Professor Simon du Plock		
Name of Student Researcher(s) and student number(s)	Iulian Chear		
Please click one of the following:			
○ UG Student	◉ PHD/MPHIL Student	○ MSc Student	○ Staff
Proposed start date	01/02/2019	**Proposed end date**	12/2020
Details of any co-investigators (if applicable)			
1. Name: Click here to enter text.	Organisation: Click here to enter text.	Email: Click here to enter text.	

Topic/Research Area (tick as many as apply)

☑ Social/Psychosocial ☐ Occupational ☐ Forensic ☐ Developmental
☐ Sport & Exercise ☐ Cognition & Emotion ☐ Psychoanalysis ☐ Clinical
☐ Psychophysiological ☐ Health

Methodology (tick as many as apply)

☑ Qualitative ☐ Experimental ☐ Field Experiments ☐ Questionnaire
☐ Observation (humans and non-humans)
☐ Analysis of Existing Data Source/Secondary Data Analysis

1.1	Are there any sensitive elements to this study (delete as appropriate)? If you are unclear about what this means in relation to your research, please discuss with your Supervisor first.	**Yes.**

1.2	If the study involves any of the first three groups above, the researcher may need a DBS certificate (Criminal Records Check). PG students are expected to have DBS clearance. Does the current project require DBS clearance? Discuss this matter with your supervisor if you unsure	**No.**
1.3	Does the study involve ANY of the following? Clinical populations; Children (under 16 years); Vulnerable adults such as individuals with mental or physical health problems, prisoners, vulnerable elderly, young offenders; Political, ethnic or religious groups/minorities; Sexually explicit material/issues relating to sexuality; Mood induction; Deception	**Yes. It involves interviewing members of a sexual and gender minority, and it involves discussing issues relating to sexuality and gender.**
1.4	Is this a resubmission / amended application? If so, you must attach the original application with the review decision and comments (you do not need to re-attach materials etc. if the resubmission does not concern alterations to these). Please note that in the case of complex and voluminous applications, it is the responsibility of the applicant to identify the amended parts of the resubmission.	**No.**

By submitting this form you confirm that:

- you are aware that any modifications to the design or method of the proposal will require resubmission;
- students will keep all materials, documents and data relating to this proposal until completion of your studies at Middlesex, in compliance with confidentiality guidelines (i.e., only you and your supervisor will be able to access the data);
- staff will keep all materials, documents and data relating to this proposal until the appropriate time after completion of the project, in compliance with confidentiality guidelines (i.e., only you and other members of your team will be able to access the data);
- students will provide all original paper and electronic data to the supervisor named on this form on completion of the research / dissertation submission;
- you have read and understood the British Psychological Society's *Code of Ethics and Conduct,* and *Code of Human Research Ethics.*

2. Ethical questions – all questions must be answered

2.1	Will you inform participants of their right to withdraw from the research at any time, without penalty? **Participants will have the right to withdraw from participating in the project at any time without any obligation to explain their reasons and will be informed about it. Furthermore, participants will be given a date up to which they can have all their supplied data destroyed (regularly a month after the interview date). All this information will be included in the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix IV.) and the Consent form (Appendix VI).**	**Yes.**
2.2	Will you provide a full debriefing at the end of the data collection phase?	**Yes.**

	Participants will be offered a debriefing stage and the end of the interview and a Debriefing Sheet (Appendix V) which will include low-cost counselling opportunities.	
2.3	Will you be available to discuss the study with participants, if necessary, to monitor any negative effects or misconceptions? **I will monitor the participants very carefully and be sensitive about the fact that talking about intimate subjects may be difficult, exposing, and might leave people feeling vulnerable. I will stop the interview at any point if I feel that the participant shows signs of becoming distressed. Furthermore, the participants will be explicitly informed that they can stop the interview at any point (either temporarily, or definitively) and that they can refuse to answer or disclose any information. At the end of the interview, they will be offered up to 20 minutes to talk about their feelings if they want to. They will also be offered a list of organisations who might be able to offer cost-effective therapy, further advice and support along with the debriefing sheet which will contain post-research contact information (Debriefing Sheet, Appendix V).**	**Yes**.
2.4	Under the Data Protection Act, participant information is confidential unless otherwise agreed in advance. Will participant anonymity be guaranteed? **For each participant, a pseudonym will be used, which can be chosen together with the participant. The pseudonym will be present on the demographic sheet, on the transcripts, within the thesis and on the consent form. Up until the analysis begins, the identity of the participant will be linked with the pseudonym. After the analysis begins, the link between their identities and the pseudonym will be deleted; as such, their data will become anonymous.**	**Yes.**
2.5	Is this research or part of it going to be conducted in a language other than English? Note, full translations of all non-English materials must be provided and attached to this document	**No.**
2.6	Is this research to be conducted only at Middlesex University? If not, a completed Risk Assessment form - see Section 8 – must be completed, and permission from any hosting or collaborative institution must be obtained by letter or email and appended to this document before data collection can commence. If you are conducting an online survey or interviews via Skype or telephone whilst you are at Middlesex University, you do not need to fill in the risk assessment form.	**No. Risk Assessment Form Attached**

If you have answered 'No' to questions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 above, please justify/discuss this below, outlining the measures you have taken to ensure participants are being dealt with in an ethical way.

2.6 The research interviews may be conducted at Brighter Spaces (Islington, London) and Support U (Reading). At Support U, where I am a volunteer, I have the opportunity to rent out counselling rooms for the purpose of the interviews. At Brighter Spaces I can rent counselling rooms for the purpose of the interview.

Are there any ethical issues that concern you about this particular piece of research, not covered elsewhere on this form? If so, please outline them below:

Regarding the recruitment procedures employed (advertising and snowball sampling), I may be contacted by past clients or individuals whom I know personally or in a professional capacity. I will not interview any person that I know personally or in a professional capacity, including past or current clients.

Self-Disclosure: I plan not to self-disclose information regarding my gender or my sexuality in the recruitment material or within the information sheet. Still, there is the possibility of being asked directly by the participants about it. I plan to say that I am a member of the LGBTQ+ community, I am open to wearing any type of clothing and that I do not identify as a cross-dresser.

For the participants who sign up to receive either a full version of the research or a summary, there is a risk for them feeling 'betrayed' reading interpretations of their accounts that might not be the same with their own understanding of their experiences (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008, p. 267; Hopf, 2004, p. 338; Willig, 2013, p. 99). To minimise this risk, specific steps will be taken during the data analysis, in regard to the level and degree of the interpretation. As such, any attempts to take the analysis far beyond the participant's own words or any type of 'hermeneutics of suspicion', will be carefully considered also from an ethical point of view. Secondly, I plan to ask my participants if they consent to be contacted post-interview for follow-ups should there be any ambiguity regarding their interviews. This would ensure an opportunity for clarification, and It would be implemented through the consent form (by giving them an opt-in/ opt-out option).

Regarding anonymity, using a snowballing sample within a small minority increases the chance for participants to know each other and to be able to recognise each other. This will be addressed accordingly within the anonymisation process to lower this risk, but also bearing in mind that anonymity is a tension within the research process as it protects the participants and it can also deny them *'the very voice in the research that might originally have been claimed as its aim'* (Parker,2011, p. 17).

Appendix III.

INDEPENDENT FIELD/LOCATION WORK RISK ASSESSMENT FRA1

This proforma is applicable to, and must be completed in advance for, the following field/location work situations:

1. *All field/location work undertaken independently by individual students, either in the UK or overseas, including in connection with proposition module or dissertations. Supervisor to complete with student(s).*
2. *All field/location work undertaken by postgraduate students. Supervisors to complete with student(s).*
3. *Field/location work undertaken by research students. Student to complete with supervisor.*
4. *Field/location work/visits by research staff. Researcher to complete with Research Centre Head.*
5. *Essential information for students travelling abroad can be found on www.fco.gov.uk*

FIELD/LOCATION WORK DETAILS

Name:	Iulian Chear	**Student No** **Research Centre:(staff only)**	M00558139
Supervisor:	Prof Simon du Plock	**Degree course**	Doctorate in Existential Psychotherapy and Counselling

NEXT OF KIN Telephone numbers and name of next of kin who may be contacted in the event of an accident	**N/A**
Physical or psychological limitations to carrying out the proposed field/location work	No.
Any health problems (full details) Which may be relevant to proposed field/location work activity in case of emergencies.	No.
Locality (Country and Region)	Reading, London UK.
Travel Arrangements NB: Comprehensive travel and health insurance must always be obtained for independent overseas field/location work.	Public Transport
Dates of Travel and Field/location work	Summer and Autumn 2019 and Spring 2020

PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION VERY CAREFULLY

Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment

List the localities to be visited or specify routes to be followed **(Col. 1).** For each locality, enter the potential hazards that may be identified beyond those accepted in everyday life. Add details giving cause for concern **(Col. 2).**

Examples of Potential Hazards:
Adverse weather: exposure (heat, sunburn, lightening, wind, hypothermia) Terrain: rugged, unstable, fall, slip, trip, debris, and remoteness. Traffic: pollution. Demolition/building sites, assault, getting lost, animals, disease. Working on/near water: drowning, swept away, disease (Weil's disease, hepatitis, malaria, etc.), parasites, flooding, tides and range. Lone working: difficult to summon help, alone or in isolation, lone interviews. Dealing with the public: personal attack, causing offence/intrusion, misinterpreted, political, ethnic, cultural, socio-economic differences/problems. Known or suspected criminal offenders. Safety Standards (other work organisations, transport, hotels, etc.), working at night, areas of high crime. Ill health: personal considerations or vulnerabilities, pre-determined medical conditions (asthma, allergies, fitting) general fitness, disabilities, persons suited to task. Articles and equipment: inappropriate type and/or use, failure of equipment, insufficient training for use and repair, injury. Substances (chemicals, plants, bio- hazards, waste): ill health - poisoning, infection, irritation, burns, cuts, eye-damage. Manual handling: lifting, carrying, moving large or heavy items, physical unsuitability for task

If no hazard can be identified beyond those of everyday life, enter 'NONE'.

