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Negotiating transgender identity in interactions: the experiences of transmasculine people.

Rowan Earle Douglas

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Abstract

As social constructionist gender theory gained currency in the mid-to-late twentieth century, transgender identities were often presented as ‘proof’ of gender’s intersubjective construction, with little attention given to how trans people were experiencing their own gender identity negotiation. Despite a rise in literature exploring trans lives, there remains limited exploration of trans people’s experiences of identity in their day-to-day interactions with others, and much of the literature exploring trans language and voice focuses on transfeminine rather than transmasculine individuals.

Accordingly, this study sought to understand transmasculine people’s lived experiences of negotiating their gender identities in everyday interactions, looking particularly at participants’ interpretations and experiences of masculinity and ‘passing’. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to analyse semi-structured interview data from ten transmasculine UK adults.

The study has three main findings. Firstly, this study found that participants held non-traditional interpretations of masculinity, feeling congruence with identity positions that did not follow hegemonic norms of masculinity. In addition, they were intentional in how they constructed masculinity in interactions and sought to do so in ways that were considerate and minimally harmful to others.

Secondly, this study found that participants felt significant vulnerability in social interactions, feeling at risk of being misgendered and/or subject to transphobic violence. As a result, participants existed in a state of hyperawareness in interactions, abating as their transitions progressed through access to gender affirming care.

Thirdly, this research showed that participants were critically aware of their own gender work in interactions, with certain signifiers considered especially salient when doing passing, including vocal pitch, prosody, lexical choices and speech content. The data further demonstrated participants’ ambivalent relationships with passing, perceived to be simultaneously necessary and potentially harmful.

Drawing on these findings, this study argues that transmasculine people need to be understood as reflective subjects in interactions, using traditional gender norms strategically to achieve intersubjective recognition and safety. It further argues that transmasculine people's freedom to achieve their interactional aims is constrained by their discursive and interpersonal contexts.

The significance of the research lies in its novel approach to exploring transmasculine identity in interactions. Through a phenomenological approach, it identifies aspects of interactions that feel most significant for participants themselves (e.g. intersubjective recognition and safety) and demonstrates the critical eye that transmasculine subjects apply to their own identity work in interactions. Finally, it highlights the importance of integrating transmasculine people's felt experiences of gender into constructionist theories of transmasculine identity.

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1. CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

This is a phenomenological study exploring transmasculine people's experiences of negotiating their gender identities in interactions. This introductory chapter provides an overview of the study, exploring the research background, aims, approach and significance before outlining the structure of the rest of the thesis.

1.1. Research background

1.1.1. Social constructionist gender theory and responses from trans scholars

Transgender people and their genders and identities have long been of interest in diverse corners of the academy. In the fields of sociology and gender studies, the examination of trans identities has been presented as a means by which social constructionist theorists could demonstrate the constructed nature of gender (e.g. Kessler & McKenna, 2000). Through the supposed discrepancies between trans people's bodies and stated identities, they were seen to represent a powerful rebuttal to traditional notions of gender essentialism. Such theories often revolved around questions such as the following: if a person can be born a boy but consider themselves a woman, is it really true that a person's gender identity stems from their sex?

These ideas were consolidated by feminist scholars, ethnomethodologists and sociologists, including Candace West & Don Zimmerman who presented the example of a transgender woman called Agnes in their work 'Doing Gender' (1987). Twenty years previously, Agnes' story had been articulated by ethnomethodologist Harold Garfinkel (1967) as evidence of the active and learned nature of 'passing' as a member of a gender identity category. Garfinkel (1967, p118) defined 'passing' as "[t]he work of achieving and making secure [one's] rights to live in [an] elected sex status". In other words, the process by which a person may come to be recognised in the gender identity that feels most congruent for them. West & Zimmerman (1987) extended this proposal by using Agnes' case to substantiate their theory of gender as a social phenomenon that is dynamically negotiated and 'done' in everyday interactions. They argued that gendered ways of being are learned, rather than

essential, and that the fact that they could be learned and reproduced by Agnes, a trans woman, was proof of their theory.

A similar approach was proposed by Judith Butler in 'Gender Trouble' (1990). In 'Gender Trouble', Butler argued that gender identities are not stable internal identities, but collections of performative acts, without which gender identities would have no substance. In 'Gender Trouble', Butler referred briefly to the example of a drag artist, arguing that, if gender is performative rather than innate, then a drag artist's performance of femininity is no less 'real' than that of a cis woman. Both perform signifiers based on a socially sanctioned idea of what 'woman' should look like, rather than on a fixed internal essence. In this way, Butler implicitly recalled West & Zimmerman's discussion of Agnes and the notion that, if gender is not innate, then a subversive gender performance can be understood as an evidentiary tool: "[t]he purpose of the example is to expose the tenuousness of gender 'reality'" (Butler, 1999, xxiv).

In response to these works, as well as to trans-exclusionary feminists who sought to delegitimise and pathologise trans identities (e.g. Hausman, 1995; Raymond, 1994), a new body of theory and commentary surfaced. This body of work, written by scholars and thinkers who were themselves transgender (e.g. Namaste, 2000; Prosser, 1998; Stone, 2006), is understood to form the basis of the field of Transgender or Trans Studies (Stryker & Currah, 2014). These scholars took a variety of approaches in responding to those non-trans constructionist and exclusionary writers who had used trans people as 'evidence' in the development of their theories. Some objected to the constructionist rejection of trans gender identity as ontological, arguing that trans people's gender identities should be respected as constitutive of the self, rather than transient constructed performances (e.g. Prosser, 1998). Others shared social constructionist approaches to gender identity, while criticising how trans people's real lives and experiences had been erased in preference for using trans people as two-dimensional 'proofs' of theory, spoken about rather than ever spoken to (e.g. Namaste, 2000; Serano, 2016). Despite differing approaches, these writers were often united in calling for greater attention to be paid to the real experiences of trans people, relating to all aspects of their gender and identities. They argued that trans people and trans lives were much more than

rhetorical substantiations of constructionist gender theory, but powerful subjects and creators of knowledge in their own right (e.g. Stone, 2006).

1.1.2. Negotiating gender identity in interaction

Meanwhile, following from work such as West & Zimmerman's (1987) 'Doing Gender', the notion of gender as a contingent and constructed phenomenon was taken up in other disciplines, including sociocultural linguistics. In the sociocultural linguistic field, the existing focus on language and intersubjectivity meant linguists were well-placed to explore how gender identities were constructed, reified and maintained through discourse and interactions. Instead of focusing on trans people as an evidentiary tool, sociocultural linguists moved from studying supposed differences between men's and women's speech (e.g. Labov, 1966; Macaulay, 1977; Trudgill, 1983), to anthropological investigations of how different communities used language and other signifiers to construct and maintain local identities (e.g. Bucholtz, 1999; Eckert, 1989a; Ochs, 1992). Through this work, linguists advanced theory around the links between linguistic styles and social meanings, and how these could be harnessed as part of the active and dynamic negotiation of gender in everyday social interactions.

Over time, linguistic scholars, including trans linguistic scholars, increasingly began to use these methods to examine trans people's language use in the negotiation of their identities (e.g. Edelman & Zimman, 2014; Zimman, 2019). Nevertheless, despite the calls of early trans scholars to treat trans people as subjects and producers of knowledge, the sociocultural research thus far has predominantly taken an observational perspective, with little investigation of trans people's first person perspectives of their own gender negotiation in interactions. Additionally, at last analysis, the majority of linguistic research on trans voices was found to have focused predominantly on transfeminine rather than transmasculine voices (Azul, 2015). It is for this reason that the present study focuses on the experiences of transmasculine people, a group that I understand to include all those who were assigned female at birth, but who now identify in a masculine gender role, including both trans men and non-binary transmasculine people.

There are some key gaps in the existing literature on transmasculine identity negotiation and transmasculine sociocultural linguistics. While there has certainly been an increase in sociological and anthropological literature exploring trans(masculine) people's lives and experiences over recent years (e.g. Hansbury, 2005; Keig & Kellaway, 2014; Stein, 2018), none of this work has focused on experiences of gender identities in interactions specifically, despite questions of gender identity negotiation and construction having been foundational to the field of Trans Studies (e.g. Prosser, 1998). Similarly, while there has been more attention paid (including by trans scholars themselves) to how trans people negotiate and construct their gender identities linguistically (e.g. Konnelly, 2022; Zimman, 2015), very little of this research has taken a first person perspective to this enquiry, meaning that it does not ask trans participants themselves to account for their own behaviours around gender identity negotiation in interactions.

1.2. Research aim

The aim of this research study is to provide a full and detailed investigation of transmasculine people's own experiences of negotiating their gender identities in interactions. This study builds upon the critiques of early Trans Studies scholars who called for trans people to be understood as creators of knowledge and treated as experts in their own gender identities and experiences (e.g. Namaste, 2000; Stone, 2006). Similarly, this study employs and extends the work of sociocultural linguists, whose theories have advanced our understanding of how gender identities can be dynamically signified and negotiated by individuals in everyday social interactions (e.g. Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Motschenbacher, 2007).

Drawing upon these influences, this research study has been designed to answer the following research question:

- RQ: What are transmasculine people's lived experiences of negotiating gender identity in interactions?

This question is accompanied by two subsidiary research aims:

- To understand how transmasculine people interpret their experiences of masculinity in interactions;

- To explore transmasculine people's relationships with passing in interactions.

1.3. Study approach

To answer this research question, the study uses phenomenology, an approach that is particularly well suited to complex questions of experience and identity.

Phenomenological research is grounded in phenomenological philosophy, an approach to inquiry that focuses on how the world 'appears', rather than how it 'is' (Spinelli, 2005). While phenomenological thinkers differ in specific focus, they are generally united by the sense that the way in which we experience the world is drawn both from the raw matter of the world itself, as well as from our own consciousnesses and the interpretations and assumptions therein (Large, 2008). Accordingly, phenomenology's object of inquiry is the experience of the world, rather than the world itself.

Specifically, this study uses Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, or IPA. The aim of IPA is to gain insight into the way in which participants experience and interpret their lifeworlds, drawing on phenomenological principles to do so (Eatough & Smith, 2008). The goal of IPA is not to uncover the 'truth' of an experience, but rather to look in depth at how an experience was lived and interpreted by a participant (Smith et al., 2022). This is appropriate in response to earlier works that have treated trans identities as distant curios, with limited investigation of what it is *like* for trans people to do and be.

IPA is an idiographic research approach, meaning that it focuses on the particular rather than the universal (Smith et al., 2022). For this reason, a small sample of ten transmasculine participants was recruited for this study. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, preferred due to their capacity for creating rich data exploring participants' emotional lives, and their flexibility in tailoring the interviews to each participant individually. The data were analysed using the stages laid out by Smith and colleagues (2022) in the 2nd edition of their guide to doing IPA.

An important aspect of the IPA approach relates to its acknowledgement of the 'double hermeneutic' research process (Smith et al., 2022). The 'double hermeneutic' pertains to an acknowledgement that both the researcher and participants are situated subjects approaching the knowledge creation process from worldly perspectives. Accordingly, it is understood that the researcher's interpretations of the research data are variously shaped by their own personal context and fore-meanings, with emphasis placed on the researcher being reflective and transparent about these influences. Section 3.1.6 discusses my own positionality as the researcher of this piece of work, looking at my motivations for undertaking this study, as well as exploring both how my identity as a transmasculine person and my own constructionist approach to gender may have influenced my interpretations of the data collected for this study.

1.4. Research significance

The main significance of this research is twofold. Firstly, this study implements a novel approach to exploring how gender identity is negotiated in interactions with its use of phenomenology. Through doing so, this study is able to focus on the aspects of interactions that feel most significant for participants themselves. Being guided by participant priorities in this way enables an analysis that moves beyond more typical areas of trans sociolinguistic study (e.g. vocal pitch or identity construction) to further topics of importance. These notably include participants' feelings of vulnerability and fear when in interactions with others, as well as how different interactional contexts impact transmasculine participants' experiences of negotiating their gender identities. Additionally, this study's phenomenological approach allows for an examination of the critical eye that transmasculine research subjects are already applying to their own identity work in interactions. There is limited existing research that explores transmasculine people's own perceptions of their identity work, however this study demonstrates that transmasculine participants can provide rich and insightful metalinguistic commentary on their gender work in interactions. This is significant for sociocultural linguists working on transmasculine language in opening up new avenues of enquiry (e.g. the impact of context or the presence of affect in trans identity construction), as well as demonstrating the fruitfulness of research

approaches, such as IPA, that seek participants' first person perspectives on their own identity work in interactions.

Secondly, with its focus on interactions, this study builds upon existing sociological research into transmasculinity through exploring transmasculine people's experiences of being in the world with others. By placing the emphasis on intersubjectivity, the data collected for this study demonstrates the ways in which the presence of others can impact transmasculine people's experiences of the self and identity. Notably, this approach allows for an examination of the felt importance of intersubjective recognition, indicating how the support and acknowledgement of others can be instrumental in impacting transmasculine people's wellbeing and confidence in their identities. Such an intersubjective analysis is of use to other sociologists or anthropologists working with transmasculine people in emphasising the importance of the social in transmasculine people's experiences of their selves and identities.

1.5. Thesis structure

This thesis has five remaining chapters, laid out below:

Chapter two is a literature review, exploring works that are relevant to the background and conception of this study. Structured around five key questions, it explores existing theory and research around transmasculine experiences, constructionist approaches to gender, the study of gender broadly and transgender specifically in interactions, and how trans scholars have critiqued constructionist gender theory in the past.

Chapter three lays out the methodology and methods of this study. The methodology section includes an introduction to phenomenology and explores how IPA draws on the foundations of phenomenological philosophy in its theory and method. The methods section lays out the steps carried out in the completion of this research study, from the data collection process to the analytic stages, to related questions of ethics and research validity in the context of this study.

Chapter four explores the findings of this research study, laying out my interpretative analyses of the participant accounts gathered through the study interviews. This chapter is structured around three overarching themes (Group Experiential Themes) developed during the data analysis process.

Chapter five is the thesis discussion chapter, exploring how the findings from this research align with and build upon existing research in this area. In this chapter I propose three key wider insights from this study, drawing on both existing literature and the analysis from this study.

Chapter six serves as the study's conclusions. This chapter revisits the research question to demonstrate how this study has met the original research aim. This chapter also includes discussions of the limitations of the study, as well as its implications and a suggestion for further research in this area.

2. CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

[O]ur interest in transsexuals is not in terms of transsexualism, per se, but only in terms of what transsexualism can illuminate about the day-to-day social construction of gender by all persons...The existence of transsexualism, itself, as a valid diagnostic category underscores the rules we have for constructing gender, and shows how these rules are reinforced by scientific conceptions of transsexualism. (Kessler & McKenna, 2000, p11)

But our lives and our bodies are made up of more than gender and identity, more than a theory that justifies our very existence, more than mere performance, more than the interesting remark that we expose how gender works. Our lives and our bodies are much more complicated, and much less glamorous, than all that. They are forged in details of everyday life, marked by matters not discussed by academics or clinical researchers. (Namaste, 2000, p1)

This study was born out of the need for greater insight into transmasculine people's first-person perspectives of their gender work in interactions. While trans people and trans identities have traditionally been at the heart of theorisation around gender and its construction in interactions (e.g. Garfinkel, 1967; Kessler & McKenna, 2000), our knowledge of trans people's first-person perspectives of gender in social interactions has remained limited. Trans critiques of the analysis of trans identities in constructionist gender theory are not new, and it was critical responses to social constructionist and trans-exclusionary feminist theorisations that formed the foundation of the intellectual field now known as Transgender Studies (Stryker & Currah, 2014). Nevertheless, research into trans people's own perspectives has tended to focus on questions of experience and embodiment in other areas, such as accessing gender affirming care, feminism, the workplace, and education (e.g. Hansbury, 2005; Rogers, 2020; Schilt, 2006; Stein, 2018, etc), rather than trans subjectivity in interactions specifically. Social interactions are the domain of focus in

the present study, as this research aims to complement those analyses of gender construction that position interactions as the key domain in which identity work takes place (e.g. Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; West & Zimmerman, 1987). My intention with this work is not to refute the notion that gender is constructed, reified, policed and transformed through interactions, but rather to propose an approach that centres trans subjects' (and by extension, all subjects') active and conscious role in its production. It is my proposal that sensitivity to the phenomenology of being in interactions as a gendered subject can only strengthen and expand our understanding of intersubjective gender dynamics.