1. LOCALITY/ROUTE (specify here the exact name and address of each locality/organisation)	**2. POTENTIAL HAZARDS**
1.1 Travel to my suggested interview premises: -Support U(Reading, RG1 7SB); -Brighter Spaces (London N1 8PT)	1.1 Everyday hazards of travelling 1.2 Lone working and possibility of assault. I will be alone with the participants in the room. 1.3 Adverse weather. I plan to interview participants around Summer 2019 and Winter 2019. Adverse weather (extreme heat in summer, or wind and snow falling in winter) may affect my travel plans and my participants' travel plans.

The University Field/location work code of Practice booklet provides practical advice that should be followed in planning and conducting field/location work.

Risk Minimisation/Control Measures **PLEASE READ VERY CAREFULLY**

For each hazard identified **(Col 2),** list the precautions/control measures in place or that will be taken **(Col 3)** to **"reduce the risk to acceptable levels",** and the safety equipment **(Col 5)** that will be employed.

Assuming the safety precautions/control methods that will be adopted **(Col. 3),** categorise the field/location work risk for each location/route as negligible, low, moderate or high **(Col. 4).**
Risk increases with both the increasing likelihood of an accident and the increasing severity of the consequences of an accident.

An acceptable level of risk is: a risk which can be safely controlled by the person taking part in the activity using the precautions and control measures noted including the necessary instructions, information and training relevant to that risk. The resultant risk should not be significantly higher than that encountered in everyday life.

Examples of control measures/precautions:

Providing adequate training, information & instructions on field/location work tasks and the safe and correct use of any equipment, substances and personal protective equipment. Inspection and safety check of any equipment prior to use. Assessing individuals fitness and suitability to environment and tasks involved. Appropriate clothing, environmental information consulted and advice followed (weather conditions, tide times etc.). Seek advice on harmful plants, animals & substances that may be encountered, including information and instruction on safe procedures for handling hazardous substances. First aid provisions, inoculations, individual medical requirements, logging of location, route and expected return times of lone workers. Establish emergency procedures (means of raising an alarm, back up arrangements). Working with colleagues (pairs). **Lone working is not permitted where the risk of physical or verbal violence is a realistic possibility.** Training in interview techniques and avoiding /defusing conflict, following advice from local organisations, wearing of clothing unlikely to cause offence or unwanted attention. Interviews in neutral locations. Checks on Health and Safety standards & welfare facilities of travel, accommodation and outside organisations. Seek information on social/cultural/political status of field/location work area.

Examples of Safety Equipment: Hardhats, goggles, gloves, harness, waders, whistles, boots, mobile phone, ear protectors, bright fluorescent clothing (for roadside work), dust mask, etc.

If a proposed locality has not been visited previously, give your authority for the risk assessment stated or indicate that your visit will be preceded by a thorough risk assessment.

3. PRECAUTIONS/CONTROL MEASURES	**4. RISK ASSESSMENT** (low, moderate, high)	**5. SAFETY/EQUIPMENT**
1. All the interviews will take place during office hours when there is someone present in the building. 2. Environmental information consulted, and advice followed: I will reschedule and cancel any interviews if extreme weather is forecasted (extreme heat, abundant snowfall, etc.) 3. If I notice that the participant is getting angry or out of control, I will stop the interview and try to de-escalate the situation. If that does not work, I will leave the premises.	Low	The counselling rooms at SupportU have panic alarms, and there is always someone in the building during open-hours. At Brighter Places there is a concierge during normal working hours, and other counsellor working in the nearby rooms. All my allocated places are located on main streets. They have fire extinguishers and easy access to the outside.

PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION AND SIGN AS APPROPRIATE

DECLARATION: The undersigned have assessed the activity and the associated risks and declare that there is no significant risk or that the risk will be controlled by the method(s) listed above/over. Those participating in the work have read the assessment and will put in place precautions/control measures identified.

NB: Risk should be constantly reassessed during the field/location work period and additional precautions taken or field/location work discontinued if the risk is seen to be unacceptable.

Signature of Field/location worker (Student/Staff)	Iulian Chear	**Date:**	18/11/2018
Signature of Student Supervisor		**Date:**	20/12/18
APPROVAL: (ONE ONLY) **Signature of Director of Programmes** (undergraduate students only)	Click here to enter text.	**Date:**	Click here to enter a date.
Signature of Research Degree Co-ordinator or Director of Programmes (Postgraduate)	Click here to enter text.	**Date:**	Click here to enter a date.
Signature of Research Centre Head (for staff field/location workers**)**	Click here to enter text.	**Date:**	Click here to enter a date.

FIELD/LOCATION WORK CHECK LIST

1. Ensure that **all members** of the field party possess the following attributes (where relevant) at a level appropriate to the proposed activity and likely field conditions:

☑ Safety Knowledge & Training?	☐ Awareness of cultural, social & political differences?
☑ Personal clothing & safety equipment?	☑ Suitability of field/location workers to proposed tasks?
☐ Physical & psychological fitness & disease immunity, protection & awareness?	

2. Have all the necessary arrangements been made and information/instruction gained, and have the relevant authorities been consulted or informed with regard to:

☐ Visa, permits?	☑ Weather conditions, tide times and ranges?
☑ Legal access to sites and/or persons?	☑ Suitability of field/location workers to proposed tasks?
☐ Vaccinations and other health precautions?	☐ Safety equipment and protective clothing?
☐ Financial and insurance implications?	☑ Travel and accommodation arrangements?
☐ Health insurance arrangements?	☑ Arrival times after journeys?
☐ Civil unrest and terrorism?	☑ Emergency procedures?
☐ Crime risk?	☑ Transport use?
☐ Political or military sensitivity of the proposed topic, its method or location?	

Important information for retaining evidence of completed risk assessments:

Once the risk assessment is completed and approval gained the **supervisor** should retain this form and issue a copy of it to the field/location worker participating on the field course/work. In addition, the **approver** must keep a copy of this risk assessment in an appropriate Health and Safety file.
RP/cc Sept 2010

Appendix IV.

New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling (NSPC)
Middlesex University

Participant Information Sheet

Title of study: *A phenomenological-hermeneutic enquiry into the lived experience of crossdressing for adult male-born subjects in the UK* (2019-2020)

Researcher: Iulian Chear
Contact: LC1028@live.mdx.ac.uk

Supervisor: Prof Simon du Plock
Contact: Simon.duPlock@metanoia.ac.uk

Date: __/__/20__

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?
Writings about the experiences of cross-dressers in academic literature have often been based on theories, rather than people's own experiences and understanding. I aim to find out about crossdressing as it reveals itself through people's personal experiences. It is important that the people who are involved in providing services, and any type of support for cross-dressers, have an understanding that comes from the cross-dressers themselves. For example, it might be helpful for clinicians, counsellors and psychotherapists who might work with individuals involved in crossdressing to have a better understanding of this client group. As part of this, the study aims to contribute to the sparse clinical and academic literature in this under-researched area.

Why have I been chosen?
You have been selected to take part as you are an adult-born male who for at least two years has identified as a cross-dresser or who has been involved in regular crossdressing activities and have expressed your interest in being involved in this research. Also, in line with the intention of the study to research a particular group, you are not undergoing gender reassignment surgery or any hormone treatment, and you have no plans to do so in the future, as far as you know at this moment.

What will happen to me if I take part?
The research consists of taking part in a one-to-one semi-structured interview which will last approximately 60-90 minutes. During the interview, you will be asked to reflect upon your experience of crossdressing by recalling specific feelings, thoughts, descriptions or events. At any point, you will have the right to refuse any information disclosure or to stop the interview at any time should you wish.

The interview will take place at a time and place that is convenient for you. This can be at a local private consulting room, a local charity or a local library room. At the end of the interview, you will be offered the opportunity to debrief, and you will be given a flyer containing post-research contact information. Also, you will be given the option to receive a copy of the final research or a summary of the research, should you wish to.

What will you do with the information that I provide?
Every effort will be made to ensure your confidentiality, and all the information you provide will be held confidentially in compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018. The interview will be digitally recorded, and then the recording will be transcribed by myself. During the transcribing stage, all identifying information will be removed and disguised (e.g. names, places, occupations). The recordings will be safely deleted after six months after my thesis has been graded, while the anonymised transcripts may be kept securely for up to ten years in an encrypted university repository after the thesis has been published. It is possible, should you wish too, to erase the recordings earlier on, for example, after they have been transcribed. To protect against non-authorised access, the audio recordings, the transcripts and the personal data of the participants will be kept securely by the researcher electronically on encrypted drives. Also, your name or other personal details will not be associated with your data; a pseudonym (which you are free to choose) will be used. Any remaining personal information (e.g. your contact information) will be deleted securely after six months after my thesis has been graded.

The results of the research study will be used as part of a doctoral dissertation. It will include quotes from the anonymised transcripts for clarity. The results of the research may also be presented at conferences or published in journal articles. If this is the case, neither your name nor any other identifying details will be used.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?
Talking about intimate and personal topics can be difficult for some people. It is also possible that taking part in this study will bring up issues you haven't considered before, or leave you feeling emotional, vulnerable or exposed. I will be sensitive to any upset you might feel, and you will be offered a debriefing session to talk about your experience and ask any questions. Furthermore, you are free to stop the interview at any point, either for a period of time or indefinitely, and to refuse answering any questions or disclosing any information you don't wish to. You will also be given a debriefing sheet which contains post-research contact information and also a list of specialised organisations which can offer further support, advice, information, should you be interested in further support.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
Talking part in the interview might have no direct benefit, although for some people, it may be an opportunity to reflect on their experiences, and they may find this beneficial.

Consent
Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You will be given a copy of this information sheet for your personal records, and if you agree to take part, you will be asked to sign the attached consent form before the study begins.

You have the right to have any supplied data destroyed on request up until the analysis of the transcripts begins, on __/__/20__.

Who is organising and funding the research?
This research has been organised and funded by Iulian Chear under the joint auspices of The New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling (NSPC) and Middlesex University, London.

Who has reviewed the study?
All proposals for research using human participants are reviewed by an Ethics Committee before they can proceed. The NSPC research ethics committee has approved this study.

Expenses
Unfortunately, this is not a funded project, and so expenses will not be paid.

Thank you for reading this information sheet.

If you have any further questions, you can contact me at:

NSPC
61-63 Fortune Green Road
London, NW6 1DR
LC1028@live.mdx.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about the conduct of the study, you may contact my supervisor:

Prof Simon du Plock
NSPC
61-63 Fortune Green Road
London, NW6 1DR
Simon.duPlock@metanoia.ac.uk

Or

The Principal
NSPC
61-63 Fortune Green Road
London, NW6 1DR
+44 (0) 207 435 8067
office@nspc.org.uk

Appendix V.

New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling (NSPC)
Middlesex University

Debriefing Sheet

Title of study: *A phenomenological-hermeneutic enquiry into the lived experience of crossdressing for adult male born subjects in the UK* (2019-2020)

Thank you for taking part in this study.

Your contribution is very valuable and will contribute towards a wider understanding of crossdressing. So far, most of the writings about crossdressing have often been based on theories. As such, the aim of this study is to describe the experience of crossdressing by using the participants' own words. Furthermore, crossdressing represents one of the remaining unresearched areas in the larger spectrum of gender and sexuality.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to listen to your experiences. I will ensure that the results of the study will be appropriately disseminated to raise awareness about the experiences and the needs of people who engage in crossdressing.

If you have any questions, you can contact me by email at LC1028@live.mdx.ac.uk or via the New School of Counselling and Psychotherapy at:

Iulian Chear

NSPC

61-63 Fortune Green Road
London, NW6 1DR.

Phone: 07848 169 371

E-mail: LC1028@live.mdx.ac.uk

Or if you feel the need to talk to my supervisor you can contact him at:

Prof Simon du Plock

61-63 Fortune Green Road
London, NW6 1DR.

E-mail: Simon.duPlock@metanoia.ac.uk

Thank you once again for contributing to this research.

Further Support and Information

In the event that you feel you require further support, you can contact your GP, or you can get in touch with the following organisations:

In London:

London Friend offers counselling and support. Visit londonfriend.org.uk or call 020 7833 1674.

Elop offers counselling and support. Visit www.elop.org/ or call 020 8509 3898.

Naz offers counselling and support. Visit www.naz.org.uk/ or call 020 8741 1879.

In Reading:

SupportU offers free counselling, advice and support. Visit www.supportu.org.uk/ or call 0118 321 9111.

Talking Therapies Berkshire offers counselling. Visit www.talkingtherapies.berkshire.nhs.uk/ or call 0300 365 2000.

Nation Wide:

Samaritans offer emotional support 24/7. Visit www.samaritans.org or call 08457 909090

Pink Therapy, directory of private counsellors specialised in working with LGBTQ+. Visit www.pinktherapy.com or call 020 7836 6647.

Finally, you can get in touch with your GP who can guide you about further services that are available in your area.

Thank you once again for contributing to this research.

Iulian Chear

Appendix VI.

New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling (NSPC)
Middlesex University

Written Informed Consent

Title of study: *A phenomenological-hermeneutic enquiry into the lived experience of crossdressing for adult male-born subjects in the UK* (2019-2020)

Researcher: Iulian Chear
Contact: LC1028@live.mdx.ac.uk

Supervisor: Prof Simon du Plock
Contact: Simon.duPlock@metanoia.ac.uk

- I have understood the details of the research as explained to me by the researcher, and I confirm that I have consented to act as a participant.
- I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, the data collected during the research will not be identifiable, and I have the right to withdraw from participating in the project at any time without any obligation to explain my reasons for doing so.
- I understand that I can ask for my data to be withdrawn from the project until data analysis begins on _____.
- I further understand that the data I provide may be used for analysis as part of a doctoral thesis and also, may be presented at conferences or in journal articles. I understand that in all these circumstances, I will not be identifiable, and I provide my consent that this may occur.
- I confirm that I am over 18 years of age.

I am interested in receiving the results of the research by post:
☐ a copy of the final thesis;
☐ a summary of the research results.
My postal address: _____

I ☐ consent to be contacted by the researcher for possible follow-ups regarding my participation in this study.

☐ do not consent.

Participant	Date	Signature
Researcher	Date	Signature

To the participant: Data may be inspected by the Chair of the Psychology Ethics panel and the Chair of the School of Science and Technology Ethics committee of Middlesex University, if required by institutional audits about the correctness of procedures. Although this would happen in strict confidentiality, please tick here if you do not wish your data to be included in audits: _____

Appendix VII.
Demographic Questionnaire

Please tick the appropriate box:

1. What is your age?

☐18-30 ☐30-45 ☐45-60 ☐Over 60 ☐Rather not say

2. How would you describe your ethnicity?

_____

☐Rather not say

3. How would you describe your gender identity?

☐Male ☐Female ☐Rather not say ☐Other_____

4. How would you describe your relationship status?

☐Single ☐Married ☐Open relationship ☐Partnered ☐Polyamorous ☐Rather not say

☐Other _____

5. How would you describe your sexuality?

☐Heterosexual ☐Gay ☐Bisexual ☐Rather not say ☐Other_____

Thank you for taking time to complete this questionnaire.

Appendix VIII. Interview Schedule

The proposed interview schedule is included in the table below:

	Question:	Prompts:	The rationale for the question
1	Can you tell me how did you start to cross-dress?	Can you say more about your history of crossdressing? Has your crossdressing changed over time? How? How 'regularly' do you cross-dress?	*This is a more narrative question, both to get people comfortable to talk about their experiences and to get a sense of their history with crossdressing.*
2	How would you define crossdressing?		*As I said before, I will ask every participant about their rationale for using this term, rather than to impose my definition on them.*
3	Can you describe your life with crossdressing?	What about your: - Social life - Romantic life - Sexual life - Professional life - Familial life	*A descriptive question to open up their world even more with possible prompts from many areas of their lives.*
4	Who are you when you are cross-dressed?	How do you feel? How do you see yourself? How do you think others see you?	*The next two questions focus on identity. The rationale was to get people to describe their identity without making assumptions about it and in a neutral way.*
5	Who are you when you are not crossdressing?	How do you feel about it? How do you see yourself when not crossdressing? How do you think others see you? Can you compare who you are when you are not crossdressing with who you are when you are crossdressing?	
6	Describe your experience of sexuality and gender while being cross-dressed.		*I came up with this question as I could not find references to it in the literature.*
7	What does crossdressing mean for you?	How do you feel about it?	*This is a crucial question for the study.*
8	Describe aspects of being a crossdresser that you enjoy the most, and elements you would change if you could.	How do you feel about (any) them? How does it impact your life at the moment? How do you see yourself in the future?	*Evaluative question regarding their life with crossdressing.*

Appendix IX.

Analysed Interview

R	Proposed Theme	Transcript:	Comments: Descriptive, *Linguistic* and conceptual.
		I: So, can you tell me how did you start to cross-dress?	
1	Time Generalisation Crossdressing Others	A: Ehm... so it was... yeah, I guess...I started, the first time was when I was a teenager [Ihm] like many I went through the drawer of my sister and my mum, and... yeah... trying stuffs dresses, or skirts and so on.	Hard for him to find his word. *'I guess' – not sure about time* Like many – generalisation. Hard for him to go there the intimacy of crossdressing to capture or describe it.
		I: How old were you?	
2	Uncertainty Time Crossdressing	A: Ehm... Not sure exactly?!... so... I was probably on 13, near as well...14?, yeah something like that.	Not sure about age; hard to remember. *'probably,' 'something like'- vagueness* Started out as a teenager. Crossdressing beginning
		I: So, that is the first time it happened?	
3	Memory Crossdressing Gender Time Crossdressing Frequency Time Time Crossdressing	A: Yes, I think so. Yeah. Although, (laughter) I think that... I have this very old memory as a kid from kindergarten [Ihm] where there was this drawer or chest, it was just full of costume(s) [Ihm]; I remember there was a dress... how do you call it in English? Dress? Yeah? And... so... these are very few things I remember from kindergarten, so then I guess (chuckles), it must have been some crossdressing at the time (laughing nervously), and that was kindergarten, so it would be 5 (years), -ish. [Ihm]. But then, yeah, after that, not until around the time I was 13 or 14 years old [Ihm].	Not sure about his first time. *'I think so'* Laughter to signify that he is revealing something Significant old memory. *He seems to be translating his experience from his native language.* Costumes - first crossdressing at 5. He assumes that there could be more crossdressing as a child, yet it is only a supposition. Maybe it would be to revealing to say more? Nothing between 5 and 13. Gap between 5-13 Crossdressing. Pause
		I: What happened after that?	
4	Time	A: Ehm, after that... ehm... So, I went to university.	Huge jump in time.
	Crossdressing Others	I: So, you were a teenager, and you were crossdressing by using clothing from your mother and your sister?	Bringing him back.