2.1.1. The research area

This is an interdisciplinary study. The topics and concepts under investigation are drawn primarily from sociocultural linguistics and sociology while the research methodology has its roots in phenomenological philosophy and psychology. Much of the literature that informs this study is drawn from the sociocultural linguistic field, as the theory and research of sociocultural linguists has been highly significant in developing knowledge around how gender identities are produced and negotiated in interactions (e.g. Bucholtz, 1999; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Ochs, 1992). I have turned to sociology, ethnomethodology and feminist theory in exploring the origins of social constructionist approaches to gender identity (e.g. de Beauvoir, 1953; Garfinkel, 1967; West & Zimmerman, 1987), and it is sociologists and anthropologists who have produced much of the pre-existing research into transmasculine people's experiences and lives (e.g. Abelson, 2014; Jourian & McCloud, 2020; Rogers, 2020; Stein, 2018). Crucially, this study owes a great debt to the work of the trans critical scholars who have previously questioned and deconstructed notions of trans identity as theorised by non-trans scholars. These works have come from diverse disciplines, including literary criticism (Prosser, 1998), sociology (Namaste, 2000), philosophy (Preciado, 2023) and media theory (Stone, 2006). Without these works, my quest for legibility in the following pages would have been much more fraught.

2.1.2. A note on terminology

Throughout the course of this research, I have been conscious of the importance of using congruent and appropriate language to describe the identities and experiences of transmasculine people. I have been aware of the importance of language in making trans identities legible (“it is by being interpolated within the terms of language that a certain social existence of the body first becomes possible” (Butler, 1997)) as well as its inverse power in erasing or problematising trans people’s lives and experiences (Zimman, 2017). My own understanding of appropriate and respectful language for trans people is drawn from a decade of involvement in trans and intersectional feminist activist and community spaces. However, even across that relatively brief period of time, I have noticed linguistic norms shifting and evolving. At all times, our capacity for linguistic self-determination is defined and limited by the labels and categories available to us in our current sociohistorical context (Drabinski, 2014), and I am aware that the language that I use now may seem outdated or strange to future readers. With this in mind, I have made linguistic choices based on my own understanding of current norms in both trans community spaces and academia, with my prevailing intentions being respectfulness and inclusivity for all people.

This study focuses on *transmasculine people*, a group that I understand to include transgender men, as well as non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals who were assigned female at birth but who now identify in a masculine gender role. In instances where I refer to *transfeminine people*, I am including transgender women and others who were assigned male at birth but who now identify in a feminine gender role. Throughout this study, I use the term *trans* to refer to those who feel their gender identity to be different from the sex they were assigned at birth, in whatever way they conceptualise this experience. I tend towards the shortened *trans*, rather than *transgender* or *transsexual* in order to be inclusive of as wide a range as possible of gendered self-determinations. I use the terms *cis* or *cisgender* to refer to those who are not trans. When discussing other research studies, I will use the gender terminology used by the author. Where this is not provided, I will default to the terms above where appropriate.

Much has been written about ideas and definitions of sex and gender, some of which I will touch upon in this literature review. Traditionally, sex has been understood to

refer to binary categories ('male' and 'female') which are then realised in corresponding binary gender identities ('man' and 'woman'). Critics of this framework have pointed out the ways in which a strict binary understanding of sex categories is insufficient to describe the vast range of human sexual diversity (e.g. King, 2022; Vilorio & Nieto, 2020). Others have argued that the very notion of sex categorisation is a sociohistorically contingent idea developed to give gender differences the appearance of naturalness (e.g. Butler, 1990; Preciado, 2023). Drawing on these critiques and with the intention of moving away from a binary or determinative understanding of sex, I have tended towards reference to a person's *material* or *physical sex characteristics* in this work, rather than referring to someone as *being* or *having* a sex. By *material sex characteristics*, I refer to the network of physical characteristics that are generally considered to determine, or to be constitutive of, a person's sexed identity. These include primary sex characteristics (e.g. chromosomes, gonads, hormones and genitalia) as well as secondary sex characteristics (e.g. breast development, body hair patterns, fat distribution, vocal pitch, etc).

Throughout this work, I tend towards the use of *gender* to refer to the societal systems, structures, power and hierarchical differences that have arisen from the traditional binary gender/sex distinction. I use *gender identity* to refer to a person's own sense of their identity from a gendered perspective. I am conscious that viewpoints on the notion of gender identity can vary hugely, and I will explore these both in the context of the academic literature and my participants' understandings of their own identities in subsequent sections and chapters. Nevertheless, my work is predicated by a belief that a person's sense of their own gender identity, however it may be conceptualised, is a valid and legitimate means of navigating their own sense of self and embodiment within a sociohistorically dependent environment of meanings and norms. In guiding my approach to gender, I am inspired by Judith Butler's repeated insistence that gender theory must at all times be directed by the question of how life can be made more livable for all (Butler, 1999, 2004, 2024; Jones, 2021), for "[w]hat makes for a livable world is no idle question" (Butler, 2004, p17).

2.1.3. Structure of the literature review

This research study has been designed to answer the following research question (RQ):

- RQ: What are transmasculine people's lived experiences of negotiating gender identity in interactions?

This question is accompanied by two subsidiary research aims:

- To understand how transmasculine people interpret their experiences of masculinity in interactions;
- To explore transmasculine people's relationships with passing in interactions.

The following literature review is structured around five questions, the answers to which will provide the literary background to the RQ and wider study. The literature review questions are laid out below.

Q1. What do we know about transmasculine people's lives and experiences?

- This question provides a background to the study's exploration of transmasculine people and their lives.

Q2. What does it mean for gender identity to be negotiated in interactions?

- This question provides a background to social constructionist approaches to gender that position gender identity as a construct that is actively negotiated and maintained in interactions.

Q3. How have sociocultural linguists developed the study of gender identity negotiation in interactions?

- This question explores how the study of gender construction in interactions has been developed and built upon by sociocultural linguists.

Q4. What have previous studies of transmasculine people in interactions explored?

- This question will provide a background to previous work exploring transmasculine identity and language in interactions, much of which focuses on the salience of the voice to gender affirming care.

Q5. How have trans scholars approached and critiqued questions of gender identity construction in the past?

- This question sets the context for this study within the wider field of Trans Studies, providing a critical accompaniment to the literature discussed in the previous questions and exploring how studies of trans lived experience and gender identity construction can complement one another.

2.2. Q1. What do we know about transmasculine people's lives and experiences?

Over the last thirty years, there has been a proliferation of publications exploring transmasculine people's lives, experiences and identities. These include auto-ethnographic memoir-style works (e.g. Green, 2020), edited collections of transmasculine people's essays (e.g. Keig & Kellaway, 2014), biographies of notable transmasculine figures from history (e.g. Smith, 2017) and qualitative analyses of transmasculine people's experiences and embodiment (e.g. Caudwell, 2014; Pathoulas et al., 2021; Rowniak & Chesla, 2013). From these works, certain themes emerge. In this section, I will explore relevant aspects of this body of research, looking particularly at transmasculine people's relationships with societal privilege, diverse masculinities, and perceptions of 'passing'.

2.2.1. Navigating traditional masculinities

Throughout the literature on transmasculine identities, there is frequent reference to transmasculine people's attitudes towards and navigation of male privilege. Through transitioning into masculine identities, those transmasculine people who pass as men find themselves in the unique position of having experienced what it is like both to be treated as a woman and as a man. Some have described feeling a tangible shift in the way that others relate to them as a result of their transition. For instance, Clements and colleagues (2021) discussed transmasculine individuals' experiences of feeling safer as a result of transitioning, of being assumed to be competent by others, and being free from traditional constraining expectations placed upon women. Schilt (2006) framed this phenomenon as the 'outsider-within' perspective, with some trans men finding themselves to be accepted and treated in the same way as cis men, despite not having been 'born into' that world. In her study of trans men in the workplace, Schilt's participants described feeling that they were awarded more authority "simply because of being men", further suggesting that they received this authority at the expense of their women coworkers (Schilt, 2006, p476). Schilt proposed this to be an example of the 'patriarchal dividend', a concept drawn from Connell (2005, p79) and defined as "the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women". In Brown and colleagues' (2016) study of female to

male transsexuals, participants described the discomfort that they felt about the 'privilege' of being accepted into the world of cis men. This analysis explored their participants' distress at being privy to other men's sexist language and behaviours, with one participant stating:

"It's a blessing and curse because guys think I'm just another guy and they can tell rape jokes around me and I'm not ok with that you know. Like that's just not ok." (Brown et al., 2016, p28)

Brown et al. (2016) highlighted participants' struggles to navigate this dynamic with their cis male peers, noting how participants described wanting to challenge the other men's sexist behaviour, while also being fearful of being targeted for doing so. This speaks to a common tension in the literature concerning transmasculine people's attitudes towards interactions with cis men. Transmasculine people have frequently described their desire to act in line with progressive feminist principles, while simultaneously being afraid of the repercussions of doing so. This desire to stay true to progressive principles was described by Stein, who said: "[t]he experience of having once lived as a female offers insights into a 'toxic masculinity' many try to avoid at all costs" (2018, p168). This attitude is illustrated by Sito's (2014, p188) reflections on his own behaviour and principles, in which he states:

I have to make sure that when I do accept all of the social advantages that come with being a large, educated, straight, Chicano man, that I also do not forget what it was like to be a large, lesbian, Chicana woman.

In exchange for their newfound societal privilege, transmasculine people have described feeling expected to engage in culturally prescribed, or 'hegemonic', expressions of masculinity that can feel alien and uncomfortable (Clements et al., 2021; Lindner & Vargas, 2024). Like 'patriarchal dividend', 'hegemonic masculinity' is a concept derived from the work of Raewyn Connell, whose (1995) book 'Masculinities' is considered a groundbreaking contribution to the study of masculinity (Messerschmidt & Bridges, 2024). In this work, Connell presents masculinities as 'projects', whose constituent practices are implemented in the service of developing and maintaining social structures of power. She defined hegemonic masculinity as:

[T]he configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which

guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (Connell, 1995, p77)

In this way, hegemonic masculinity does not represent a fixed set of practices or vision of masculinity, but one that changes according to the local and historic context of the relevant social structure. In the modern Western context, practices of hegemonic masculinity can include displays of toughness, independence or aggression, but these practices may vary locally from group to group. For transmasculine people who have not been raised as boys and men, feeling expected to engage in practices aligned with hegemonic masculinities can feel confronting and uncomfortable (Stein, 2018). For instance, Rubin (2003, p168; p171) spoke of some participants' discomfort with beliefs that equate masculinity with "dominance, power, strength, aggression, sexual drive, lack of emotion", and their resulting eagerness to "remak[e] what it means to be a man". Similarly, Lindner and Vargas' (2024) transmasculine participants spoke expansively about their discomfort with traditional norms around masculinity and violence, and the expectation that they be ready both to enact and receive violence upon and from other men. Furthermore, monakali and Francis (2020) explored how especially stark this discomfort can be for transmasculine people who were at the receiving end of gender-based violence when living as women. In their analysis, they touched upon participants' concerns around how their masculinity would be perceived by others, and the fear that they might be read as dominant or aggressive. Karabo in monakali & Francis (2020, p12) encapsulated this feeling saying:

"I felt like transitioning would betray who I am somehow. Like you become lowo muntu wes'lisa [that kind of man] who does wrong things. I felt like...what if I become a monster."

For Karabo, there was a tension in wanting to transition in a way that felt congruent, while also being afraid of the potential of "embodying violent masculinity or being perceived as doing so" (monakali & Francis, 2020, p12).

2.2.2. Constructing alternative masculinities

As a result of these tensions with hegemonic masculinities, much of the literature exploring transmasculine people's relationships with masculinity touches upon intentions to engage in alternative masculinity practices. Abelson's (2016) trans men

participants described trying to be conscientious about taking up too much space in public, while Jourian (2017) discussed participants' critical examinations of the masculinities of their fathers, and their intentions not to replicate the aspects of these that they perceived to be harmful. Some transmasculine people have even described moderating behaviours that held different social meanings for them as women as compared to as men or other masculine people. Such behaviours included promiscuousness, being loud, or standing up for themselves in social situations. Stein (2018) described trans men to be conscious of the fact that, as people read as men, their actions might now be perceived differently and more negatively by woman peers. She described one participant saying, "[n]ow, he says, he has to learn how to turn it down, take up less space, and remember not to mansplain" (Stein, 2018, p235). Lindner and Vargas (2024, p6) explained that their participants had engaged in "intentional processes of building masculinities that felt healthy and satisfying", a construction that involved the "awareness of alternative masculinities and the formation of new definitions of personal masculinity", involving such priorities as service and care for others.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that transmasculine people's comfort in constructing alternative masculinities may be impacted by their perceived ability to pass as cis. For those who do pass as cis men, there appears to be a greater feeling of flexibility in how they can perform their masculinities. This is seemingly due to a sense that non-normative masculinity practices will not lead to impugment of their 'male-ness' due to the stable gender perception that is awarded to those who are not perceived to be trans. To this point Rubin wrote:

These men found that as they became more recognizable in their new bodies, they could behave in non-stereotypical ways and still count as men. They might be considered slightly off-centre or alternative men for rejecting the same masculine behaviours, but their manhood itself would no longer be challenged. (Rubin, 2003, p168)

This is in contrast with those transmasculine people who do not pass as cis men, and whose claims to masculine identities consequently rely more heavily on the active performance of normatively masculine behaviours. Indeed, across various research studies, transmasculine people have reported being more preoccupied about actively conveying signifiers of masculinity earlier in their transition than later (e.g. Rubin,

2003; Vegter, 2013). Vegter (2013) described how their female-to-male trans-identified participants felt less of a need to engage in the active expression of masculinity as they became more comfortable in their identities and bodies. This was often due to having accessed testosterone therapy that had masculinised their appearance and increased their chances of passing as men. Vegter (2013, p101) characterised the active expression of masculinity as “[m]asculine compensatory behaviour”, noting that there was an “increase in personal expressions of masculinity during the beginning stages of transition” which declined as individuals “felt more confident about their external selves in relation to their identities”. Green (2020, p297) similarly spoke to this phenomenon, describing how early-transition trans men could be more likely to “deliberately exhibit behaviours designed to communicate masculinity when they were worried about being perceived as not male”, although this concern gradually lessened with time.

In fact, Rogers (2020) stated that it is common for compensatory acts of masculinity to be prevalent amongst *any* men who do not hold a hegemonic position in society, something that Connell (1995) described as ‘protest masculinity’. With protest masculinity, men who do not feel comfortable that their masculine position will be recognized may put more conscious effort into performing masculinity in order to shore up their recognition as men. Research suggests that this theory of ‘protest masculinity’ may apply to some transmasculine people, particularly those in earlier stages of their transition. However, behaviour rooted in ‘protest masculinity’ can be temporary, and analyses indicate that transmasculine people may become more comfortable expressing femininity and non-normative masculinities over time (e.g. Pardo, 2019). For those who start to pass as cis men, this may be due to a closer alignment with hegemonic cis masculinity and a distance from the more vulnerable state of being perceptibly trans.

2.2.3. Precarious safety and defensive masculinities

Relatedly, research into transmasculine people’s experiences of masculinity has also explored how transmasculine people’s masculinity constructions may be directly impacted by how safe they feel at any given time. Abelson (2014) discussed how some trans men only felt able to construct alternative non-hegemonic masculinities

when they felt sure that doing so would not increase their risk of violence from other men. As with transmasculine people's tentative responses to other men's sexist behaviours (explored in 2.2.1 above), Abelson found that trans men were more likely to report engaging in normative masculinity practices when under threat, even when those behaviours contradicted their values around 'good' masculinities. Abelson characterised these behaviours as 'defensive masculinities', describing how participants felt a tension between wanting to be 'good' men and feeling pressured to do masculinity practices that "did not align with the kind of men they desired to be" (Abelson, 2014, p566). This issue can be compounded for those trans men who feel especially uncomfortable around cis men. Some have described feeling primed to fear sexual violence from men as a result of their socialisation as women and girls, while also being aware that, as people perceived to be men, they are more likely to experience casual interpersonal violence from men than when they were perceived to be women (Abelson, 2014). In her comprehensive study of trans men in the US, Abelson (2019) described how the spectre of Brandon Teena predominated in conversations with American trans men around violence and danger. Brandon Teena was a transgender man living in rural Nebraska who was gang raped and murdered on New Year's Eve in 1993. His story was later adapted into the Oscar winning film 'Boys Don't Cry' (K. Peirce, 1999). With its popularity, 'Boys Don't Cry' served as a catalyst for introducing the struggles of the transmasculine community to mainstream audiences (Green, 2020) while simultaneously impressing upon trans men, particularly in rural areas, that their lives could be under significant threat of violence (Abelson, 2019). Fear of male violence is prevalent in the transmasculine community; however, many feel ill-equipped to deal with it, having missed "the boyhood experiences common to cisgender men of fighting and learning how to handle non-sexual violence from other men" (Abelson, 2014, p448). Rubin (2003) discussed trans men's displays of masculinity in the face of threat from other men, going so far as to suggest that trans men might be especially capable of oppressive masculinities when threatened:

In short, threatened men are threatening men. This is especially true of FTMs. If their status as men is challenged, they will choose to appear as stereotypically male as possible and behave like the most 'manly' of men. Their behaviour may be hostile, oppressive, and even violent in ways that deny recognition to women and other men. (Rubin, 2003, p165)

These displays of defensive masculinity mark a contrast from contexts in which transmasculine people feel more comfortable and recognized in their masculinity, and thus less inclined to replicate “offensive aspects of maleness” (Rubin, 2003, p168). These analyses suggest that, while progressive and alternative masculinities are often highly valued by transmasculine people, they are constrained by their interpersonal context in their ability to practise the masculinities that feel most congruent for them.

2.2.4. Attitudes towards passing

Baker Rogers (2019, p640) defined passing as:

The ability of trans men to be seen as the gender they identify with (man, male, trans masculine, genderqueer, etc.), rather than to be seen as a woman based on the sex – female – they were assigned at birth by others.

For some transmasculine people, passing is the ultimate goal of their transition. This was the case for Alec in Rogers’ (2019, p647) study who said that he “transitioned so that [he] would be passable...[He] wanted to be seen as a man, not a trans man.” The experience of passing can be positive for trans men, and some describe finally feeling like their internal identity is being seen from the outside when they pass (Stein, 2018). This feeling of ‘being seen’ is described by Rubin (2003, p181) as “intersubjective recognition” and he states that “[i]ntersubjective recognition is the mutual process whereby we acknowledge and are acknowledged as authentic selves”. Another of Rogers’ participants described the comfort and recognition of passing, saying: “I feel more comfortable in my skin when I do pass. I feel like I’m, I don’t know, it’s like I’m 100 percent there; like I’m me” (Rogers, 2019, p648-649). Hansbury (2005, p252) similarly drew attention to his own experience of the intersubjective recognition of passing saying that, when he started to pass as male, it was “liberating to be seen at last as the man I knew myself to be”.

Furthermore, Hansbury highlighted how seeking to pass is not just a case of personal liberation and congruence, but a safety issue for some. He described how trans people who do not pass are often the recipients of daily harassment, and “[t]heir ambiguous appearance invites the worst from strangers, acquaintances, coworkers, family, and friends” (Hansbury, 2005, p260). The possible benefits of passing

underscore why the ability to pass is known as 'passing privilege' by some within the trans community (e.g. Cannon, 2014). To be visible as trans in society can be dangerous when those who do not conform to gender norms are subject to significant risk of harassment or violence (Lombardi et al., 2002). In an analysis of the experiences of trans men in the workplace, Schilt (2006, p481) told the story of one person who was prohibited from appearing in front of customers at his restaurant job as a result of his ambiguously gendered appearance: "I don't care how busy it gets" said his manager, "[you'll] make people lose their appetite." Green (2020, p180) described how passing as a man had helped to reduce the dehumanisation he felt subjected to by others as an androgynously presenting person before his transition:

I remember what it was first like to feel that anonymity, as testosterone gradually obliterated the androgyny that for most of my life made others uncomfortable in my presence...It was a joy to be assumed a person for a change.

For these trans men, it seems that passing as cis can be experienced as the most reliable way to feel safe in public and be treated with respect. For some, such as Schilt's participant in the restaurant, it can also be a necessary factor in being afforded the basic right to work and exist in a cisnormative society. As Snorton (2009, p87) wrote: "passing is sometimes politically and culturally necessary to avoid misrepresentation, and more importantly, physical harm."

2.2.5. Transmasculinity and intersecting identities

While some transmasculine people report feeling increased privilege as a result of being read as men, this privilege is not experienced in the same way across the population. Those transmasculine people with intersecting marginalised identities may not benefit from the patriarchal dividend in the same way as others. This inequality has been described most frequently in reference to the experiences of Black transmasculine people. While Black women face significant oppression through the intersections of their race and gender (Crenshaw, 1991; Spates et al., 2020), the quality of this oppression can shift as Black transmasculine people move from being read as Black women to being read as Black men, a group who are significantly criminalized and demonized judicially and by society at large (Elliott-Cooper, 2021). A participant in White and colleagues (2020, p257) described the experience of this

shift, saying: “I didn’t go from being like more oppressed to not anymore. It just changed the way it was happening.” Similarly, Cotten (2014) described almost freezing to death one winter night as successive taxis drove past him and did not stop, something that he felt was due to him being read as a Black man. He felt that he was perceived to pose a new danger to people in a way that was not the case prior to his transition. Relatedly, Black transmasculine people have described taking extra care to construct a kind of masculinity that is not perceived as threatening by others. One of Jourian and McCloud’s (2020, p740) participants reported being particularly careful not to do anything that might be read as aggressive in predominantly white environments, for fear that he will be stereotyped as the “angry Black guy”. A similar pressure is described by Leo in Rogers (2019, p651) who said:

“I’m a black male in society and so I have to be extra careful with the way I do things. I can’t come off as super aggressive, I have to control my temper.”

Additionally, Black transmasculine people may face obstacles in connecting with the wider trans community, whether due to a lack of understanding from their white peers (Jourian & McCloud, 2020), or from the active perpetuation of racism against them (White et al., 2020). Thus, it appears that, even within a community that could be considered to be their own, Black transmasculine people are not afforded the same recognition or safety as their white peers. While the patriarchal dividend may be made available to some transmasculine people upon transitioning, it is not experienced in the same way by all.

2.2.6. Q1. What do we know about transmasculine people’s lives and experiences? Summary.

There has been an increase of literature published in recent years exploring transmasculine people’s identities and experiences. The narratives from these memoirs, essays and research studies have touched on various aspects of transmasculine experience, with prominent themes arising around experiences of male privilege, attitudes towards masculinity and feelings about passing. Across this body of work, there are repeated references to transmasculine people’s discomfort with being awarded patriarchal privileges that were not available to them prior to their transition, as well as desires to construct transformative masculinities that do not rely

upon hegemonic ideals that they consider to be toxic or harmful. Nevertheless, while transmasculine people may prefer alternative masculinities, their ability to engage in these can be dependent on their sense of safety, with examples of transmasculine people reverting to defensive masculinities when they feel threatened or unsafe. In response to the themes emergent from the existing literature, focus in the present study is given particularly to transmasculine people's experiences of masculinity and passing as they relate to experiences of negotiating gender identities in interactions.

2.3. Q2. What does it mean for gender identity to be negotiated in interactions?

The answer to Q1 (section 2.2), served as an introduction to the extant research literature exploring transmasculine people's lives, and how transmasculine participants have articulated their experiences of gender, masculinities and passing. In answering Q2, this next section will take a closer look at the theoretical domain of the present study, concentrating its attention on early studies of identity and gender construction in social interactions. Through its focus on transmasculine people's lived experiences of social interactions, the present study seeks to complement those social constructionist approaches to gender identity that locate interactions as the source of emergent gender identity.

A social constructionist approach to gender is often characterised by the idea that gender identities are not stable categories located within individuals' psyches, but are instead relational and sociocultural phenomena constructed within, and dictated by, local contexts and discourses (Bucholtz & Hall, 2022). In such a framework, gender is not understood to be brought to an interaction, but rather to emerge within it, through interlocutors' enactment of socioculturally significant signifiers (McEntee-Atalianis, 2018; West & Zimmerman, 1987). In this way, in order for the gender that a person enacts to be intelligible, it must draw from sociocultural discourses of gender that already exist, and which are then reified and perpetuated as they are repeatedly performed in interactions. Speaking to these sociocultural discourses, Cameron (1996, p46) described her own production of gender, saying:

There is no such thing as 'being a woman' outside the various practices that define womanhood for my culture – practices ranging from the sort of work I do to my sexual preferences to the clothes I wear to the way I use language.

With this framing, Cameron draws attention to the situatedness of gender norms, emphasising that they are always reflective of and dependent on the culture in which they are located.

The social constructionist position developed as a critique to the essentialist conceptions of gender and sex that dominated Western frameworks prior to the mid-

20th century. The traditional essentialist approach drew no distinction between gender and sex, instead considering sex to be a binary categorisation responsible for salient behavioural and social differences between men and women (Dzubinski & Diehl, 2018). Crucially, essentialist gender theory positioned the historic gender structure of Western society, for instance with women as homemakers and men as workers, as responsive to natural sexual differences, with any behavioural or social differences between men and women understood to be expressive of their innate essences (West & Zimmerman, 1987). By contrast, social constructionist paradigms reject the notion that men or women have any essential ways of being, arguing instead that these differences are constructed and locally dependent.

2.3.1. The origins of constructionist approaches to gender

The notion of gender as an active phenomenon constructed within interactions came to prominence in the latter half of the twentieth century, afforded by the convergence and synthesis of a number of intellectual strands developing during that time. I will focus here on four approximately concurrent developments in thought that contributed to the development of contemporary social constructionist paradigms around gender in interactions. These are: the conceptual dislocation of sex and gender by sexologists, the introduction of social constructionist sociology, the development of sociological accounts of gender as an active accomplishment, and second wave feminist critiques of patriarchal gender norms.

2.3.1.1. The conceptual dislocation of sex and gender

In much contemporary discourse, the conceptual distinction between gender and sex/physical sex characteristics is presented as an accepted reality. For instance, on their main webpage discussing gender and health, the World Health Organisation state that “[g]ender identity refers to a person’s deeply felt, internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond to the person’s physiology or designated sex at birth” (WHO, n.d.). However, despite its comparative ubiquity, this conceptual framework is relatively new and was not in circulation until the latter half of the twentieth century. Instead, social structures and arrangements that relied upon supposed innate differences between men and women were considered to

stem directly from material sex differences, and to be reflective of inner male and female 'natures'. One of the earliest presentations of sex and gender as distinct concepts was proposed by sexologist John Money, who used the term 'gender role' in a 1955 discussion of 'hermaphroditism' (Byrne, 2023). Money defined a 'gender role' as "all those things that a person says or does to disclose himself or herself as having the status of boy or man, girl or woman, respectively" (Money, 1955, p254). In working with intersex patients, Money theorised that some had a keen sense of their own 'gender role', even when this 'role' seemed to contrast with aspects of their material sex characteristics. In doing so, Money positioned the 'gender role' as a non-physical characteristic and something which could not be determined through knowledge of a person's body. Less than a decade later, Money's contemporaries Robert Stoller and Ralph Greenson introduced the concept of 'gender identity' at a psychoanalytic conference (Byrne, 2023). Similarly to Money, they positioned 'gender identity' as a non-physical characteristic, and something which could be misaligned with a person's physical sex characteristics. As Stoller (1964, p220) wrote: "[g]ender identity is the sense of knowing to which sex one belongs, that is, the awareness 'I am a male' or 'I am a female'". Stoller was a psychiatrist and one of the first to work explicitly with trans people in the US. Through his conception of 'gender identity', Stoller sought to provide an explanation (and sometimes a 'cure') for his patients' trans identities. Both Money and Stoller have received intense criticism in recent years; amongst other things, Money is credited with normalising the use of non-consensual surgical interventions for intersex children (Dreger & Herndon, 2009), while Stoller sought to develop conversion therapy treatments for young boys 'at risk' of transsexualism in later life (Green et al., 1972). Nevertheless, their work contributed to intellectual and conceptual understandings of gender identity as being distinct from material sex, an idea that other theorists would later redevelop and build upon.

2.3.1.2. The introduction of social constructionism

In 1966, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann published 'The Social Construction of Reality', in which they proposed that knowledge and reality are socially constructed phenomena (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). As sociologists, Berger and Luckmann were sensitive to the ways in which 'reality' appeared to differ from society

to society and person to person, believing these intersocietal and interpersonal variations to contend with the traditional positivist understanding of reality as immutable or fixed. Instead, they argued that realities and norms were developed and maintained through people's everyday thoughts and actions, with 'taken for granted' knowledge becoming assumed to represent necessary truths, untouched by society. In this work, they touched upon social constructions of identity, claiming that identity, like knowledge, stands in a dialectical relationship with society. In other words, it is formed by social processes then, "[o]nce crystallised, it is maintained, modified or even reshaped" by those same processes (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p194). Thus, identities are reified and preserved through the same structures that created them, causing them to gain the appearance of naturalness ("reifications bestow an ontological and total status on a typification that is humanly produced" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p108)). While this work did not focus on gender and sex specifically, Berger and Luckmann (1966, p187) did explore the reification of distinct gender roles through socialisation, noting that boys and girls internalise men's and women's "different social worlds" from an early age and come to identify with the role considered appropriate for their gender. In this way, like other forms of reality and identity, gender roles were positioned as socially constructed phenomena that gain the appearance of naturalness through repetition.