5	Space Others Alone	A: Yeah, so when they were... they were away physically, and I was alone in the house [Ihm]. Ehm...	Being alone in the house and crossdressing as a teen. Only physically away; does this mean more?
		I: How often would you do that?	
6	Frequency Limitation Alone Time Alone Hidden Uncertainty Frequency	A: (Pause) I am not sure, not very often, 'cuz there weren't anyway many opportunities when I was alone for a long time, so that was really...so the Wednesday afternoon was one (when) I would have time to do it because there was no school and I was alone, but I wouldn't do it every week, (yeah) so maybe once in a month or I don't know.	Not sure about frequency. Lack of opportunities. Would he have wanted more? Hard to go there? To remember? 'maybe' He would not do it every time when he was alone? Being alone and crossdressing, hidden Doing it every month
		I: Do you remember what did you make of it back then?	
7	Time Sexualised game Sexuality Shame Time Crossdressing	A: Ehm... So, that time it was a bit also like a sexualised game [Ihm], where I would feel aroused and... I yeah... yeah, I would probably masturbate as well...I guess?!...Yeah!. Ehm...Yeah...(laughing nervously). So... yeah, I think it was probably at that time it was more sexualised game after that it evolved out of it, but yeah.	A *'sexualised game'* Why a game? What is a sexualised game? Feeling sexually aroused and masturbating. '*I guess' pauses, 'yeah' repetition, nervous laughter* Very difficult for him to talk about this (shame? feeling exposed? Bringing back difficult memories?) (Talking about childhood memories is quite hard at the beginning of an interview). It was more sexual at that time. Compared to what- later on? Crossdressing evolving with time.
		I: What happened later on?	
8	Time Space Being with others	A: So later on, so I moved to university, so I was staying in a shared room.	Eager to move to the university and not to stay with that period of his life. (Did my question prompt that?) Excitement to talk about this period or avoidance?
	Being with others Space	I: So, you have a mother and father and sister, that was the family? [Yeah, that was my family] and then you moved to university.	Not much about his parents and his sister. I didn't ask either.

9	Time Crossdressing Freedom lack of Alone Gender Being with himself / Being with others	A: Yeah! I was 18 years old, and then, yeah, it stopped because there was no opportunity were I was alone or where I would have access to female clothing.	No opportunity and no access. Not by himself. Being himself and being with others
		I: When you were in shared accommodation (yeah!) during university?	
10	Crossdressing Stop Time	A: Yeah. So, it basically stopped for all my... yeah... my undergrad and then I did a PhD as well, so it stopped as well.	Pause when he says how long the break has been. A long break probably around 7-8 years with no crossdressing.
		I: How was that for you not to do it?	
11	Sadness Difficulty Missing it Frustrating Limitation Coming out Fear of being outed Stop Hidden Space Safety Limitation	A: Ehm... yeah it was a bit difficult and (sadness in voice) ... [difficult in what sense?] ... because I missed it? [Ihm] (laughing nervously) ... yea, I was a bit frustrating that.. yea I couldn't have the possibility to do it anymore and... but I was very scared to be outed so I didn't try to buy clothes or hide it or... [Ihm]. So then, yeah it stopped until I had a place for myself and where I could buy clothes again.	*'A bit difficult' 'a bit frustrating' understatement?* Difficulty and sadness, loss He missed crossdressing – *nervous laughter when he is uncomfortable about something.* Difficult to articulate these emotions *'a bit frustrating' and 'very scared'* Frustration – anger of not being able to do it Fear of being outed Hidden activity Having a place and opportunity *'it stopped'* rather than *'I stopped'*
		I: What did you study?	
12		A: (inaudible) Science.	
	Time	I: Science... Ok, and this happened after you finished your PhD or earlier?	How was his life during his studies? Seems very empty. Loneliness? I did not ask about it either. Second gap between 18-26
13	Time Space / Privacy / Having his own place Time Anxiety? Memory	A: After I have finished my PhD. [OK, so you got your own place]. Yeah, so I got my own place (asking to himself 'what time was that'), I was 26 years old (laughing nervously) and then yeah, I had my own place and I bought - What did I buy, bought a dress, a skirt, a bra online [online?] Yeah. (Laughing nervously) [Ok!].	Hard to remember what age this was Talking to himself, asking himself questions *Nervous laughter ...? Loses his idea*. Wonder what was going on for him?

	Crossdressing Buying stuff online		Hard to recall. Buying a skirt, dress, bra online. More nervous laughter – he feels uncomfortable sharing what he bought with me. Feeling exposed? Anxious of opening up?
		I: You were living alone?	
14	Living alone Space	A: Yeah, and I was living alone.	Living alone
		I: How was that for you?	
15	Difficulty expressing Positive emotion	A: Ehm...Living alone? Or...? [Living alone and being able to do all of that?] ... It was nice (laughing nervously), ehm...	Not sure what he was being asked. Hard for him to describe experiences rather than more specific descriptive questions. Laughter about describing how he was to cross-dress Nice, living alone – meaning he enjoyed it, but not many details. Nervous laughter to signify feeling uncomfortable to say more.
		I: How often did you cross-dress?	
16	Frequency Crossdressing Time	A: There was well periods...there were periods where I would cross-dress very often [Ihm], maybe every day or every two days, and then there would be periods where I would have less interest on it and then yeah, I wouldn't do anything.	Periods- oscillation Crossdressing very often – every two days 'maybe' to approximate frequency The interest in it oscillates. Not sure why? How was this for him?
		I: What would you do when you were cross-dressed? Was it still just a sexual thing or did you do other things as well?	
17	Sexuality – less sexual Crossdressing	A: No, it was less sexual at that point so then I would start to do different stuff on the house.... watching TV cooking, cleaning the flat or...	It becomes less sexual. How did it change? Starts doing household activities cross-dressed. The nature of the crossdressing is changing.
		I: How was it for you do to that, cross-dressed?	
18	Positive emotion Expression Feeling more himself	A: Ehm...I would really enjoy it (laughing nervously), I was feeling well, good and probably more myself [Ihm], being able to express myself a bit more and... (laughing nervously).	Laughter nervous – again feeling uncomfortable to share how it was for him. Hard to admit that it felt good? Positive emotions.

	Expressing himself Expression – laughter		*Probably – uncertain vague?* Feeling himself, expressing himself Hard for him to talk about it, or to put it into words
		I: I am waiting for you to describe .... [Ok!]	
19	Awkwardness Sexual game. Hard to talk about	A: (More laughter) and... yeah... it was still a bit of sexual game as well going on... so, yeah sometimes I would masturbate as well while being cross-dressed, ehm.... (long pause).	Uncomfortable. *'still a bit of'* Still sexual, but only sometimes Hard for him to talk about the sexuality of it *Long pause*.
		I: Do you have any memories from that time? [for about...] From that period when you were crossdressing?	(I have to ask him lots of questions rather than give him space to share his experience). It's like we are both anxious and rushing to fill the space.
20	Time Positive emotion Difficulty expressing emotions	A: Yes, yes, I have memories. No, it was (laughing nervously), it was quite, yeah, I was happy and ...(laughter) so I would always find it difficult to speak about the emotions (laughter) [it's ok!] ehm....	Not being able to express these memories or not wanting too. Too exposing, shameful? *Yes…No contradiction there, maybe he has opposing ideas?* Finds it difficult to speak about emotions. He actually admits it. The laughter captures the emotions Positive emotions, happiness with crossdressing, and uncomfortable to be talking about them to me.
	Frequency	I: What happened after that? So, you're leaving alone? You were crossdressing from time to time to time...	I move on, rather than opening it further.
21	Time Passive? Expression the factual Space Purging Laughter expression	A: Yeah, and then, well, that lasted three years and a half... and then I had to move out 'cuz I found a job in... (inaudible) ... So, then I was living in an EU country, I found a job in this other country and I had to change job. So, I got rid of everything, (laughter).	The factual data are easy to express. Unclear if this was a welcomed change for him, almost like he was told to move. Purging and the uncomfortable laughter
	Purging Gender	I: You got rid of everything? Female clothes.	
22	Purging	A: Yeah	
		I: Ok. What made you do that?	

23	Purging Ownership Freedom Limitations Space Time Crossdressing (stop)	A: Ehm... because I had to move everything and my parents, my uncle helping to move, and yeah I had nowhere to hide it safely [Ihm]. So yeah, I got rid of everything. That informs that the flat was very small. And I knew I only one year contract there or between one year. So that is why I didn't buy anything else and it stopped for...yeah...for that period.	He moves to a place which is very small, and it does not allow him to cross-dress. In the process, he finds himself obliged to get rid of all his stuff. Another crossdressing break – for a year. Why did he do this? Was it because of the circumstances or he was actively trying to make himself stop?
		I: How was it for you to get rid of everything?	
24	Sadness Frustration /Stress Coming out Relation with parents Crossdressing as bad Shame Condemnation	A: Ehm... Well, I was a little bit sad (laughter) it was frustrated to do it, that was very stressed not to do it to be, yeah, to think that my parents would find out and I wasn't ready to have the conversation with them, ehm... so yeah, this...I did it because I thought crossdressing was bad and (laughter)	Just *'a little sad'* (the laughter again), anger frustration there. *'very stressed'*. A 'little' means very sad? Hard for him to share how much he likes/enjoyed it. How important it was for him. Fear of parents finding out. Not ready to come out to his parents. Thought crossdressing was bad – shame, condemnation etc. More uncomfortable laughter. *Does not finish his thought there.*
		I: That is how you saw it back then?	
25	Expression Minimalising	A: Yeah. A bit. Yeah.	*qualifies things as a bit, making them smaller or less significant than they really are.*
		I: 'Bad' in what sense?	
26	Lack of acceptance Fear Stigma Perversion Sexuality surrounding Crossdressing	A: Bad, but... maybe bad is not the right word... at least not... yeah ... Not accepted. [Ihm] I would be scared people would see me as a pervert, maybe as well... ehm, especially since it was still a bit sexual dimension of it [Ihm]...	*'Bad' is bad word for it.* Bad is a 'moral' or religious social judgement. He felt that he could not accept himself, or feel accepted as a crossdresser, Fear of other people's judgement Pervert The major issue was the sexuality surrounding it – the perversion which made things even more difficult to accept. The identity becomes the sexual practice.