2.3.1.3. Development of ethnographic and sociological accounts of gender

In the 1960s, Stoller worked with ethnomethodologist Harold Garfinkel on the case of Agnes. Agnes was a trans woman who presented to Stoller's clinic as intersex in the hope of being given access to gender affirming surgery. It was her assumption that she would be more likely to receive treatment if the clinicians believed her to be intersex rather than trans. Agnes met regularly with Garfinkel up to and after her surgery, and Garfinkel used Agnes's story as a case study for developing theory around gender and 'passing'. Garfinkel (2006, p70) defined passing in Agnes' case as: "[t]he work of achieving and making secure her rights to live as a normal, natural female". For our purposes, Garfinkel's most relevant contribution here is the assertion that passing was an "accomplishment" that Agnes achieved through her "success in acting out the female role" (Garfinkel, 2006, p69). Through exploring the various lengths that Agnes went to in order to pass as a woman who was not

trans/intersex, Garfinkel emphasised that her passing was not a state that she could rely upon, but an activity that she had to maintain at all times: “it would be incorrect to say of Agnes that she has passed. The active mode is needed: she is passing” (Garfinkel, 2006, p82). Through conceptualising passing in this way, Garfinkel did not characterise the ‘female role’ as something innate, but as something that could be learned: “in the manner of a ‘secret apprentice’ [Agnes] would learn, as she told it, ‘to act like a lady’” (Garfinkel, 2006, p72). In developing his analysis of Agnes, Garfinkel drew on the work of Erving Goffman, a sociologist simultaneously working on ideas around gender and identity in society. Like Garfinkel, Goffman’s work has been influential in the development of theory around gender as an active accomplishment in the social world. Goffman (1976) proposed the concept of ‘gender displays’ to refer to behaviours that are considered to be expressive of innate masculinity and femininity. However, rather than accepting this notion of natural expression, Goffman (1976, p75) argued instead that gender displays are “socially learned and socially patterned”, stating that the only thing distinguishing ‘sex-class members’ is the content of their displays. Accordingly, both Garfinkel and Goffman proposed that behaviours relating to gender and sex might originate in the social world, rather than the body. They argued that, if these behaviours could be, or had to be, ‘learned’, then they were necessarily not innate.

2.3.1.4. Second wave feminist critiques of gender essentialism

In 1949, when gender essentialism was still the primary lens through which men and women’s roles were conceptualised, Simone de Beauvoir published ‘The Second Sex’, offering a comprehensive account of the condition of women in contemporary society (Felstiner, 1980). This is a work of significant impact on the study of gender, in which de Beauvoir uses an existential-phenomenological framework to explore the subjugation and positioning of women in a society dominated by men. De Beauvoir’s intellectual approach in ‘The Second Sex’ was influenced by the work of her contemporary and collaborator Jean-Paul Sartre, an existential philosopher known, amongst other things, for the assertion that “existence precedes essence” (Sartre, 1973, p28). This phrase is of central importance to the existentialist movement of the time in its assertion that man (to use Sartre’s framing) has no internal essence nor true self outside of the self that he creates (Crowell, 2020). To Sartre, we are

constantly creating ourselves through action as there is no inherent meaning to who we are or why we are here:

[M]an first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. (Sartre, 1973, p28)

De Beauvoir used the existentialist philosophical framework to challenge traditional essentialist notions of womanhood (Butler, 1990). Rather than representing an innate essence or pre-social fact, de Beauvoir proposed womanhood to be a cultural phenomenon distinct from the material body. This phenomenon was something that female bodied people were forced to navigate and develop their own orientation towards by dint of being born with a female body, but not something that was an essential part of 'who they were'; she wrote that "[t]he female is a woman, insofar as she feels herself as such" (de Beauvoir, 2010, p73). In this work de Beauvoir anticipated later conceptual distinctions between sex and gender by arguing that a person's body (what we might consider to be their material sex characteristics) represented their 'facticity', while womanhood represented the cultural interpretation of that facticity (Butler, 1988). In existential philosophy, 'facticity' refers to those facts or unchangeable details about a person's situation that place limits on their freedoms (Aho, 2023). Accordingly, in a philosophy that emphasises the importance of freedom and the active choosing of the self, facticity refers to those things that we cannot choose or that impede our freedom to choose. Thus, de Beauvoir positioned biological sex as mere material facticity, from which women had the freedom to choose themselves and their own interpretation of gender. Nevertheless, she was clear that women's choices were constrained by factic restrictions within their local sociocultural contexts, i.e. the cultural expectations and prohibitions that restricted women's freedoms (de Beauvoir, 2010). De Beauvoir's approach can be summed up in her assertion that "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (de Beauvoir, 2010, p330). In other words, the action of becoming a woman is understood to be an ongoing project. Through this project, a woman might constitute her gender by recreating the conventions and expectations of womanhood that are designated and sanctioned in the culture in which she lives, but her womanhood does not stem simply from her existence (Butler, 1988).

De Beauvoir's work was significantly impactful for later feminists, particularly those characterised as belonging to the 'second wave'. Second wave feminism is generally located around the 1960s and 70s, considered to have been born out of a sense that feminism had 'died' after suffrage movements earlier in the century (Thornham, 2001). Like 'The Second Sex', second wave feminist Betty Friedan's (1963) 'The Feminine Mystique' challenged the notion that there is any kind of internal essence to womanhood, instead stressing that ideas around femininity are enforced upon women by structural forces within their sociohistorical context. She proposed that the 'feminine mystique' itself is an imagined feminine nature in women which can "find fulfilment only in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love" (Friedan, 2001, p70). Like de Beauvoir, Friedan was one of the early prominent writers to critique the notion that women should have any particular nature or essence based solely on their biology, noting that previous theorists of femininity had assumed that "[a]natomy is woman's destiny", and that "the identity of woman is determined by her biology" (Friedan, 2001, p103). Friedan's work was radically anti-essentialist and sought to disrupt the notion that socially determined femininity was a necessary aspect of women's natures, instead favouring a structural explanation for why women felt obliged to do womanhood in certain ways. Similarly, in 'The Dialectic of Sex', another second wave text in fact dedicated to de Beauvoir, Shulamith Firestone (1970) characterised the traditional gender role system as being an oppressive class system. To Firestone, this system was developed primarily as a result of women's ability to bear children. Firestone argued for a radical revolution of this system, advocating instead for a world in which the sex distinction between men and women held no cultural meaning. Like Friedan, anti-essentialism was central to Firestone's theory, and Firestone similarly challenged the view that the femininity expected of women is inherent, or essential, to their nature.

2.3.2. Consolidating gender as an interactional achievement

The notion of gender as a socially constructed phenomenon located in social interactions was consolidated by theorists Candace West and Don Zimmerman, who drew on each of the above intellectual strands in their influential 1987 work 'Doing Gender'. With this work, they presented gender as "a routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment" which is *done* through the implementation of activities

that are (mistakenly) understood to be “expressions of masculine and feminine ‘natures’” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p126). West & Zimmerman drew from second wave feminist ideas in their account of the structures that divide society on the basis of gender. They positioned gendered difference as an institutional phenomenon, in which ideas around men’s dominance and women’s deference led to structural arrangements, such as the division of labour. For West & Zimmerman, interactions served as the everyday human domain through which institutional arrangements could be validated and displayed. They offered examples of ways that gender differences were reified in individual interactions, for instance through a man ‘doing’ masculinity by offering to guide a woman across the street, and a woman ‘doing’ femininity by consenting to be guided and not initiating such behaviour with a man. Thus, while they positioned gender differences as a fundamentally top-down phenomenon, they indicated how these institutional differences could be maintained through interactions between men and women. According to this theory, the everyday maintenance of gender leads to the appearance of naturalness in gender differences, and they cited feminist Marilyn Frye’s assertion that:

For efficient subordination, what’s wanted is that the structure not appear to be a cultural artifact kept in place by human decision or custom, but that it appear natural – that it appear to be quite a direct consequence of facts... (Frye, 1983, p34)

Frye’s framing here is reminiscent of Berger & Luckmann’s assertion that reification and ongoing maintenance through social action can bestow the appearance of ontology onto a social product. Likewise, West & Zimmerman (1987, p146) emphasised that inequalities between men and women were not “normal and natural” but kept in place by human activity.

In ‘Doing Gender’, West & Zimmerman made explicit reference to Money’s distinction between sex and gender in proposing how gender could be conceptualised as separate from the body’s material sex characteristics. Using concepts made legible by Money, they proposed gender to be “the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one’s sex category” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p127). To their mind, the sociocultural ideas associated with supposed female and male natures were so naturalised, that performing activities considered appropriate for

those natures had become a necessary condition of being considered a competent member of the sex category. In everyday life, they considered categorisation in a sex category to be based more on engaging in “socially required identificatory displays” than on having the “socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males” (p127). In this way, the active project of doing gender (like Money’s ‘gender roles’) could, in some cases, be more important than a body’s material sex characteristics in determining whether a person was viewed as male or female: “it is possible to claim membership in a sex category even when the sex criteria are lacking” (p127).

West & Zimmerman elucidated their conclusion through the example of Agnes from Garfinkel’s 1967 ethnomethodological work. Like Garfinkel, they agreed that Agnes’s case shed light on the active ‘doing’ that made up everyday gender performances: “Agnes’s case makes visible what culture has made invisible – the accomplishment of gender” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p131). While Garfinkel characterised Agnes’s achievement to be her ability to ‘pass’, West & Zimmerman conceptualised it in terms of ‘doing’ gender. They stressed that Agnes was not producing an artificial simulacrum of an essential nature inherent to other women, but rather that she had been forced to learn the activity of womanhood in adulthood, as other women did in childhood. The fact of other women’s learning to ‘do’ womanhood so early in their lives gave it the appearance of naturalness:

[Agnes] was not ‘faking’ what ‘real’ women do naturally. She was obliged to analyse and figure out how to act within socially structured circumstances and conceptions of femininity that women born with biological credentials take for granted early on. (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p131)

As a person whose gender did not map onto their material sex characteristics in a normative way, for West & Zimmerman, Agnes was the example par excellence of the idea that gender is both actively accomplished in social interactions and separate from material sex characteristics.

2.3.3. Q2. What does it mean for gender identity to be negotiated in interactions? Summary.

The negotiation and construction of gender identity in interactions involves an understanding of gender as a sociohistorically mediated phenomenon that is emergent in interactions rather than located within individuals' psyches. With this formulation, gender identity is understood to be actively produced through the practice of gender signifiers invoking existing discourses of gender. The idea of gender as something that is 'done' in interactions was consolidated in West & Zimmerman's (1987, p126) 'Doing Gender', in which they proposed gender to be a "routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment" that is mistakenly interpreted as an expression of innate masculine and feminine natures. West and Zimmerman drew on second wave feminist critiques of gendered social structures, the sexological dislocation of sex and gender, and ethnomethodological theory around gender as an active achievement in accounting for their theory of doing gender in interactions. The notion of gender as a phenomenon negotiated in interactions is now commonplace in fields such as sociocultural linguistics and linguistic anthropology, however, as I will go on to explore in Question 5: 'How have trans scholars approached and critiqued questions of gender identity construction in the past?', there remains limited exploration of (trans) individuals' lived experiences of these constructions. Accordingly, this study seeks to complement analyses of interactional gender negotiation by offering a novel approach to understanding experiences of gender negotiation in interactions.

2.4. Q3. How have sociocultural linguists developed the study of gender identity negotiation in interactions?

West & Zimmerman's work has been hugely significant for the study of gender in interactions. Indeed, Abelson (2014, p550) identified it as "the most widely used gender theory in US sociology". Their work in 'Doing Gender' provided an early framework for different kinds of linguists to explore how gender identities can be produced and maintained through social interactions, and they have been cited in important works studying gender construction in linguistics (e.g. Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Ochs, 1992, etc). However, prior to the publication of 'Doing Gender', linguists were already exploring the use of language as it related to gender, looking in particular at the perceived differences between men's and women's speech.

2.4.1. 'Sex differences' in early variationist sociolinguistics

Early studies of gender in linguistics have been characterised as belonging to the first wave of variationist sociolinguistics (Eckert, 2012). This wave of study focused on quantitative research into the speech patterns of those associated with different demographic identity categories (e.g. race, class or gender), investigating the differences *between* them and the norms *within* them (Meyerhoff, 2011). Variationist studies of gender focused on 'sex differences', aiming to understand supposed quantifiable differences between the ways in which men and women used linguistic variables (Bucholtz, 2002). Such studies included Labov's (1966) analysis of the social stratification of English in New York, Macaulay's (1977) investigation of language, social class and education in Glasgow, and Trudgill's (1983) research into speech communities in Norwich. References to men's and women's differences in these early works often involved analysis of their relative use of standard linguistic forms, with claims made around men's and women's language use as being "more or less conservative" than each other (Eckert, 1989, p246).

These approaches to gender in linguistics reflect a form of linguistic gender essentialism in which, like the gender essentialism discussed above, gender identities are considered to be stable, binary and pre-given (McEntee-Atalianis, 2018).

Essentialist approaches to linguistics assume that the speech styles of men and women, like other physical and behavioural differences, can be clearly delimited and differentiated, and that speech styles within gender categories are more or less alike (Bucholtz, 2003). Thus, the emphasis is not on a critical analysis of gender, but on investigation of the supposed 'effects' of binary gender, a social dichotomy whose logical basis is considered to be self-evident. In approaches that are rooted in linguistic essentialism, gender identities themselves are considered to be the source of differences in speech styles between men and women (McEntee-Atalianis, 2018), with the explanations for these differences centring around cultural phenomena (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). These cultural phenomena can include uneven pressures put on men and women to speak in certain ways (Trudgill, 1983), or ideas around supposed cultural essences of femininity and masculinity (Bucholtz, 2004).

2.4.2. Feminist studies of language

The study of gender in language was advanced by feminist linguists working from the 1970s onwards. Explicitly feminist approaches investigated language from the lens of women's liberation, asking questions around patriarchal oppression and how different uses of language contributed to and detracted from the feminist project. Later writers (e.g. Litosseliti, 2006) have proposed that the works of feminist linguists in the twentieth century can be understood as contributing to three complementary paradigms, those of deficit, dominance and difference.

The deficit approach to studying gendered difference in language was one in which men's language was treated as the norm, and women's language was considered to be a weaker version of that norm. In such approaches, women's language use was often portrayed as lacking the aptitude, creativity or confidence of men's (Cameron, 2009; Litosseliti, 2006). The deficit approach to women's language was taken up by Robin Lakoff (1973) in 'Language and Woman's Place', considered to be one of the first prominent studies of gender and language from a feminist perspective. Lakoff (1973) took the view that women's language (or at least, the linguistic style associated with socially normative forms of femininity) was 'weaker' than that of men's, more preoccupied with trivial pursuits, and less confident.

This deficit approach was closely related to the dominance approach, which positioned gendered difference in language as an effect of patriarchal oppression. Examples of the dominance approach included Zimmerman and West's (1975) investigation of speech interruption by gender, in which they found men to interrupt in conversation more than women and theorised that men take a more dominant approach to interacting than women do. Similarly, Spender (1980) argued that the language system is 'man-made', positioning women as a muted group in a world defined by men. These theories presented language as a means by which women were silenced and by which men could consolidate a dominant societal position. Dominance approaches have been criticised for their treatment of 'men' and 'women' as uniform social categories, insensitive to how experiences may differ through the interaction of other intersecting social identities, such as race or class (Coates, 2013). Furthermore, along with the deficit paradigm, dominance approaches have been criticised for taking an insufficiently nuanced view of how linguistic features can function differently dependent on context and mode of use (Litosseliti, 2006).

Finally, feminist studies of gender and language have also taken a difference-based approach, in which men and women were understood to have different communication styles due to being raised in fundamentally different ways (Litosseliti, 2006). A prominent example of this approach included Deborah Tannen's (1990) 'You Just Don't Understand', in which she proposed that men and women spoke different 'genderlects' as a result of their childhood socialisation. The argument in difference approaches tended to centre around the idea that boys were encouraged to be assertive and strong, while girls were encouraged to be quiet and polite, leading to profoundly different ways of relating to one another (Sheldon, 1997). As with the deficit and dominance approaches, the difference approach has been criticised for reifying and emphasising the idea that men and women are fundamentally different from one another in the way that they use language, an idea for which there is limited evidentiary basis.