	Lack of acceptance	I: Did the sexual dimension make it more unacceptable for you?	
27	Sexual dimension Being out Fear Coming out Difficulty Illness Relationship with parents Lack of privacy Limitation Not being himself Space -moving to a different country Immigration Freedom Buying stuff online	A: Yeah, I think so. Well, at least I was able to go to...yeah, almost scared to come out people about it. Yeah, so yeah, they were a bit... was a bit more difficult for me to move out to where I was living. During that time, I had a knee injury so... then my mom came over to help me... and so she lived with me in this very small flat for a few months (laughs) I felt, very difficult to be able to share this very small flat with her and not... not be able to be fully myself. Yeah, and then after that I moved here. [here?] Yeah. Here I am in a good talent position, a nicer flat which is a little bit bigger than what I had back home... and then I started again to buy female clothes online.	*'think so'* The difficulty of the sexual practice Being scared to come out. Giving more context to the events. Having a knee injury Living with parents again / How did this decision came about? Lack of space (uncomfortable, the laugh). Lack of intimacy, of being himself Relationship with his mother Moving away from his country. He focuses on the practical aspects, maybe he wanted to be far away to have some distance to have the freedom to be himself. Immigration and freedom
		I: So, you have been here for how long?	
28	Time Crossdressing urge Frequency Part of his daily life Normalise	A: Four, five years now. (Ok!) And... yeah, I don't get... this need to cross became getting stronger and stronger. [while you were here?] yea! now it's almost... yeah, almost every day... or when I would come back home I would...yeah...change clothes and wear female clothes [Ihm].	Increasing need to cross-dress Easier to be yourself in a foreign country away from your homeland. *Fragmented discourse* Frequency to every day Wearing female clothing when he comes back from work
		I: So, you would do it every day now?	
29	Frequency	A: A... yes! (laughter)	
		I: How is that for you?	
30	Positive emotion Being myself expression Crossdressing Frequency Limitation	A: Yeah, I enjoy it because so when I do it I feel... it's more like... I guess a way of being myself be dressed every time the day and.... when I can't do it because I'm travelling back with my parents or... then I would feel I miss it.	Enjoyment *Fragmented – hard to describe experiences* A way of being himself. It is growing in importance for him. He misses it when he can't do it

	Missing it Relationship with parents		Not being able to cross-dress with his parents
		I: You miss it?	
31	Missing it Limitation Space Crossdressing evolving Experimenting being creative Gender Sexual	A: Yeah, being able to cross-dress or ....and also it started here in the UK , where I have started to experience more with more with makeup and some... so before it was only... I needed clothes and... the way I am playing a bit more with makeup an trying to... to look more, yea, more like a female, yea ...I guess...(laughing nervously)...and now is not as sexual as it used to be; so yeah, it kind of evolved a bit and... (laughing nervously)	Crossdressing is evolving make-up…rather than just clothing Being in a foreign country allows him to experiment. Experimenting, he is creative, he is playing – to look more as female *I guess – laughter + laughter- uncomfortable talking about something very sensitive for him* The sexual excitement has decreased
		I: Evolved how?	
32	Crossdressing Sexual Not knowing	A: Well, because so... this is becoming more important in my life... [Ihm]....and yeah, it's not but it's not sexual anymore.... or I don't know.	Crossdressing as more important in his life *Hard for him to express how.* Moving away from being just a fetish sexual thing *'I don't know' – not sure what has happened there,*
		I: It is not sexual anymore?	
33	Sexual Gender	A: No! So, I don't necessarily feel aroused because I am dressing as female anymore.	Not sexual anymore dressing up.
		I: How did that change?	
34	Sexual Uncertainty Awareness	A: (laughter) I'm not sure... gradually. I'm... didn't really notice it at the beginning.	*The laughter – perhaps because he was talking about something sexual? Intimate?* Not sure how it has changed. There was a gradual change. He did not notice it.
		I: Did you like being aroused while crossdressing?	
35	Emotion Sexual Crossdressing	A: Yeah, I liked it... then after what if I would... masturbate before, I would like lose interest in it.	He liked being aroused. *No uncomfortable laughter here.* Crossdressing would end after masturbating. The interest seemed only in the sexual enjoyment.
		I: In the crossdressing?	

36	Sexuality Shame	A: Yeah, I would feel a little bit ashamed.	Shame! After the sexual enjoyment, shame would manifest, perhaps also guilt? Judgement?
	Sexuality	I: You would masturbate, and after that you would want to change your clothing, and then you would feel ashamed?	
37	Change Shame Sexual	A: Yeah...Well, now, it does not happen anymore, what if I am dressing, I would not feel I need to masturbate anymore and if I do... I don't feel the need to undress or get change back to male afterwards, or... I would not feel that shame about it anymore [Ihm].	Shame has disappeared, as with the need to undress after, as with the need to masturbate His feelings about crossdressing have changed, prompting a change in his behaviour.
		I: What do you think changed?	
38	Not-knowing Frequency Normalising Acceptance Shame	A: (laughter) Ehm... I'm not sure (laughter) I don't know if it is a part of especially if I decided to it more often that just being like a normal situation. So just getting used... and... probably... also me accepting a bit this part of myself, it would stop the shame feeling afterwards.	Difficult for him to find to say what has changed and how Maybe the increase in frequency This has normalised it for him – it's a habitude now Accepting as apart of himself, rather than a fetish Ownership and acceptance
		I: What happened? How did you get more accepting towards yourself?	
39	Online friends Talking with people Belonging sharing Normalising Counselling Understanding as acceptance Support group	A: Yes... I started to get help from some friends online. So there's some forums and so on... and you start discussing with people...when you find, yeah some friends and then you will ask...I'm not alone and people do that...anyways...it is normal...it is normal (laughter) at least yeah, I'm not alone and... yeah, and then yeah, I went... I started last year also to do some counselling... over it (Ihm) for also to understand what I want or what I need to do and that helped me also to accept it.... I think, also coming here on that support group as well.	Talking with other, sharing with others, making crossdressing friends The impact of a community Not being alone, feeling like he belongs somewhere Making it normal for him *Laughter when he says its 'normal'* The impact of counselling – helping him accept Coming to a support group
		I: What do you do here?	
40	Support group Place Safe place Being out Socialising	A: Ehm... They're on this meeting for cross dressers also for transgender and so it allows you to have like a safe place where I can come and get dressed and accessorise/ socialise with people. Yeah.	Having a safe space to socialise and express share experiences and practical stuff Being with others
		I: How is it to be dressed in a group?	

41	Positive emotions Being physical Expressing Freedom Normal stuff Be more outside	A: Beautiful, yeah, very nice (laughter). I really yea... enjoy it, I really enjoyed it to come here... and I need to be able to... to be with more physical to express that part of myself, a bit more free and... do normal stuff, not just been locked at home and... (laughter). So, yeah (laughter).	Very positive emotions about being with others cross-dressed <u>Being with the body more</u> Need to be more free Need to be outside *A lot of laughter*
		I: How would you define crossdressing?	
42	Scientist Crossdressing definition Binarity Crossdressing vs transgender Gender Definition Frequency Hobby Understanding / Anxiety Full on Partial Partial crossdressing and part-time	A: Ehm... yeah... I'm a scientist (laughs), I just define it as a way to dress and behave of the opposite gender than was born. A bit more as a hobby or... as opposed to be a transgender person or who really would identify themselves as the wrong gender and go through transition and live their life, where crossdressing is a bit this damage as well of not fitting completely in the gender that was assigned at birth but... ehm... in terms its more... it's not 24/7 for the cross-dresser... it's so part of the day or some part of the week or the month, I don't know. So, I say it is more as a hobby and instead of living your life... so...yeah... I would define it... I don't know if it makes sense (laughing uncomfortably) (It does! it does) and... so yeah... yea, maybe in the crossdressing the... I guess it doesn't have to be a full on with everything, so with like questions as to whether I do it at home or at least so I don't always wear makeup because sometimes I just don't have time or can't be bothered, so it can just be some.... ehm... I guess partial crossdressing, just a piece of clothing.	<u>What does being a scientist mean for him?</u> Crossdressing definition Difference between crossdressing and transgenderism Crossdressing as not fitting in the gender you were assigned at birth Frequency/ time as a difference Part-time nature of crossdressing *'I don't know' yet, his discourse is quite articulated in here, in contrast to other parts of the interview* Crossdressing as 'hobby' *I don't know if it makes sense (laughing uncomfortably) concern of not being understood.* *His' discourse becomes more fractured here, he changes the idea, as if he realised something about it* Types of crossdressing: partial Make-up Partial crossdressing and part-time
		I: Are you wearing anything now?	
43	Uncomfortable Crossdressing hidden Contradiction	A: (Nervous laughter) Yeah, I am wearing underwear (laughter). So, yeah, (laughter) so I guess I'm crossing.	Awkwardness *It was uncomfortable to admit he was wearing female underwear.*

			The realisation that he is crossdressing even right now to a degree. Contradiction to his previous definition
		I: You would do that; you would want something underneath your clothing?	
44	Crossdressing hidden	A: Yeah	Hidden crossdressing How often does he do it? Doing it full-on is part-time, yet he may be crossdressing partially or hidden quite often.
		I: So, can you describe your life with crossdressing? How does it fit in your life?	
45	Importance Emotion Gender	A: I guess I went over this part a bit. (Say that again?) So yeah, I guess we went over it a bit on the previous questions. So yea, it takes quite a large part of my life at least for the moment. Yeah... still good...yeah, I would come back home, and I will change into female clothes... So... yeah, I would not necessarily take... put on makeup or do more than just put on female clothing, at least that will be the base. (laughter).	Large part of his life in the present He would cross-dress almost every day after work. Not clear if he has any hidden clothing during his day at work as well. Make-up is optional Crossdressing starts with dressing up for him.
		I: Do you do anything else like going out cross-dressed? Going to a club, dressed?	
46	Time Going out Space Not being known Anonymity Safe – foreign country Crossdressing Going outside	A: I've started to do it a bit recently. [what exactly?] So, I went on holiday in May [Ihm] and I took some female clothes with me and then because I knew I there was no one, I knew that.... So yeah felt safe to go out and not be recognised or being dressed in a wig and make-up [So you went for full-on?] Yeah [outside?] outside. Yeah, in the street.	Doing it in a foreign country on vacation Not being recognised anonymity Feeling safe Full on crossdressing Going outside
		I: How was that in the street?	
47	Emotion Fear First time out Safe space Space Being out Conservative	A: I was yeah, I really enjoyed, it was very good (laughter). So, I was very scared very nervous obliviously because it was the first time ever. So, I would...yeah...I met socially here but here in a safe place people. I know because I said but while there in the street. I went to this island, so it was a bit... probably more conservative than here in the UK.	Positive emotions *Laughter to signify what?* First time out Scared and nervous Safe space vs unsafe space Conservative spaces – How he navigates that? How does he know that? Fear of judgement Judgement vs ignorance

	Fear of judgement Ignorance Confident Being with others Courage Positive emotions Female persona Male persona Female persona Being with himself	So, I was also afraid of people being judgemental or... but actually, the will most of you don't care (laughter) that much. So yeah, it made me feel more confident with myself as well...and yeah, I really enjoyed it everywhere I saw it twice. Now I realise it on my phone this put in selfie mode. So, if it detects a smile, it will snap a pic automatically. I realise that is not something that happens often when I do it in the male mode but down battery left every time I would check myself if the hair was ok it would actually snap a picture because I was actually smiling much more.	*Laughter as release of tension and unease* Lack of public rection made him more confident Courageous Other people's reactions He smiles much more dressed as a girl. Rarely smiles as a man. <u>Why?</u> Pays more attention to himself as a female. <u>Being a female brings back attention to the body, the aesthetics and the here and now.</u>
	Female persona Positive emotions	I: So, you're much happier and smiling.	
48		A: Yeah (laughter). Smiling, yeah.	
		I: It is very interesting.	
49		A: Yeah.	He does not follow up with any comments.
		I: So, in terms of your social life. So, you meet people here? [Yeah] Do you go anywhere else in here or just on vacation, but that's it?	
50	Space Time Being out Safe Others Safe place Being out Space	A: So I went here in the UK, I went, it was last month. I just went for a makeup lesson, but again is beauty sounds or marketing those services for cross-dressers transvestite, etc. So again, it was a safe place. Also, I went to a... to a party but... so that I could change there, it was a party as well for crossdressers, transgenders, etc.	Being out in a safe space Make-up session Services for crossdressing/transvestites Safe space Party for trans people He could change there
		I: Does anyone from your friends or from your family know about it?	
51	Coming out Time	A: So, I did tell my parents and my sister in... over Easter. It is still very recent.	He is out to his parents and his sister. Easter – he was out for 4-5 months.
		I: Over Easter? so that is a couple of months?	
52	Time	A: Yeah!	

		I: How was that?	
53	Coming out Motivation Being with others Uncertainty	A: It was very emotional (laughter) very difficult to tell... because I'm the adult. It is a bit difficult as well because stuff but seeing my parents don't really understand, so to try to understand why... there is there's a reason behind it off, probably no one know, I don't know.	Wonder what was the emotion? What was hard for him to say? Coming out to his parents Parents not understanding why he does it, made things difficult (people not knowing about crossdressing, while in most cases their knowledge is full of negative stereotypes). The importance of the reason, of an explanation.
		I: Do you think there is any reason behind it?	
54	Motivation Ownership Judgement? Crossdressing as personality trait	A: Ehm... Not really, I don't know. I'm not sure of any biological reason for... or if it just the way... the way I am. I don't know, people with temper, bad temper, I don't know, people maybe cross-dress... (laughter).	Motivation Biological reason Crossdressing as the way he is (possibility rather than certainty) Part of him People with bad temper – part of your personality. Similarly, to a personality trait.
		I: Does it have an impact on your professional life?	
55	His professional life	A: Not so much. So yeah, not so much. Yeah, no.	Keeping things separate? He does not elaborate.
		I: What about your romantic life?	
56	Being with others Sexuality	A: It's a bit difficult. For a while, I am single, so it's... and... [Have you always been single?] No, yeah, I have been single most of my life. So I never really got a serious.... serious relationship or... and ...Yeah, I sort of always seen myself as straight. But then recently, I realised as well that while being dressed.... maybe I'm more bisexual so... but only if I see myself as a female.	Difficulty Single most of his life No serious relationship Pause here and e change to talk about sexuality Straight sexuality Sexuality changes when he is dressed up He is straight as male and bisexual as a female
		I: So, you're more bisexual only dressed.	
57	Sexuality Positive emotions Not knowing	A: Yes (laughter)...So... as some point as male I would see myself going with a guy, I would only see myself going with a girl... but if I'm being dressed and putting this female then... yeah, I would.... so I did even try once or twice with going with guys, and it was ok, I liked it so... but for some reason	How is it for him to be bisexual, when dressed up? Sexuality Positive emotions to describe the experience

	Motivation Sexuality Being with others Gender identity Romantic life	I can only do it if I am ...yeah...I am putting on female (low voice), which... I'm not sure why (laughter) and... but... I guess... for my whole life .... I am generally more attracted to women than guys in general, so... yeah. But then... I have never so... going back to more romantic life ....so yeah, I never really a long-term relationship and... and I am not sure if being a cross-dresser and being a bit sometimes confused a lot about my gender if that played a role.	*'not sure why'* Motivation for his sexuality More attracted to females than males overall. <u>How is this for him? Does he want one?</u> Being confused about gender The impact of crossdressing on his romantic life
		I: Do you think you're confused about your gender?	
58	Gender identity	A: Sometimes a bit, ehm.	
		I: What is your gender?	
59	Gender identity Expressions Gender identity Questioning	A: So yeah...I put male (laughter) on the form, but ehm... I am putting male on my life... but yea, I do wonder sometimes if I should.... ehm, so if I should I lived…yeah…my life more as a female than male or... if I would have been happier and.... sometimes I consider or wondering if I should like.... transition or not.... I am still in the haze now (laughter) [Ihm, OK]	*Very hard for him to articulate* Questioning where he is on the trans spectrum *Lots of fractures in the discourse* Questioning transitioning *'in the haze now' metaphor*
		I: Who are you when you're cross-dressed?	
60	Expressions Ideal self Crossdressing Gender identity Spatial metaphors for Identity Fake	A: Ehm... (laughter)...I think I would.... so probably more myself or try to be... try to be what the person I would like to be seen as maybe, or if I was presenting as female outside. Ehm... and then, sorry, I am confusing myself (laughter) [its ok] (more laughter). So deep down, yea... I am...so then yeah, I am more myself I am not trying to fake or present otherwise ehm...	Hard to answer Crossdressing as more myself Crossdressing as who he would like to be seen as He got confused with the question: 'sorry I am confusing myself.' Laughter to disperse the awkwardness Genuine crossdressing as being fake Hard to describe who he is deep down and who he is presenting as.
		I: Do you have a different name when you are crossdressing?	
61	Crossdressing	A: Yes. So... the one I gave you... so that is the female name (Laughter).	The female name
		I: So, who is she? How is she?	
62	Female persona	A: Ehm (long pause) ...It is a good question (laughter).... (long pause) ...I guess ....yeah,	Hard for him to describe his female persona

	visibility Male persona	I know... so when I dress I like to... to try to be confident as a woman... and to be sexy as well.... (long pause).... then....(long pause).... In a certain way (laughter) I am not that different from the way I am a male as well [Ihm]. So, I realised also recently that so... I wanted to go to the party as well with the ...much more extroverted as a female, but actually I'm still less introverted than I as a guy (laughter) (long pause).	Maybe he hasn't thought about it before. Being confident, sexy …being visible *Long pause where he is thinking about it* Not that different to the male persona – yet there are some difference. Very hard to capture Still introverted as a woman… even more than when being a man. Perhaps he is still not very confident as a woman?
		I: How do you see yourself when you are dressed?	
63	Crossdressing Gender Confidence Emotion Crossdressing Being with parents Weird	A: It depends on the day (laughter); [you can give examples, if you want]. Yeah, yeah sometimes.... Sometimes I would feel, or I would see a.... very much a guy in dress [Ihm] or a guy wearing a dress and then I would not really like... I would not really like that... and so at other time I would... very much more see....a... want to see a woman... and then I would (low voice) ... yea more... that will give me more confidence. Ehm... and yea... yeah there was... I realised as well at some point that I... so it is one of the two ways... either torment if I do make-up in certain way.... at some point once it kind reminded me as well of a picture of my mum when she was younger [Ihm]... which I felt a bit weird as well (laughter).	How he experiences himself cross-dressed A guy in a dress – which is not something he likes Seeing a woman... makes him confident Hard to tell if he is talking about liking himself dressed up as a woman, or being convincing as a woman Two ways of seeing/doing the make-up Looking like his mother when she was young – uncomfortable
		I: What was weird? You looking like your mother when she was young?	
64	Being with parents surprising	A: Yeah...(laughter). 'Cuz, I didn't realise that there was a coincidence (low voice, inaudible) a bit. But yeah... it wasn't bad (laughter). It was just a bit surprising, I guess...	The surprise of looking like his mother The more he thinks about it, the less uncomfortable he becomes. Is there a positive spin on this?
		I: How do you think others see you when you're cross-dressed?	