Taken together, these approaches to feminist sociolinguistics have been hugely generative for studies of gender in language. They were instrumental in pioneering theory that was sensitive to the gendered social contexts in which speakers operate, and in understanding how language can contribute to maintaining the social order in

a patriarchal system. Nevertheless, they tended to present a binary view of gender and language, with limited scope for explaining the similarities in language use between women and men and the differences in speech within gender identity groups. As Litosseliti (2006, p41) explained:

The insufficient contextualisation of gender and the failure to view gender as part of a complex system of intersecting social variables are the key reasons why these models are not currently influential within feminist linguistics.

2.4.3. Doing identity through linguistic practice

Variationist and early feminist approaches to studying gender and language tended to characterise perceived differences between men and women's language use as a *consequence* of gender, rather than a *constructor* of it. In this way, men's and women's identities were treated as stable, and their language use was proposed to reflect these stable identities. This conceptualisation runs contrary to social constructionist approaches to gender in which, as explored above, behaviour in social interactions is positioned as one of the key methods through which gender is constituted, rather than a method through which it is revealed. Early feminist studies of gender and language did attend to social context in their examination of women's and men's language in a patriarchal system, however they did not provide a framework for understanding language as instrumental in the reification and maintenance of that same patriarchal system. The dominance approach came close, in its conceptualisation of language as an oppressive tool used in the subjugation of women, however this approach positioned women as passive subjects to whom language was 'done', rather than exploring the agency of all language users in constructing reality and identity as they speak.

Over the past 35 years, sociocultural linguists have moved away from these approaches, increasingly focusing on the role of language in constructing different social identities, including gender. Sensitive to the limitations of studies that have positioned entire gender groups as homogeneous speech communities, more recent constructionist studies have explored how language can be used to construct and maintain local identities within smaller groups of speakers. In contrast to the

homogeneous speech community model, later theorists have focused instead on communities of practice, an approach that “considers language as one of many social practices in which participants engage” (Bucholtz, 1999, p210). These have included studies such as Penelope Eckert’s (1989a) linguistic ethnography of ‘jocks’ and ‘burnouts’ in a high school in Detroit, Scott Kiesling’s (2009) study of fraternity men’s use of variables to index identity stances, and Mary Bucholtz’s (1999) analysis of the linguistic practices associated with ‘nerd girls’ at a US high school. In these works, the use of language is presented as one of the many ways in which these communities maintain and construct salient parts of their identities. For instance, Bucholtz explored how nerd girls would use specific linguistic variables in such a way as to emphasise their distinct identity from other peer groups within their school. This included the avoidance of colloquialisms and slang, as well as the use of formal language in order to distinguish themselves from the more casual style of their ‘cool’ girl peers (Bucholtz, 1999).

Practice-based approaches to identity and language draw from ethnography as well as traditional sociolinguistics (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992) and, like the aforementioned works of Garfinkel, Goffman and West & Zimmerman, position identity as a social phenomenon that emerges through practice. In this way, language use is understood as one possible practice of identity work, along with other non-linguistic aspects of social activity such as dress, behaviours, work, and others. The studies of Eckert, Kiesling and Bucholtz mentioned above can be understood to be examples of linguistic anthropology due to their ethnographic methodologies and “understanding of the crucial role played by language (and other semiotic resources) in the constitution of society and its cultural representations” (Duranti, 2009, p5).

2.4.4. Gendered linguistic styles

With the move away from studies of ‘sex difference’ in approaches to gender and language, it became less common for linguists to claim any one way of speaking was typical of any particular gender identity group. Nevertheless, it remains the case that certain clusters of linguistic features and behaviours can come to be associated with a particular gender, or other identity group (Eckert, 2012), for instance the formal

language used by nerd girls as referenced above in Bucholtz (1999). Heiko Motschenbacher (2007, p256) has proposed that, while ‘genderlects’, or gendered styles, can no longer be considered to be “stable, clear-cut and opposite gendered varieties”, they nevertheless remain significant in the construction of gender. Motschenbacher (2007) contended that, for as long as styles are *considered* to be expressive of gender identities, they can be deployed strategically in the doing of male or female identities. Thus, while the avoidance of colloquialism was not innate to Bucholtz’s nerd girls (they were not born with a natural predisposition to avoid colloquialism), it nonetheless became a salient means by which they could strategically *do* a particular kind of femininity or girlhood, due to the social meaning of colloquialism in their local context. In other words, through the use of gendered linguistic styles, people can construct their genders in socially intelligible ways, while gender identities themselves are in turn constituted and reified by the repetition of these normative styles. Thus, through Bucholtz’s nerd girls’ repeated avoidance of colloquialism, they both construct a nerd girl identity for themselves, while simultaneously reinforcing the perception that not using colloquialisms is a salient marker of nerd girl-ism. Podesva and colleagues (2001, p179) commented that “[s]tyle simultaneously gives linguistic substance to a given identity and allows that identity to be socially meaningful.” In short, through using a linguistic style in the performance of a particular identity, a person simultaneously indexes that identity and further reifies the supposed link between the style and identity in question.

2.4.4.1. Conceptualising the links between language and social meanings

In order to position the use of language as a practice in the negotiation of gender identities, it is necessary to account for how different linguistic features and styles can come to be associated with gender identities in the first place. In other words, for the avoidance of colloquialism to be part of the construction of a nerd girl identity, there must be a reason for why the avoidance of colloquialism came to be considered relevant to this identity initially. To explain this process, Mary Bucholtz & Kira Hall (2022) proposed the ‘indexicality principle’, asserting that linguistic forms can be understood to ‘index’ social meanings (such as a gender identity) through the creation of semiotic links between the form and the social meaning. In this way, the linguistic form functions as a sign of the social meaning.

One of the first to comment on the links between signs and social meaning was Charles Sanders Peirce, a philosopher of logic who developed the theory of semiosis to account for links between signs and the objects that they signify (Atkin, 2013). Peirce defined a sign as “something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity”, saying that a sign could “create[...] in the mind of that person an equivalent sign” (Peirce, 1931, 2.228). In developing this theory, Peirce described the mental connections that are formed between real world objects and signs that do not share a direct referential link. For instance, from seeing a plume of smoke, one might surmise the presence of a fire despite not having seen the fire itself. In this example, the smoke is the sign, and it is signifying, or *indexing*, the fire (Atkin, 2005). One of the key properties of indexing is that the sign in question does not resemble its object (Atkin, 2005). In other words, a picture of a fire could not be considered an index as it directly resembles the object itself. Additionally, given that the plume of smoke could instead have emerged from a very large kettle or nearby steam train, its presence does not necessarily mean that there is a fire. Instead, the association between the index and object is social and perceptual and exists only insofar as its users perceive it to exist.

Peirce’s ideas around semiosis were extended by Ferdinand de Saussure, who proposed the theory of semiology to explain meaning in language (Culler, 1976). De Saussure described language as a system of concepts to which humans have applied an arbitrary system of signs (i.e. words) (McEntee-Atalianis, 2018). Like Peirce’s assertion that indexes do not resemble that which they signify, de Saussure drew attention to the lack of necessary relationships between words (signifiers) and the mental concepts that they represent (signifieds) (Culler, 1976). In linguistics, this arbitrary relationship is understood as a lack of *iconicity* (de Saussure, 2013). Unlike highly *iconic* signs, such as onomatopoeias, in which some aspect of the sound signal can be associated with the meaning of the concept, most words are not iconic at all. A lack of iconicity denotes the fact that no element of a word’s sound pattern or orthography is related to the associated mental concept (Thompson & Do, 2019). In other words, while the sound of the word ‘bang’ is iconically linked with the mental concept of a bang, there is nothing in the sound pattern or spelling of ‘fire’ that necessarily denotes its referent. Thus, neither Peirce’s plume of smoke nor de

Saussure's writing of 'fire' resemble their referent (a fire), but both invoke the idea of a fire in the mind of the perceiver. In this way, almost all language represents an arbitrary mental association between a sign (a word or phrase) and its related mental concept. At some point, the meaning of the sign has come to be associated with its referent, despite there existing no necessary link between the two. Understanding language in this way provides a framework for understanding how other signs, such as the use of a linguistic feature or style, can semiotically index a social meaning, such as gender, without there being any necessary pre-existing link between the style and the meaning.

2.4.4.2. Indexing gender through ideological association

Exploring the way in which linguistic features can come to index genders, Elinor Ochs (1992) noted that there are very few linguistic features in English that directly index a specific gender identity. In other words, short of explicitly identifying themselves as a man or woman, there is little that a person could say in English that would necessarily categorise that person as a man or woman. Those features that do refer explicitly to a gender are not in fact indexes, given that they hold a conventional semantic link with the gender in question, for instance 'boy', 'Mrs', 'uncle', etc. Instead, Ochs argued that gender-related linguistic features index a 'stance' that in turn indexes a gender identity. Stances are *ways of being* that communicate a certain kind of personhood, for instance you could present a stance of deference, kindness or aggression. Ochs (1992) argued that stances can be said to constitute a group identity when the stance is ideologically associated with the perceived characteristics of the identity group. Thus, the construction of a gender identity can rely, in part, on a speaker's use of linguistic features that index stances perceived to be constitutive of that identity. By way of example, Ochs (1992) described how linguistic intensifiers that emphasise the force of an utterance are typically associated with a male style in Japanese. Ochs argued that the intensifiers themselves do not index manhood, but rather the related stance of dominance and power. Through the ideological association between manhood and power in Japanese culture, the intensifiers come to implicitly index masculinity despite their lack of explicit reference to manhood. Through this framework of ideological indexing, the links between indexes and their gendered meanings are not

understood to be necessary or pre-existing, but to have arisen in response to a system of gender norms and ideologies. In other words, the use of an intensifier could be understood to be part of a masculine 'style' (or genderlect), despite there existing no necessary relationship between intensification and masculinity outside of pre-existing ideological norms. The same principle can be understood through the example of nerd girls' avoidance of colloquialisms. While avoiding a colloquialism has no necessary relationship with being a nerd girl (any number of people might speak in this way for any number of reasons), in this specific example, the linguistic feature could be understood to index a sense (or stance) of propriety, intelligence or formality. These stances are ideologically associated with the identity category 'nerd girl', meaning that this specific linguistic feature can come to be associated with the identity in question, despite a lack of direct or explicit reference.

2.4.5. Indexing gender using multimodal semiotics

Looking beyond linguistic features specifically, others have explored how diverse non-linguistic signs can also be harnessed to index gender identities. In his explanation of social semiotics, Theo van Leeuwen (2005) asserted that multiple modes of communication, from language and gestures to food, dress and everyday objects, can carry significant cultural value and significance. For van Leeuwen, a speaker can draw upon multiple semiotic modes simultaneously in their identity construction, without prioritising one over the other. Following from de Saussure's focus on the arbitrariness of association between signifier and signified, analyses in social semiotics examine the meaning of linguistic signifiers and other semiotic resources from the perspective of their 'semiotic potential'. Van Leeuwen (2005) defined a signifier's 'theoretical' semiotic potential as being constituted by all the past uses of that signifier and all of its potential future uses. In contrast, the signifier's 'actual' semiotic potential consists of all the past uses that the interlocutors know about, and which are considered relevant to the interaction at hand. Accordingly, a social semiotic approach considers semiotic associations to be dynamic and contingent on both context and interlocutors' own mental concepts of those signifiers. Thus, a signifier is not considered to have a meaning that is fixed in time or place, but rather to accumulate semiotic potential based on previous and possible uses.

A social semiotic framework is appropriate for studying the ‘doing’ of gender in interactions due to its sensitivity to multimodality in communicating social meaning – that is to say, it enables the analyst to look beyond the strictly linguistic to non-linguistic signifiers as well. Anna Corwin (2017) demonstrates the efficacy of a multimodal approach to understanding gender in interactions in her analysis of the semiotic agency and performance of gender among genderqueer individuals. In this study, she explored the gender work of Julia, a genderqueer individual who made use of multiple semiotic modes in the performance of their gender. Corwin reported on Julia’s linguistic strategies, in their use of the pronoun ‘we’ to refer to both groups of women and men, the way zhe presented their gender in their choice of clothing, and their behavioural signifiers, such as which bathroom zhe chose to use. Corwin discussed how Julia moved smoothly between different gender presentations by engaging in shifting semiotic displays and negotiating social situations differently depending on how zhe wished to present at any given time. The social semiotic approach is additive to the study of gender work given the non-essentialising power of semiotic potential. By understanding signifiers and their social meaning through a framework of how they are used, without attributing inherent meaning to them, the analyst is able to move away from an approach that would consider any signifiers to be necessarily feminine or masculine. Corwin’s (2017) work illustrates how a social semiotic approach is particularly useful for understanding the identity work of trans individuals, such as Julia, in interactions. Through positioning all semiotic modes as being of equal importance, a social semiotic approach enables investigation of the complex of semiotic resources that may be harnessed as part of a trans person’s gender performance in interactions.

2.4.6. Q3. How have sociocultural linguists developed the study of gender identity negotiation in interactions? Summary.

Drawing on social constructionist ideas of gender as a phenomenon that is actively negotiated in interactions, studies of gender identity in sociocultural linguistics tend to be predicated on the assumption that the use of language is a semiotic practice that is harnessed in the production of gender identities. This approach has evolved from earlier variationist sociolinguistic studies of gender, in which women and men’s linguistic practices were understood to be a result, rather than constructive, of their

gender identities. While early feminist linguists advanced the field through their attendance to the sociohistorical context in which men and women's speech existed, these approaches have been criticised for their conceptualisations of men and women as linguistically distinct and internally homogeneous speech communities, with insufficient consideration of the role of language in constructing and reifying sociohistorical gender norms. Later studies in linguistic anthropology have explored how language is used in the construction of (gender) identities, as well as providing an account of how linguistic and non-linguistic signifiers and styles can become indexical of gender identities and related stances through locally contingent gender ideologies. This multimodal approach to semiotic gender construction is central to the way in which transmasculine participants' descriptions of their own gendered behaviours in interactions will be understood throughout this study, with both linguistic and non-linguistic signifiers being understood to be important in the signification of gender identities in interactions.

2.5. Q4. What have previous studies of transmasculine people in interactions explored?

Despite the wider turn towards social constructionism in linguistic studies of gender identity, the rise of constructionist approaches to trans linguistics has been slower. Instead, the majority of early work that touched upon trans people's language and speech focused on the supposed differences between the speech of men and women, and how the characteristics of a putative gendered speech style could be recreated by a person transitioning into that gender identity. Many of these studies sought to identify surgical (e.g. Gross, 1999) or behavioural (e.g. Gelfer & Van Dong, 2013) interventions that could be implemented to help trans people to access the vocal sounds associated with the gender identity that is congruent for them. These studies often carry implicit or explicit assumptions that men and women's speech is different in predictable and reliable ways (a claim critiqued in section 2.4.2 above) and that all trans people are committed to changing their speech as part of their gender transition: "[a]n important part of the [transition] process, especially for the male-to-female transsexual, is attaining an acceptable feminine voice" (Gelfer, 1999).

More recently, Lal Zimman (e.g. 2021) has critiqued this traditional approach to trans linguistics, arguing instead of the need for "distinctively trans approaches to the study of language" (Zimman, 2021, p423). He has described trans linguistics as a linguistics that:

[C]entres social and linguistic transformation, the dialogic nature of identity construction and affirmation, and the discovery of what is possible over the documentation of trends and norms. (Zimman, 2021, p424-425)

With this, Zimman calls for a discipline that does more than describe people's language use, but which prioritises work that "impact[s] trans people's wellbeing, safety and vitality" (Zimman, 2021, p425) and which "reconsider[s] fundamental issues through a trans lens" (p427). This section will discuss early approaches to studying trans speech before moving onto more recent constructionist research in trans linguistics from Zimman and others.