65	Confidence Others	A: Ehm...I think...the rest still see that I am still a bit...ehm... probably unsure, maybe a bit too lack of confidence....	Other see lack of confidence in him.
		I: That's what people see in you?	
66	Others Confidence lack of Being with himself	A: Yeah, I think that's what they see most of the time...(laughter)	Lack of confidence He is being harsh with himself.
		I: Where do you think that lack of confidence comes from?	
67	Confidence lack of	A: I don't know. I mean... in general or when I am dressed?	Interesting that he thought about it 'in general.'
		I: When you are dressed?	Maybe there is more to it…
68	Passing Being a crossdresser Real vs fake gender Others	A: It is because I... I realise that I am.. yea, probably ...people could tell that I am not a real woman in terms of ...so I am a cross-dresser, so... ehm.	A *real* woman Looking like a crossdresser makes him lack confidence – the issues of passing as a woman He is talking as if not passing is negative.
69	Passing	I: So, you have doubts that other people would believe?	
		A: Yeah... [Ihm]	He feels that he does not 'pass' yet.
		I: Would you like them to believe?	
	Passing	A: Yeah...	
		I: Would that make a difference?	
	Passing	A: ... Yea! That would be nicer.	
	Poz emotion	I: Nicer...why would it be nicer?	
	Passing – blending in Visibility	A: I guess because then... I would blend in more easily [Ihm]	Passing would offer the ability to blend in. This would be safer for him.
	Passing – as a women rather than a crossdresser	I: They would think you are a 'real' female.	
70	Passing Being safe Others Shame Others' Judgement/ Ridicule	A: Yea. That is it. Well, yeah...usually when...so it is more that within the streets and ... when there is a cross-dresser, yeah people... some people would start to... some people would stare a bit more or might giggle as well and...and so yeah that...	Looking like a crossdresser leaves you open to judgment and unpleasant social reactions. This refers to public situations. Shame / Judgement / Rejection
		I: Has that happened to you?	
71	Others Time Shame	A: Yeah, when I went to out in the street when I was in Sicily, I was ... so most of the people walked and did not bother, but there were a few people who looked at me more...	He experienced people looking at him more intensively.

	Abuse / discrimination	most commonly and... at some point there were... group of teenagers and I could hear them giggling after passing me.	Hearing teenagers giggling.
		I: How was that?	
72	Anger Courageous Anger Enjoyment	A: Ehm... I was a bit annoying, but actually .... I was quite happy to be brave enough to have done it ...so it didn't bother me...in that moment it didn't bother me as much...That's all it would... and... you know what I think back of it, and I am probably a bit more annoyed than I was at that moment.... because I think in the moment, I was a bit ... just enjoying the moment and then... (laughter)	Annoyance with people's reactions Being brave and euphoric, enjoying the moment More annoyed now thinking about it now.
		I: Who are you when you are not crossdressing?	
73	Expression Shy introvert Opening up Expression Others Hiding Unsafe	A: Ehm...(laughter)... I am ... yea always been...so.... (long pause) ... so yeah.... I am quite shy in general, a bit ...introverted...and yeah, I don't like to...open up too much ...actually even some of my close friends told me that I am a bit difficult to read because... ehm.... think because I always try to hide those.... feelings about my gender and crossdressing and...	Hard for him to describe himself *Long pause and fractured discourse* Shy and introverted, Being closed off Not wanting to open up Being difficult to read Trying to hide his feelings about gender and crossdressing
		I: Can you describe yourself in a couple of words? So, you're shy and introverted; what else?	
74	Expression Being kind caring Pragmatic square scientist Being understood	A: Ehm.... (long pause) .... I'm kind. I mean I care about.... what other people as well, so... about how what they would feel, so I would try to make them.... to make them happy or... I was also always very pragmatic in life.... (laughter) that's maybe being a scientist or that (laughter).... just being a bit square and yeah, a bit more pragmatic... sometimes... I don't know if that makes sense (laughter). Yeah...	Hard to describe himself *Long pause* Being kind Caring about other people Trying to make other people happy Pragmatic, being a scientist Wondering if he is understood Hard for him to express himself in words
		I: It does make sense. Pragmatic, scientific, rational.	
75		A: Yeah. (Laughter).	
		I: How is she, if you think about it? She is also shy?	
	Expression	A: Yeah...ehm... although I would like her not to be shy.	Desire to not be shy
		I: How would you like her to be?	
	Expression	A: (Laughter) I would like her to be...probably a bit more...bubbly or even as well sassy [Ihm], but I guess...yeah... it is	Desire to be bubblier, sassy.

	Confidence Lack of experience Expression Others Scientist Identity	also probably taking me a bit of time to really build... because I have.... obviously something that I can only really experience when I am socialising [Ihm] and... I haven't done for a long time, so... so.... having got other (inaudible) for a long period; but yeah otherwise, yeah I would like a sissy caring about other people (laughter), that doesn't change (laughter)....and ...yeah.... I'm still a scientist also (low voice) ... being rational and pragmatic... even as female.	Still starting up and gaining confidence as a woman Not much experience being with people as a woman Like to be more sassy Caring about other people - Value A rational and pragmatic woman who is also sexy and expressive Being truthful to who he is, whatever gender role
		I: Is there any difference? So, can you compare how you are when you are crossdressing with how you want when you're not crossdressing? Is there any difference at all?	
76	Identity Expression Experimenting, creative, expressive Classic Expression as a male	A: (long pause) ehm... not so much...(v long pause) .... maybe I am a bit.... I will be a bit more... daring with styles and so on, experiencing different sides of me.... as a... dressing as a male, usually pretty much just a classic type of clothes so...the jeans, a shirt or t-shirt.	*Long pauses; maybe he has not thought about this before?* Not much difference between male and female person The female persona is more daring with styles, experimenting, being creative and expressive Conservative r and classic way of dressing up as a man
		I: Do you want to experiment more as well with (being a) woman?	
77	Experimenting, creative, expressive	A: Yeah, I want to try to experience more, to try different styles...	
		I: A bit more sexier?	
		A: Yeah.	
		I: More revealing, maybe?	
		A: Yeah.	
		I: More glamorous?	
	Sexuality/ expression Male vs female	A: Maybe more... not glamorous.... more (laughter) .... but yea... a little bit more revealing, a bit more sexy. So, I will tell you when I went to the party recently I... I actually realise that .... I was feeling sexy, which is not something I tend to feel much as a.... dressing as male (Ihm).	The female persona to be sexier, revealing, but not glamorous. Feeling sexy dressed as a woman, not usually happening as man. Why? What is the difference in experience?
		I: You feel more attractive as a woman? or you just feel sexy yourself?	

78	Sexuality expression Unhappiness Make-up the relation with himself	A: A... yeah... I just feel sexy myself...but I don't know if I feel more attractive as a woman because ...I am not happy with my make-up or all sorts of (laughter) but... yeah ... no I still feel... myself just a bit more sexy [Ihm].	Women clothing make him feel sexy Not sure if he is portraying an attractive woman The make-up seems decisive for him
		I: Any other differences?	
79		A: (long pause)	
	Positive emotions Expression	I: She smiles more.	Smiling more as a woman. Why?
		A: Yeah...	
		I: Does that mean you are more relaxed?	
	Relaxed Crossdressing as relaxation Being with himself Being in the moment Time	A: Yeah...maybe... actually yeah because...yeah ...when I do it at home is also more as a way to relax and chill out the tough of the day so ...yeah I guess yeah ... should be more relaxed....it is a good point (laughter)	He can relax as a female. Be present, focus on the present moment. Just figured it out
		I: What about expressing yourself....and talking...being able to ...express yourself and your feelings ...and your thoughts? Is there any difference?	
80	Male vs female	A: Not so much... (long pause)	
		I: Do you find it easier to talk about your feelings as a female?	
	Male vs female Expression	A: Ehm... not that I really noticed it ...to be fair, ehm.... (long pause). Although, yea... maybe I would be a little bit more spontaneous...there is not a big difference [Ok!]	More spontaneous as a woman What is his experience of being a woman? Not 'big' differences
		I: What is your experience of sexuality when you are cross-dressed?	
81	Sexuality	A: So...yeah... I said earlier ...so... I do feel more as a bisexual when crossdressing, so then I would fancy both male or female (low voice) ...ehm... which, yeah, it doesn't really happen when I am not crossdressing.	More bisexual cross-dressed No sexual attraction to males without crossdressing. What changes in his experience to allow for it?
		I: So, when you are dressed as a male you have no interest in other man? Or attraction?	
82	Sexuality Gender	A: Not, really ...or at least ...I find it that if I don't.... don't see myself as a male having a romantic or sexual relationship with another male. So sometimes, when I am dressed as a male and I see a guy... and ok, maybe I am	Not interested in male with male relationship Wanting to be with a man, as a female.

	Sexuality Gender	bit attracted .... but then I would think a bit maybe from a female perspective (low voice)... if that makes sense. I mean, in my head, I am... yeah which ...as I said if I see a woman that I feel attracted to, that does not really matter that much [how you are dressed?] Yeah...or if I am seeing it from a male perspective or female perspective.	Thinking about males from a female perspective. Having a female and a male perspective. *'in his head'* Female attraction is not dependent on what he is wearing. How is it to be with a woman as a woman?
		I: Have you tried to be with a woman and dressed as a woman?	
83	Sexuality	A: No. I haven't tried that, actually. I never...so, I would like, or wouldn't mind, to try.	The desire to be with women while cross-dressed
		I: Would you like to try that?	
	Sexuality	A: Yeah, if the occasion finds itself, if I find the right person.	
		I: But, is that something that you would be interested in doing or... if it happens, it happens?	
	Sexuality	A: No, I would be interested in doing.	It is an active interest rather than just a possibility.
		I: And, the only time you have been with a man it was while you were cross-dressed.	
	Sexuality	A: Yes!	
		I: How was that?	
84	Fun Sexuality	A: (laughter). It was quite fun, and so I did it twice so... it is a bit of a new experiment as well, and discovered a new part of myself (laughter).	Experimenting and discovering his sexuality. Discovering a new part of himself,
		I: A new part of yourself?!	
		A: yeah, because...	
		I: How does it feel to be with a man, dressed as a woman?	
85	Sexuality Gender Crossdressing	A: (long pause) Ehm... I would feel like I was really a woman in that way, that I am not even a cross-dresser anymore really, and...	Being with a man, makes him feel like a woman; he is not a crossdresser, he becomes a woman. A validation stimulus?
		I: So, when you are with a man, you really feel that you are a woman?	
	Sexuality Gender	A: Yes, yeah.	
		I: Do you really feel that you are a woman in other situations?	
86	Gender Being with others Crossdressing	A: Yeah... sometimes when I... when I cross-dress and I go more social environment and then it ties with all people, especially here... people see me back as a woman then I... yea I feel (low voice)..	Being cross-dressed socially makes him feel like a woman as well Being seen and referred to as a woman

		yeah, a bit more woman and less as a ...as a guy trying to present a bit.	More a woman, less a guy in a dress A difference for him between a woman and a guy trying to present as one
		I: So, your experience of gender changes as well?	
	Gender	A: I guess so, yeah...(laughter)	
		I: When you are dressed as a man you feel more as a man, and when you are dressed as a woman you start to feel more as a woman?	Are there exceptions?
87	Gender Dressing as smth	A: yeah, yeah	
		I: How do you feel right at this moment, because I know you know you have some male and some female clothing? I can see the male... [yea!] (laughter). How do you feel now?	
88	Gender crossdressing	A: Yeah...ehm...Probably more like a male…yeah. (laughter).	Feels that clothing mirrors how he feels in terms of gender.
		I: So now you are inclining more towards the male side?	Dressed as a male feel more as a male.
		A: Yeah, I think so yeah.	
		I: What does crossdressing mean for you?	
89	Crossdressing Repression Expression Limitation Gender	A: (Laughter) So, it is just...yeah.... a way of living and exploring...so my feminine part that exists and... that I ignored 'cuz I tried to and it didn't work so ...(laughter) yeah...so...yeah ...means to be able to do ....ehm...stuff I wasn't able to do when... or I am not able to do as a guy.	Crossdressing as a way of living and exploring his existing and ignored feminine side. Ignoring his feminine part did not work. Hard for him to put it into words Crossdressing is being able to do stuff that he could not do as a man.
		I: What kind of stuff?	
90	Expression Gender Crossdressing	A: Right, presumably wearing female clothes, doing make-up... but also going shopping as well, so when I went... when I was the time in Sicily, I went in shops and browsed.	Activities reserved for females. Clear separation between what females and what males can do. Going to shops and browsing
		I: Would you go to a female shop as man and buy female clothing?	
91	Gender Shame Fear of Judgement	A: So, I did try once or twice as a male...but I always feel a bit awkward and stressed [Ihm], I always feel like people are going to look at me weirdly you know or... yeah...	Shopping for female clothing as a man felt awkward and stressed. Being self-conscious that

	Being out Being with others Expressing himself Experimenting Being creative Male Sameness	but I only did it a few... there was really relaxed and stress-free and so yeah this is something.... the kind of stuff I am able to do while crossdressing which is more new and also experiencing with always different styles, make-up with the hair as well ...welcomed...be a bit more creative, I guess... ehm... because yea... with a guy it is always a bit (laughter) the same boring stuff, (laughter).	you are crossing a social norm? Fear of people looking at him weirdly Went shopping dressed as female a couple of times and felt relaxed and stress-free. Only females are allowed to buy and browse there. A gendered space. This is new for him Being creative with his appearance As a guy the same boring stuff. The clothing store is gendered and policed by strong social norms space.
		I: So, it is a way for you to be creative with yourself?	
92	Creative	A: A bit, yeah.	Being creative as a crossdressing, expanding his world. Taking care of him, paying attention to himself.
	Male	I: Being a man seems very limiting, or limited for you, while being a woman is whole range of things to do?	
	Male Presentation Expression	A: Yeah.... yea in terms of ways of presenting myself.	Expanding his world in terms of more ways of presenting himself.
93	Male	I: How would it be for you to be more... to try a different style of clothing as a man?	We never evade the gender dichotomy. His gender system is strongly binary.
	Uncertainty Male Deference Sameness	A: Yeah, I don't know...I find it a little bit difficult as a male to try different styles of clothing, yeah styles of clothing.... 'cuz then... very quickly I feel ...a ...something is not me anymore or if I try to change.	Difficult as male to experiment or change his style. Written script for the male role and for the female role. It would not feel like him if he would change. He can do it, but it would not feel genuine for him.
		I: Now, the way you are dressed, is you and it expresses you?	
94	Male Freedom Comfortable	A: Yeah, as male. Then if I would buy a dress as female, I am feeling.... yea, I am feeling more free to experience with different styles and I am more comfortable as well [Ihm, ok!]	The way he is a male, feels like him and his male persona. As a woman, it is genuine to be freer to experiment for him

		I: So, elements of being a cross-dresser that you enjoy the most, first?	
95	Expression Representation Being with himself / Body	A: Ehm... (laughter) ... I guess just being able to ...I can ...dress and do the make-up right and I feel sexy as I felt like during the party - that is what I would enjoy the most.... I feel desirable or I feel pretty and... this is what I would enjoy the most.	He enjoys dressing up, being happy with his make-up, feeling sexy, feeling desirable and pretty. He can do this only by escaping the male role with a female world. His gender identity is not binary, yet he negotiates it into a binary system – like most of us.
	Male	I: Do you feel pretty as a man?	
96	Male	A: Not so much (laughter). [not so much]	Not so much pretty as a man. Why?
	Male	I: Do you think you can be sexy as a man? Or sassy as a man?	
	Male Values	A: (long pause) It could, but... yeah, it happens less often, and it is more difficult ...when I have that feeling, I guess.... (v long pause) .... I guess it would happen if I would achieve something I am proud of... than...as a male, I would feel a bit more sexy or sassy or...yeah.	More difficult to be sexy or sassy as a man Being a woman is about the activity in itself As a man, he associates it with achievement and feeling proud – which is much harder to get. Being a man is about other activities that bring you joy, but not much about the activity in itself. By comparison, it seems much easier to get it as female persona with make-up and clothing.
		I: What about elements that you would change if you could?	
97	Being with others Difficulty Stigma Difference	A: So, I would change the way people look at it... on society ...I mean in general...so... yea...lots of people are still judgemental or homophobic, transphobic or [Ihm] and ... so yeah...that is what ...if I could that I would change more....how the other, of course society considers people like me or...	Desire for society to change, how people look at him, the judgement. Really fantastic to hear that he is aware that society has actually an issue, and that there is nothing wrong with how he is but how society is with difference.
		I: Does this impact you in any way?	
98	Being with others Freedom Being out Confidence	A: yeah, because I guess that if there wasn't that factor I would explore it more before, and I would be feeling more free to go out even here while dressing as a... presenting as female, then now...yeah...I don't feel confident or safe enough to do.	The impact is that it has delayed him exploring this side of him. A loss here. Would feel freer to out. Feels limited constrained

	Safe		Does not have the confidence or feel safe enough to go out cross-dressed in the city where he lives. He would have to 'pass' to go out safely.
		I: How do you see yourself in the future?	
99	Not knowing Time Crossdressing Being out Being with others	A: (Laughter). It is a good question, I don't know ...[I mean regarding crossdressing]...yeah...I don't think it is going to go away (laughter), and then ...I would like it to be ...I would like to be able to go out more ...so hopefully ...how I see people to...yeah... meet up with other people and more interested in coffee more casually, more as a female...so...how I would like it to be in the future.	Hard to say where he sees himself with his crossdressing. He is sure it is still going to be a part of his life. Nervous laughter there (anxiety?) He would like to be more social and to have more opportunities to be a 'woman,' and to be experienced as a woman.
		I: You mentioned how others see it, how do you see it? Crossdressing. What is crossdressing?	
100	Crossdressing Acceptance Expression Freedom Expression Crossdressing	A: Yeah, it is just...it's just a way for people like me to... yeah to express a part of themselves and yea...to me. I mean everyone is free to be and do whatever they like as long as they don't bother or don't hurt anyone else. I mean...yeah...don't matter, so...year. That is how I see it... like a way of people to express themselves like...if you go to Camden town and there are people who are a bit more like punk styles and so on ...is ...they are just being themselves...is fine....	*People like me* – ownership and difference Hard for him to express how he sees crossdressing. Crossdressing is a way for people like him to express themselves, similar to how punk people do it. Crossdressing as being 'punk' What does punk mean for him? His values: being free as long as you don't bother or hurt anyone else. Problematic, his existence bothers many other people. Just being yourself is fine. Another value and principle.
		I: Do you have anything to add, that we haven't covered or... anything that is important that you would like to say?	
101		A: No, not that I can think of...(long pause) Not really, I don't know, no (laughter).	Nothing to add. Nervous laughter. *Something uncomfortable about this laughter here.*
		I: OK. We will stop here.	