2.5.1. Early work in trans linguistics

Research in trans linguistics began as a primarily medical pursuit. As trans identities became increasingly accepted and visible in the second half of the twentieth century, and as gender affirming medical care became more accessible, linguists and clinicians sought to understand how the transformation of the voice could be achieved as part of a medical gender transition.

2.5.1.1. The significance of vocal pitch

The pitch of a speaker's voice is understood to be the primary acoustic marker that listeners use to determine a speaker's gender (King et al., 2012), and research has shown that the average vocal pitches of cis men and women tend to differ significantly (Simpson, 2009). Indeed, the pitch of cis men's voices has been described as being half as high as that of women and prepubescent children of any gender (Titze, 2000). Consequently, altering a trans person's vocal pitch is considered by some to be an important aspect of a gender transition. The acoustic measure behind the pitch of a voice is fundamental frequency (F0). Fundamental frequency values reflect the speed at which the vocal folds vibrate. Thinner vocal folds are able to vibrate more quickly, typically leading to a higher vocal pitch, while thicker vocal folds vibrate more slowly, resulting in lower average pitch. Pitch differences are associated with gender differences due to testosterone's impact on the vocal folds during puberty. Those who have been through a testosterone-based puberty will likely have thicker vocal folds and lower vocal pitch (Evans et al., 2008).

For those trans people who wish to pass as a man or a woman, achieving a pitch range typical of that gender could form an important part of the process (Hodges-Simeon et al., 2021). Evidence has shown that trans people are more likely to be gendered correctly if their average vocal pitch falls within the typical range for their gender (e.g. Dahl & Mahler, 2020; Hardy et al., 2020; Holmberg et al., 2010). In some cases, speaking at a vocal pitch that is not perceived to align with a person's gender can lead to them being misgendered even when other signifiers are available that index that person's gender identity (Pasricha et al., 2008). As a result, trans people's voices can impact the satisfaction that they feel with their communication and even their wider wellbeing (e.g. Dacakis et al., 2017; Nygren et al., 2016). A 2018 study found that female-to-male transgender individuals with voices that sounded more

masculine reported greater wellbeing than those with voices that sounded more feminine (Watt et al., 2018), while conversely another found that trans women with voice difficulties had more symptoms of anxiety and depression than those without (Novais Valente Junior & Mesquita de Medeiros, 2020).

2.5.1.2. Testosterone's impact on transmasculine voice

Historically, the majority of literature on trans voices has focused on transfeminine voices at a ratio of around 3:1 (Azul, 2015). This imbalance is likely due in part to the different medical interventions available to each of these communities as part of a gender transition. For transmasculine people who wish to transition medically, it is common to receive testosterone therapy in which exogenous testosterone is used to masculinise the body. As noted above, one of the effects of testosterone on the body is to thicken the vocal folds, which can lead to lower vocal pitch in transmasculine individuals (Cler et al., 2020). While the use of oestrogen treatment is also prevalent amongst transfeminine individuals, it does not have an impact on the thickness of the vocal folds, meaning that there is no equivalent hormonal treatment to raise vocal pitch (Davies et al., 2015). Accordingly, helping transfeminine people to raise their vocal pitch can require interventions that may be slower and more invasive than those for transmasculine people, consequently requiring more research and study. Nevertheless, this has led to a significant imbalance in the ratio of linguistic literature exploring transfeminine as opposed to transmasculine voice in interactions.

Much of the literature exploring transmasculine people's voices has focused on the impact of exogenous testosterone on pitch. Research has shown that long-term testosterone treatment can significantly lower a person's vocal pitch, often resulting in a mean fundamental frequency that is indistinguishable from that of cis men. There are varying reports on how long this takes to happen, although most propose that a significant change in pitch can be expected within the first 12 months of testosterone treatment (Damrose, 2009; Deuster et al., 2016; Irwig et al., 2017). Research such as this has tended to paint a homogeneous picture of transmasculine people's vocal transitions, with the assumption being that further voice interventions are generally unnecessary when the transmasculine person is able to access testosterone to masculinise their body and voice (Azul, 2015).

However, contrary to previous understandings, it is not the case that testosterone treatment can always be relied upon to fully ‘masculinise’ the voice (Ziegler et al., 2018). Some transmasculine people may never reach their desired pitch range, even on long term testosterone treatment (Cosyns et al., 2014). Additionally, some trans people may reach the pitch range typical of their gender but continue to be gendered incorrectly based on other features of their voice or speech (Azul, 2015). Indeed, Van Borsel and colleagues (2009) found no significant correlation between vocal pitch and listener ratings of ‘maleness’ in audio recordings of female-to-male transsexual participants. These findings complicate straightforward approaches to the gendering of voices, suggesting that there is more to vocal gender attribution than a simple measure of pitch.

2.5.2. Critiquing the deterministic approach to gendered voice

Despite the apparent differences between the average pitch ranges of men and women, research that holds physiological differences between men’s and women’s vocal apparatuses to be solely responsible for those differences has been criticized for taking an overly deterministic approach. Lal Zimman (2018) has challenged the prioritisation of physiology as the sole determinant in gendered vocal difference, arguing instead for an understanding of how vocal acoustics are impacted by sociocultural factors. He has argued that physical sex characteristics are often proposed as the key explanation for differences between women’s and men’s voices, when similar results could also be interpreted through the lens of social constructionism. In support of a constructionist approach, Zimman (2018, p5) proposed four key arguments (or lessons):

1. The lesson of linguistic diversity: different languages and cultures index gender phonetically in different ways;
2. The lesson of socialization: some gender differences in the voices are acquired in childhood, prior to pubescent vocal changes;
3. The lesson of intersectionality: members of the same culture and speakers of the same language may index gender differently based on other identities they embody;

4. The lesson of agency: speakers have the ability to consciously manipulate the gendered characteristics of their voices.

With these arguments, Zimman proposed a move away from determinist perspectives of gendered voice and towards an understanding that holds space for the impact of society, other identities, and speaker agency on how trans people create voice.

Zimman (2015) modelled a constructionist approach to trans voice analysis in his multi-year ethnography tracking the acoustic characteristics of 15 transmasculine speakers' voices in the San Francisco Bay Area. In this work, Zimman analysed the acoustic frequency with which participants pronounced the /s/ phoneme, a sound that has been found to vary significantly by gender (Fuchs & Toda, 2010), as well as impacting attribution of speakers' sexuality (Campbell-Kibler, 2011). Zimman found a wide range of mean frequencies across the group, indicating a lack of homogeneity in transmasculine people's speech signals. Most notably, Zimman was able to separate his participants into three approximate groups by the frequency of their /s/ production. He found that the lowest frequency /s/ was produced by those speakers who identified as men and had the most conventionally masculine gender presentation. For these speakers, the /s/ production could be interpreted as a feature in their construction of normative masculinity. The next group of speakers produced an androgynous /s/, which overlapped with both men's and women's typical /s/ production. All of the speakers in this group identified as queer men and, while masculinity was central to these speakers' identities, they tended not to present in normatively masculine ways. For these speakers in turn, the /s/ production could be interpreted as part of the construction of their non-normative gender presentation or indeed of their queer identity. The third group of speakers had the highest frequency /s/, some even higher than the standard women's range. None of these transmasculine speakers identified as men, instead aligning with labels such as 'boy' and 'genderqueer'. Zimman (2015, p214) pointed out that, in addition to their high frequency /s/ production, all these speakers "distance[d] themselves from hegemonic masculinity, linguistically and otherwise", suggesting that high frequency /s/ was just one factor of their semiotic construction of non-normative masculinity. Finally, the participant with the second highest mean frequency /s/ identified as a man but reported having a 'fem' gender presentation. While identifying as a man meant that

his identity did not fit with the other high /s/ speakers in the third group, he nonetheless had a gender presentation that was not based in hegemonic masculinity, with his voice being “among the most salient means by which [he] constitute[d] his flamboyantly non-normative take on masculinity” (Zimman, 2015, p214). For this speaker, his particular /s/ production could be interpreted to be constitutive of his gender presentation (fem) rather than his gender identity (man), indicating the complex and unpredictable work that a linguistic signifier might be doing in constituting how any individual person does gender in interactions. From this study, Zimman surmised that it was not just gender identity, but gender expression and sexuality that could also inform, and be constructed by, a speaker’s vocal characteristics. Additionally, it was clear from the variation within Zimman’s sample that a simple shared identity (i.e. being transmasculine) did not necessitate a shared linguistic or spoken style.

2.5.3. Self-aware constructions of trans identities in interactions

In this study, Zimman (2015) touched upon the idea that transmasculine people may engage in self-aware masculinisation of their speech (‘the lesson of agency’), such as through consciously choosing to lower their pitch as part of their gender performance. While this point is not the focus of Zimman’s analysis, his comment that trans people are “acutely tuned into the ways their bodies and voices are changing” raises the possibility that this conscious awareness of body and voice is something that could be investigated (Zimman, 2015, p208).

Transmasculine people’s experiences of self-aware linguistic gender construction remains an under-researched area, however there are a small number of studies that have touched upon trans people’s conscious experience of using speech to mould their gender constructions in interactions. In her Master’s thesis, Anna Jørgensen (2016) undertook interviews with trans participants in Denmark, exploring the vocal strategies they employed in constituting their gender identities. Reflecting Zimman’s claim around trans people’s awareness of their voices and bodies, Jørgensen’s participants displayed high levels of self-awareness and reflectiveness about their linguistic gender constructions in interactions. For instance, one trans man described how he had put more conscious effort into performing his masculinity linguistically

during the early days of his transition, saying that he used to avoid asking questions due to a sense that it was more masculine to speak his mind decisively (reminiscent of the findings around early-transition compensatory masculinity discussed in section 2.2.2). Another trans man reported being hyper-aware of how other men used their voices, saying that he perceived men to speak in a more monotone fashion so tried to emulate this himself. Additionally, he described feeling more comfortable to speak in his local Jutland accent that he had been prior to his transition, when he had used a standard Copenhagen accent instead. Conversely, a trans woman that Jørgensen spoke to reported actively suppressing her Jutland accent in preference for standard Danish. For her, a standard accent, along with avoiding swearing, was a way of signifying her femininity in interactions. These findings indicate a high level of linguistic self-reflection on the part of these participants, as well as speaking to the importance of gendered linguistic styles in the construction of gender identity in interactions.

Through Jørgensen's participants' examples, it is possible to make some assumptions about the perceived differences between men's and women's speech in their local context. It seems that, for them, masculinity/manhood is indexed by being forthright and speaking monotonously and with a regional accent, while femininity/womanhood is indexed by a more standard accent and avoiding swearing. As previously discussed, it is doubtful that such linguistic variables are necessary features of the speech of any gender community; not all men speak with a regional accent and not all women avoid swearing. Nevertheless, these examples indicate how gender styles may *feel* meaningful for trans people in the performance of a gender identity, both to the speaker and, likely, to the listener as well. Thus, while a gendered style is not essential to any gender identity, it can be used in the construction of that gender identity and, through doing so, contribute to the reification and maintenance of the link between the style and its associated identity.

Beyond Jørgensen (2016) there are few studies that have touched upon trans people's first person perspectives of their own gender work in interactions. Those that do exist indicate that trans people can be strategic about the gender signifiers in their speech in accordance with their interactional context. In their wider study on communication satisfaction amongst male-to-female transsexuals, Pasricha and

colleagues (2008, p29) described how participants reported feeling more or less concerned about their “female communication patterns” depending on to whom they were speaking. The authors posited that this concern was influenced by the formality of the interaction and the level of intimacy that the speaker had with their interlocutor. In informal settings, it appeared that the felt need to consciously perform femininity felt less urgent than in more formal settings or with strangers. Additionally, participants said they put in more effort to perform feminine signifiers (e.g. raising the pitch of their voice) when speaking on the phone, given that the listener only had the voice as stimulus for assessing the speaker’s gender. One of the participants noted that

“[W]hen you’re talking face-to-face with someone there’s a lot of visual cues as to how they should relate to you. On the telephone, there’s not.”

(Pasricha et al., 2008, p29)

In this example, the participant appears to be engaging in a strategic assessment of how she should index her gender identity to her interlocutor based on a multimodal assessment of the signifiers observable to her interlocutor. Without the help of visual semiotic resources, such as her physical appearance or clothing, she feels that she must emphasise audible signifiers of femininity if she wishes to be read as a woman by a stranger. As indicated by Corwin (2017) and van Leeuwen (2005), this participant indicates the multiple semiotic modes that must be accounted for as part of the intersubjective construction of an identity in a social setting.

In addition, there is evidence that trans people can be strategic in the construction of their gender in interactions in accordance with their interactional objectives. Lex Konnelly (2021) published an analysis of non-binary people’s gender constructions in trans healthcare settings, finding that participants reported consciously adjusting their communication styles in accordance with the gender style that they felt was necessary in the context of the doctor/patient relationship. Driven by a concern that a non-normative gender identity might lead to restricted access to gender affirming care, some non-binary people described withholding their non-binary identity in healthcare settings and constructing a strategic binary identity instead. Indeed, one of Konnelly’s participants humorously acted out their own experience of doing this during the research interview, through ‘masculinising’ the content and phonetic style of their speech. They described making gruff and monotonous sounds with their

voice in order to convince the doctor that they were a binary trans man, in the assumption that this would lead to a higher chance of being approved for top surgery. In this instance, this participant consciously chose to use the linguistic and non-linguistic signifiers that they felt would index the most appropriate or productive identity in this interaction, displaying a high level of conscious control and awareness over the signification of their gender identity.

Taken together, the findings of Pasricha et al. (2008), Jørgensen (2016) and Konnelly (2021) suggest that trans people are not only aware of and reflective about their linguistic gender constructions in interactions, but also strategic about how they can use multimodal signifiers to index their gender identities in the ways that feel most appropriate and productive. Nevertheless, beyond these studies, those which explore trans people's own experiences of constructing their gender identities in interactions remain rare and there is little discussion of how trans people may be active and conscious participants in their own gender work.

2.5.4. Q4. What have previous studies of transmasculine people in interactions explored? Summary.

The majority of work in trans speech and linguistics historically has had a clinical or phonetic focus. These previous studies have sought primarily to understand how trans people's vocal pitch and other phonetic features can be altered as part of a gender transition. In response to this body of research, Zimman (2021, p423) has written of the need for a "distinctively trans linguistics" that moves beyond a determinist approach to trans people's speech features and towards an acknowledgement of the various social and identity-based factors that may impact how a trans person constructs their identity linguistically. These factors include the lesson of agency, which suggests that trans speakers may consciously manipulate the characteristics of their voices in the indexing of their identities. Nevertheless, there has been limited exploration of trans people's own accounts of their active and conscious role in the construction of their identities in interactions. While a small number of studies has indicated that trans people can be reflective and strategic about the ways in which they harness gendered signifiers in interactions, this remains an understudied area. It is for this reason that the present study prioritises

transmasculine people's own experiences of the negotiation of their and others' gender identities in interactions.

2.6. Q5. How have trans scholars approached and critiqued questions of gender identity construction in the past?

The question of whether to prioritise trans people's own reports of their experiences of gender has long been contested ground. As discussed in section 2.3.1.3 above, studies of trans people were hugely generative in the development of social constructionist approaches to gender. Many of these discussions drew from Garfinkel's (2006) original study of Agnes, in which Agnes' active passing was presented as important 'proof' that gender is something that is *accomplished* in interactions (e.g. Kessler & McKenna, 1985; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Through deconstructing the idea of a necessary link between gender identity and material sex characteristics, discussions of trans, drag and other related identities were used to bolster arguments critiquing the notion of gender as natural or innate (Namaste, 2000). With these approaches, trans gender performances were positioned as ones in which "the emergent nature of identity is especially stark" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2022, p20).

2.6.1. Butler and 'Gender Trouble'

The anti-essentialist approach to gender was extended by Judith Butler (1990) in 'Gender Trouble', one of the most influential and well-known works of gender and queer theory to be published in the twentieth century (Prosser, 1998). In 'Gender Trouble', Butler drew on the philosophy of Foucault, Hegel, de Beauvoir and others to present their critique of essential gender. Rather than being a fixed internal identity, Butler presented gender as a stylised collection of performative acts, without which gender identities would have no substance at all. Like de Beauvoir, Butler presented gender as a social creation whose possibilities were dictated by a person's cultural context. Unlike de Beauvoir, however, Butler did not present sex categories as biological facticity, instead questioning the sex/gender distinction that had become popular in discussions of gender (as discussed in section 2.3.1.1). Butler argued that sex categories do not precede gender but are instead equally as socioculturally constructed. They posited that sex, like gender, is a cultural phenomenon, conceived with the express intention of giving male and female gender identities the appearance of natural fact. Rather than being natural fact, however, Butler contended

that performative acts of gender were not expressive but constitutive, forming the entire substance of a gender identity: “[t]hat the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality” (1990, p173). Amongst the acts that make up a gender performance, Butler mentioned the use of language, describing speech as an act with linguistic consequences carried out by the body, positioning it as both word and deed simultaneously: “speech belongs exclusively neither to corporeal presentation nor to language, and its status as word and deed is necessarily ambiguous” (1999, xxv).

Exploring the effects of gender in society, Butler positioned it as “regulatory fiction” (Butler, 1988, p528), with gender performances being subject to significant social policing and control. They stated that:

Performing one’s gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all. (Butler, 1988, p528)

In this framework, people are rewarded if they perform gender in a normative fashion, for instance through shows of masculinity by men or femininity by women, whereas gender identities and expressions that deviate from social expectations are deemed unintelligible, and subject to social sanctions such as public discrimination, prejudice, and violence (Motschenbacher, 2007).

In their conception of gender as a regulatory structure, Butler drew upon the writing of Michel Foucault, a French poststructuralist philosopher. Foucault is known, amongst much else, for critiquing the prioritisation of individual subjects as the starting point for social analyses, instead arguing for analysis grounded in the rules and structures operating “beneath the consciousness of individual subjects”, and thus defining their conceptual possibilities (Gutting & Oksala, 2022). Butler acknowledged the significance of Foucault in their conception of the sociocultural construction of binary sex, stating that: “[f]or Foucault, the substantive grammar of sex imposes an artificial binary relation between the sexes, as well as an artificial internal coherence within each term of that binary” (Butler, 1999, p25-26). As with West & Zimmerman’s (1987) proposal that gendered difference is an institutional structure, maintained through day to day interactions (as outlined in section 2.3.2), Butler drew on Foucault to emphasise that it is official power structures that create and subsequently regulate

notions of gender and sex difference (“Foucault points out that juridical systems of power *produce* the subjects they subsequently come to represent” (Butler, 1999, p4)). Butler used this analysis to question the utility of the concept of ‘woman’ (to them, an institutionally produced and regulated phenomenon) in the struggle for gender liberation:

Feminist critique ought also to understand how the category of “women,” the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought. (Butler, 1999, p5)

With this assertion, Butler questioned whether it is possible to emancipate an oppressed category within the power structures that *produced* that category. For those power structures, the oppression and normative regulation of that category are necessary constituent factors, without which it would cease to exist. In other words, to the systems that govern our societies, the category of ‘woman’ is partly defined by the normative and regulatory restrictions to which it is subject, and there can be no ‘woman’ without those restrictions.

In ‘Gender Trouble’, Butler suggested that one of the most significant ways of rejecting those restrictions and doing gender non-normatively was through drag. Reminiscent of Garfinkel’s positioning of Agnes, Butler described drag performances as revelatory of the constructed nature of gender identity. They stated that: “in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency” (Butler, 1990, p175). Butler emphasised that a person’s material sex characteristics do not necessitate certain gender performances and challenged the notion that it is possible to ‘express’ a gender identity through the performance of culturally sanctioned acts. Thus, if a cis woman’s production of culturally sanctioned gendered acts is performative, rather than expressive, then there are no grounds to consider the cis woman’s performance more authentic than that of a drag performer or ‘transvestite’: “[i]ndeed, the transvestite’s gender is as fully real as anyone whose performance complies with social expectations” (Butler, 1988, p527).

2.6.1.1. Prosser’s critique of ‘Gender Trouble’

Through their development of the gender performativity theory, Butler's work has had a significant impact on research exploring trans identities in interactions. One does not need to look far to find Butler's theories around gender performativity being cited in analyses of how trans people use language to construct their gender identities (e.g. Corwin, 2009; Gratton, 2016; Hazenberg, 2015; Zottola, 2018). While the theory of gender performativity certainly *can* lend itself to the study of trans identity construction, it seems important to note that it was not Butler's express intention with 'Gender Trouble' to create such a theory. They touched only briefly on 'transsexuals', and it is their discussion of drag that is critics' primary touchstone in linking the text of 'Gender Trouble' to trans identities (e.g. Prosser, 1998). However, as Butler noted three years after its publication, even their discussion of drag performances was not intended to be the central focus of the text:

Although there were probably no more than five paragraphs in Gender Trouble devoted to drag, readers have often cited the description of drag as if it were the "example" which explains the meaning of performativity.
(Butler, 1993, p24)

Similarly, in the preface to the 2nd edition of 'Gender Trouble', Butler noted that, were they to write the book again, they would include a specific section about transgender identity (Butler, 1999). Even more explicitly, in a 2016 New York Times interview, Butler is quoted saying:

"I didn't take on trans very well...So, in many ways, it's a very dated book...And it's one that wasn't able to profit from the extraordinary scholarship that's happened in that area in the intervening years." (Fischer, 2016)

Nevertheless, as Prosser (1998, p24) suggested, 'Gender Trouble' over time became canon for "a theory of transgender performativity that was apparently not its substance".

Butler's work in 'Gender Trouble' (and how it has been used to theorise about trans identities) has been critiqued by a number of trans scholars (e.g. Namaste, 2000; Serano, 2016). A significant critique was proposed by Jay Prosser (1998) in 'Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality', considered to be one of the founding texts of trans cultural theory (Carter et al., 2014). In this text, Prosser claimed that performativity theory relegated trans people and their identities to being mere

devices in drawing attention to the contingency of gender; he stated that “transgender’s function is unambivalently and emphatically that of the elucidating example of gender performativity” (Prosser, 1998, p26). For Prosser, this positioned transsexual people as pinnacles of gender performativity in a way that was fundamentally at odds with how many transsexuals experienced their own identities. Crucially, he noted that the performance framework overlooked those transsexual people who did not seek to perform in their identities, but rather, to ‘be’:

[T]here are transsexuals who seek very pointedly to be nonperformative, to be constative, quite simply, to be. What gets dropped from transgender in its queer deployment to signify subversive gender performativity is the value of the matter that often most concerns the transsexual: the narrative of becoming a biological man or a biological woman (as opposed to the performative of effecting one). (Prosser, 1998, p32)

Here, Prosser argued that positioning transsexual people’s gendered becoming as performative ignores their subjective sense of their gender identity as ontological. To suggest that a transsexual man is performing being a man, for instance, could undermine their fundamental sense that they simply are a man.

For Prosser, Butler’s rejection of the notion of an internal gender ‘core’ could not account for the experiences of those trans people who have a strong desire for a congruent sexed embodiment. In other words, if gender is nothing more than a stylised performance of acts, why would (some) transsexual people’s experiences of gender be “an intensely sensory, visceral experience” (Prosser, 1988, p70). As Prosser went on to describe, the intense visceral nature of some transsexual people’s experiences in their bodies can lead them to engage in extreme acts of self-violence due to their discomfort and pain. For these people, a sexed interiority is a highly salient aspect of their experience while, according to Prosser, for Butler: “any *feeling* of being sexed or gendered (whether “differently” or not), along with other ontological claims, is designated phantasmatic, symptomatic of heterosexual melancholia” (Prosser, 1988, p43). In response, Prosser argued that a narrative of trans identity must hold space for trans people’s feeling of gendered embodiment (“corporeal interiority”), in order that transsexual people’s feelings of their gender and sex can be acknowledged as “generative ground” in understanding transsexual identity (Prosser, 1988, p43). Rather than focusing purely on a theory of gender

performativity with gendered interiority relegated to phantasm, instead transsexuals' experiences of the body must be respected and integrated:

At what point do our experiences of our bodies resist or fragment our theoretical generalisations, reveal them as displacements of experience, and demand from them new formulations? (Prosser, 1988, p96)

2.6.2. Treatment of trans identities by trans-exclusionary feminists

'Gender Trouble' was not the only feminist work to be criticised for its approach to understanding trans identities. As trans identities gained greater visibility and attention through the twentieth century, there emerged a group of trans-exclusionary feminists, whose interpretations of gender theory led them to question the legitimacy of trans identities entirely, particularly the identities of trans women. As Abelson (2018) notes, trans-exclusionary feminists have likely represented a relatively small proportion of feminist theorists from the 1970s to today, but their influence has been significant. Trans-exclusionary feminism is a multifaceted ideology based variously in assumptions of trans people's sexual deviancy, excessive devotion to medical technologies, and commitment to socially constructed ideals of gender. As trans-exclusionary feminist Bernice Hausman (1995, p140) put it:

[T]ranssexuals are the dupes of gender. They contain its compulsive deconstruction of sexual difference through their own compulsive relation to technology, and they produce themselves as the simulacra of sexual difference through the presentation of gender as both origin and goal of sex identity. Transsexualism is gender's alibi.

With this extract, Hausman argued that the possibility of medical transitions reifies gender differences through allowing for the reformulation of sexual embodiment in line with transsexuals' supposed sense of gendered essence. By arguing that transsexuals are the 'alibi' of gender, Hausman appears to claim that trans people's existence helps to sustain the notion that gendered essences are natural and innate, a position that second wave feminist theory had thus far sought to deconstruct. By positioning transsexuals as the 'dupes' of gender, trans people's agency is diminished and they are positioned as deluded or deceitful.

The most famous trans-exclusionary feminist text is Janice Raymond's 'The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male', a 1979 book containing attacks on both transsexualism in general and individual trans feminists active in the movement at the time. For Raymond, being trans was an essentially deviant position; she described the feeling of a trans identity as a "schizoid state" (Raymond, 1994, p179) and she made clear her belief that trans women were not women, but were "deviant males" (Raymond, 1994, p183). In 'The Transsexual Empire', Raymond suggested restricting trans people's access to gender affirming care, stating that it would be best if transsexualism is "morally mandat[ed]...out of existence" (Raymond, 1994, 178). In one of the most well-known sequences of the book, Raymond proposed that the very act of trans women's transitions is a form of rape, positioning trans women's identities as inherently violent just by virtue of their existence. She stated that:

All transsexuals rape women's bodies by reducing the real female form to an artifact, appropriating this body for themselves. However, the transsexually constructed lesbian-feminist violates women's sexuality and spirit, as well. Rape, although it is usually done by force, can also be accomplished by deception. (Raymond, 1994, p103-104)

While much of 'The Transsexual Empire' focused on trans women, she also touched upon trans men, suggesting that trans men were 'tokens', used to save face for the wider project of transsexualism:

The female-to-constructed-male transsexual is the token that saves face for the male 'transsexual empire'. She is the buffer zone who can be used to promote the universalist argument that transsexualism is a supposed 'human' problem, not uniquely restricted to men. (Raymond, 1994, p27)

Here, trans men are positioned as a form of disguise, in which the supposed 'Transsexual Empire's' project to invade cis women's bodies could be given the appearance of invading cis men's bodies as well. While trans women were positioned as deviant, intrusive and violent, trans men served to cloak the true intentions of the 'Transsexual Empire'. In Raymond's imaginings, the agency of trans women was demonized and made violent, while the agency of trans men was erased. In this way, Raymond's theorisation echoed traditional normative assumptions about men and women, with those Raymond considered to be men

(trans women) being presented as homogeneously violent and dominant, and those Raymond considered to be women (trans men) being presented as weak and lacking in independent subjectivity.

While Raymond's claims may seem outlandish, her work was well received by some at the time (e.g. Hoagland, 1980) and its influence can be seen in other, less polemic, texts. For instance, in 'Doing Gender', West and Zimmerman (1987) include an extract from Raymond commenting on how trans people's choices to have gender affirming procedures cannot be considered 'free' given the constraints of the sociocultural patriarchal context. After this extract, and echoing Hausman above, West and Zimmerman (1987, p145) go on to claim that gender affirming care serves as a testament to the felt essentialness of sexed bodies: "[t]he physical reconstruction of sex criteria pays ultimate tribute to the 'essentialness' of our sexual natures – as women *or* as men". The original quote from Raymond is not in itself necessarily inflammatory, particularly if (generously) interpreted as an existentialist comment on *all* choices being limited by the facticity in which they are situated. Nevertheless, its very inclusion is testament to the possibility of laundering trans-exclusionary sentiment into superficially neutral commentary on gender in the context of a patriarchal society. Just before the section that West and Zimmerman quote, Raymond suggested that gender affirming care provided the same effect as heroin usage, with both being "highly effective yet dangerous treatment[s] for dissatisfaction and despair" (Raymond, 1994, p134). On the following page, Raymond suggested that gender identity clinics could become government-funded "sex-role control centres, for deviant, non-feminine females and non-masculine males, as well as for transsexuals" (Raymond, 1994, p136), explicitly likening the potential for these facilities to secretive CIA and FBI operations. While Raymond's examples here may seem eccentric, it is not insignificant that her work has been quoted in an analysis of gender work as influential as West and Zimmerman's 'Doing Gender', indicating the ubiquity of trans-exclusionary sentiment in certain corners of feminist and gender studies.

2.6.3. 'The Empire Strikes Back' and Trans Studies

In 'The Transsexual Empire', Raymond referred to some trans women by name, and she included stories about these women amongst her 'evidence' for how trans people were dividing and damaging the women's movement. One of these women was Sandy Stone of Olivia Records, an all-women record label in the US. Prior to publishing 'The Transsexual Empire', Raymond sent an early copy to Olivia Records, reportedly in the hope of outing Stone as trans to her colleagues (whom Stone had already told). Stone later described the targeted and organised harassment that she faced after Raymond included her in 'The Transsexual Empire', escalating to threats of murder (Williams, 2014). While the Olivia Collective supported Stone, her participation in the project became sufficiently controversial that she decided to leave. Ten years after the publication of 'The Transsexual Empire', Stone published 'The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto' (Stone, 2006). This text included a response to Raymond, as well as providing a critical analysis of prominent contemporary discourse and narratives around trans identities. In this work, Stone critiqued narrow and medicalized understandings of womanhood, both from trans and cis writers. She challenged those narratives that had positioned the moment of sexual reassignment surgery as being the beginning of womanhood, advocating for a move away from the understanding of women as being defined by their material sex characteristics. Crucially, she asked why so much research and theory around trans identities had been written by cis writers, arguing that: "transsexuals are infantilized, considered too illogical or irresponsible to achieve true subjectivity" (Stone, 2006, p229-230). In response to this, she called for transsexuals to occupy a generative position in the discourse, asking: "If the transsexual were to speak, what would s/he say?" (Stone, 2006, p230).

'The Empire Strikes Back' has had a significant impact on work exploring trans identities, and has been credited as providing the first articulation of Trans Studies as a distinct interdisciplinary field (Stryker & Currah, 2014). Trans Studies is a field that seeks to understand and critique normative discourses and knowledge that relate to gender, sex, embodiment and identity from critical trans perspectives, as well as "investigat[ing] transgender phenomena as its proper object" (Stryker & Currah, p4). Central to Trans Studies, and reflecting Stone's critique in 'The Empire Strikes Back', is the prioritization of knowledge created by trans people:

Perhaps most importantly, the field encompasses the possibility that transgender people (self-identified or designated as such by others) can be subjects of knowledge as well as objects of knowledge. That is, they can articulate critical knowledge from embodied positions that would otherwise be rendered pathological, marginal, invisible, or unintelligible within dominant and normative organisations of power/knowledge. (Stryker & Currah, 2014, p9)

Thus, the production of knowledge in Trans Studies seeks to move away from the situation as described by Stone, in which trans people had not been able to gain true subjectivity as creators of critical thought.

2.6.3.1. Tensions with social constructionism in Trans Studies

Beyond Stone's (1987/2006) 'The Empire Strikes Back', other prominent early works in Trans Studies include Prosser's (1998) 'Second Skins' (discussed above), Viviane Namaste's (2000) 'Invisible Lives', Henry Rubin's (2003) 'Self-Made Men' and Julia Serano's (2007/2016) 'Whipping Girl'. These texts explored the treatment of trans identities in contemporary feminist and queer theory, critiquing theorisations that they felt disregarded trans people's real experiences of their bodies and identities. For instance, Serano (2016) commented on how academic theory on gender had contributed to the erasure of trans people:

When academics appropriate transsexual and intersex experiences for their essays and theories, and when they clip out specific aspects of our lives and paste them together out of context to make their own creations, they are simply contributing to our erasure. (Serano, 2016, p212)

Serano also critiqued the trans-exclusionary position that claimed that trans people transition due to "a desire to 'fit in' or assimilate into gender normalcy" (Serano, 2016, p149). In opposition to this claim, Serano referenced her own experience, in which her transition was driven by a lifelong sense of her 'subconscious sex', rather than a draw to socially constructed norms of womanhood: "my female subconscious sex has nothing to do with gender roles, femininity, or sexual expression – it was about the personal relationship I had with my own body" (Serano, 2016, p84-85). Like Prosser (1998), Serano focused on the transsexual body, arguing that trans experiences can only be understood through reference to trans narratives of

embodiment, an aspect that she considered to be overlooked in social constructionist/performativity theories of gender. Instead, Serano argued for approaches to trans theory that account for both social and embodied aspects of trans experience, believing this to be the only way to truly capture the nuances of gendered experience.

Like Serano, Namaste (2000) made reference to the tendency in social constructionist theory for trans people to be used as 'evidence' of the performativity of gender (e.g. Garfinkel, 1967; Kessler & McKenna, 1985). Namaste argued that such a tendency makes trans people's real lives invisible through the presentation of trans people as theoretical devices:

They are reduced to a mere figure, made visible only to indicate some other phenomenon; represented as stereotypical caricatures only to disappear as human beings. (Namaste, 2000, p266)

Namaste instead called for an approach that acknowledges the everyday realities of trans lives, focusing on how "transsexual and transgendered people live" (Namaste, 2000, p69). However, despite criticizing approaches to trans identity based purely in the social construction of gender ("[a]n exclusive focus on the production of subjects through discourse can evacuate the possibility of agency" (Namaste, 2000, p54)), she does not seek to disregard the construction of gender altogether. For Namaste, it is necessary to make space both for a constructionist understanding of gender in the world as "mediated through text and discourse" *and* gender identity "as it is lived and experienced" by trans individuals (Namaste, 2000, p54; p65).

2.6.3.2. Rubin's integration of genealogy and phenomenology

In response to these tensions, Rubin (2003) proposed an approach to studying trans identity that drew on both genealogical and phenomenological methods. The genealogical approach is reminiscent of constructionist ethnographies, exploring the social conditions in which trans identities are made legible, with a particular focus on historical context:

Genealogy foregrounds the discursive constraints and freedoms of any given historical period. It illuminates the historicity of the categories that individuals use to make sense of their lives – how they are generated and

how they are altered...It captures the ways in which subjects and subjectivity are made recognizable within the available categories of the moment. (Rubin, 2003, p22)

For Rubin, the power of a genealogical approach came from its ability to analyse and express how the idea of female-to-male transsexuals had emerged as a specific identity in response to contemporary medical technologies. The genealogical approach provided a framework with which Rubin could conceptualise the limits placed on the subject by their historical context, instead of taking participants' reported experiences as "the *only* measure of a body or the subject that inhabits it" (Rubin, 2003, p12). As a counterbalance to the genealogical approach, Rubin paired it with a phenomenological approach, an approach that prioritises the subjective experience of the self and the body. For Rubin, the phenomenological approach returned agency to transsexuals as subjects with authority in their own narratives. Given the predominance of theory grounded in constructionism and performativity, Rubin considered complementary approaches prioritising trans narratives and experiences of the self to be important:

In today's climate...I am in favour of tipping the epistemological seesaw in the other direction, toward experience, to counterbalance what I believe is an undue emphasis on structural constraint and the discursive constitution of the subject. (Rubin, 2003, p11)

As a result, Rubin proposed a phenomenology based on trans people's experiences of the body, noting that "bodies are a crucial element in personal identity formation and perception" (Rubin, 2003, p11).

The approach to phenomenology that is taken in the present study is not in perfect alignment with that of Rubin (2003). Rubin's phenomenology draws from Merleau-Ponty, a phenomenological philosopher who explored spatiality, perception and perspectives of the body. Conversely, the phenomenology in the present study is in closer alignment with the interpretative phenomenology of Heidegger, and the ways in which phenomenology has been reshaped in phenomenological psychology (as will be outlined in detail in section 3.1.2.2 below). Nevertheless, these phenomenologies are complementary approaches, representing a "turn to the self-reports of transsexual subjects" (Rubin, 2003, p30), rather than a sole focus on identity as it can be theorized.

2.6.3.3. Integrating lived experience and social constructionism

As indicated by Prosser, Serano, Namaste, Rubin and others, the tension between constructionist analyses of gender and attendance to trans experience has been prominent in Trans Studies since its inception. Indeed, Haulotte (2023, p32) goes as far as to suggest that “[t]rans theory is *characterised* in part by the apparent tension between discursive analyses of cisgender society and phenomenological descriptions of trans experiences” (emphasis my own). I do not think, however, that these approaches must necessarily be in opposition. Indeed, in some of the most influential early social constructionist texts, a phenomenological account of social reality and identity is provided as the basis for a constructionist analysis. For instance, the first section of Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) ‘The Social Construction of Reality’ contained a “phenomenological analysis of the reality of everyday life”, as they believed it necessary to take account of the “intrinsic character” of reality before they could proceed with its analysis (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p7; p33). While Berger & Luckmann (1966, p34) take a narrow view of phenomenology, positioning it as “purely descriptive” rather than “scientific”, they are nonetheless asserting that a critical analysis of everyday life should be grounded in an understanding of how it is lived by ordinary people. Similarly, in Garfinkel’s (1967) ‘Studies in Ethnomethodology’ (the manuscript which included his essay on Agnes’ active accomplishment of passing), he draws heavily from the work of Alfred Schutz, a phenomenologist who sought to provide a phenomenology of the social world. Indeed, in one essay, Garfinkel (1967, p37) noted that “[r]eaders who are acquainted with his writings will recognize how heavily this paper is indebted to him”. While Garfinkel does not seem to have referred to his own work with Agnes as phenomenological, his approach has been linked with phenomenology by others (e.g. Langsdorf, 1995; Schilt, 2016) and his detailed exploration of Agnes’ subjective experience of her body and identity is not at odds with a phenomenological approach. Finally, the French title of the second book of de Beauvoir’s ‘The Second Sex’ is ‘L’expérience vécue’, directly translatable as ‘lived experience’. The first translation of ‘The Second Sex’ into English by H.M. Parshley titled the second book ‘Woman’s Life Today’ (de Beauvoir, 1953), a translation that obscured the phenomenological basis of this section (although it has since been updated in more

recent editions (e.g. de Beauvoir, 2010)). In this section, de Beauvoir presented the reality of society as it was lived by women, drawing on narrative accounts of women's lived experiences and presenting a feminist phenomenological investigation of the "sexed/gendered body" (Bergoffen & Burke, 2024). It was de Beauvoir's exploration of the lived experiences of women within their social context that formed the basis of constructionist accounts of gender drawing on 'The Second Sex'. For de Beauvoir, a phenomenological account was not in tension with a sensitivity to women's context and social situation. Instead, sociohistorical context could be understood to be the facticity which constrained and shaped women's existence and choices. Furthermore, in a televised interview with de Beauvoir and Sartre that touched upon the women's movement, de Beauvoir challenged Sartre's position, pointing out that there were certain elements of women's lived experiences that Sartre would not be able to understand as a man. After Sartre questioned the need for women to have their own organisations, de Beauvoir responded:

"Et même vous, qui êtes théoriquement et énergiquement tout à fait partisan d'émancipation des femmes et tout ça, eh bien, vous ne partagez malgré tout pas ce qu'elles appellent, et que j'appellerais avec elles, 'le vécu des femmes'. Il y a des choses que vous n'avez pas à comprendre." (Philosophy Overdose, 2022)

"And even you, who are theoretically and energetically a supporter of the emancipation of women and all that, well you still do not share what they call, and which I would also call, 'the experience of women'. There are some things that you do not have to understand." (Translation my own)

This is a passing comment in an interview and not, like 'The Second Sex', a formal elucidation of de Beauvoir's philosophy. Nevertheless, from both this comment and the content of 'L'expérience vécue', it appears that de Beauvoir too valued subjective experiences as a basis from which to formulate critical analysis and action. Here, as in Berger & Luckmann (1966) and Rubin (2003), the phenomenological is not considered to be in opposition with a critical analysis of society but could be argued to be its foundation. Indeed even Butler, the theorist responsible for the mainstreaming of gender performativity, argues that gender theory must hold space for subjects' experiences of life: "[it] must be situated within the context of lives as they are lived and must be guided by the question of what maximises the

possibilities of a livable life” (Butler, 2004, p8). With this in mind, the approach in the present study prioritises the lived experiences of trans participants as its object of study. In line with Rubin’s suggestion of the need to ‘tip the epistemological seesaw’, this study offers an exploration of gender work in interactions from a phenomenological position, prioritising participants’ own accounts of their gender identities, their strategic use of language and their active gender work.

2.6.4. Q5. How have trans scholars approached and critiqued questions of gender identity construction in the past? Summary.

Trans people’s gender identities have historically served as generative ground for social constructionist critiques of gender essentialism due to the perceived contrast between trans people’s gender identities and their material sex characteristics. These critiques have varied in the extent to which they accept trans identities as legitimate or valid. The field of Trans Studies grew out of a response to this body of literature, with early trans critical scholars arguing that some constructionist approaches to gender use trans identities merely as evidentiary tools, with insufficient attention paid to trans people’s experiences of their own gender identities and embodiment. These scholars, including Prosser, Namaste and Serano, have called for an approach to studying trans identities that pays greater attention to trans people’s lived experiences, with Rubin (2003) specifically proposing an approach that integrates both constructionist and phenomenological approaches. It is in response to these calls for greater acknowledgement of trans experience and subjectivity that the present study takes a phenomenological approach to studying transmasculine people’s experiences of gender identity. Furthermore, my approach is predicated on a belief that phenomenological and constructionist approaches are complementary, with a phenomenological understanding of the social world being necessary for its critical analysis, and with a critical understanding of the constraints of sociohistorical context being an essential part of understanding a subject’s facticity in which their life is experienced.

2.7. Literature review: summary and research question

This research study is a response to the work of Trans Studies scholars who have called for greater attention to be paid to the everyday experiences of trans people as regards their gender identities (e.g. Namaste, 2000; Prosser, 1998; Rubin, 2003; Serano, 2016). I have chosen to focus on transmasculine people's experiences of interactions given the importance of social interactions in the active construction of identity (e.g. Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Kessler & McKenna, 2000; West & Zimmerman, 1987), as well as the possibility for a wide range of semiotic modes to be harnessed in interpersonal interactions (Corwin, 2017; van Leeuwen, 2005). In line with previous research that has found issues around masculinity and passing to be especially salient for transmasculine people (e.g. Rubin, 2003; Stein, 2018), I have chosen to focus additionally on how transmasculine participants interpreted and made meaning out of their experiences relating to masculinity and passing in interactions.

Accordingly, this research study seeks to answer the following research question:

RQ: What are transmasculine people's lived experiences of negotiating gender identity in interactions?

This question is accompanied by two subsidiary research aims:

- To understand how transmasculine people interpret their experiences of masculinity in interactions;
- To explore transmasculine people's relationships with passing in interactions.

3. CHAPTER THREE: Methodology & methods

This is a phenomenological study using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore transmasculine people's experiences of negotiating gender identity in interactions with others. To collect the data for this analysis, semi-structured interviews were performed with ten transmasculine adults in the UK, during which I explored their experiences of negotiating their transmasculine identities as well as their experiences of passing and masculinity in interactions. In this chapter, I will first explore the methodological foundations for this work, before moving on to exploring the study method in detail.

Section 3.1, 'Methodology', explains how the interpretative phenomenological method has its roots in the philosophies of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. In Husserl's theory of transcendental phenomenology, developed through the first decade of the 20th century and beyond (Beyer, 2020), he argued that we do not perceive the world itself but only as it appears to us in our consciousness. It was Husserl's proposition that the appearance of 'things' is influenced not only by real world stimuli but by an individual's previously held interpretations and assumptions about those stimuli. Husserl argued that we should seek to bracket off those assumptions in an attempt to gain closer insight into the world as it 'really' is. Following Husserl, his former assistant Martin Heidegger proposed an alternative 'interpretative' form of phenomenology. Heidegger critiqued and extended transcendental phenomenology through the argument that it is not in fact possible to bracket off our assumptions in our understanding of the world. Instead, interpretative phenomenological theorists argue that we are indelibly situated within that world, and that it is never possible to gain sufficient distance from the world such that we can study it in any 'objective' sense. Accordingly, we have access only to our *experience* of the world as it appears in our consciousness, and it is that experience that forms the object of study. It is particularly the interpretative phenomenology of Heidegger that informed the conception of this study's method, with IPA focusing on how participants make meaning out of the world around them as situated and interpretative beings (J. A. Smith et al., 2022). In this chapter, I will explore the theoretical background of IPA more closely and explain why it is an appropriate method for the present study.

Section 3.2, 'Methods', explores how this study was carried out, including how and which participants were recruited, how the interviews were performed, and what the stages of and approach to analysis were. The method used for this study follows the guidance set out by Jonathan Smith, Paul Flowers and Michael Larkin in the 2022 2nd edition of their guide to IPA. This book lays out the theoretical basis of IPA, as well as providing direction on how to undertake an IPA study oneself. In this section I will also explore the ethical considerations involved with the development of this research, as well as how its quality and validity can be evaluated.

3.1. Methodology

3.1.1. Rationale for choosing a phenomenological approach

As explored in section 2.6 above, this study aims to answer those Trans Studies scholars who have called for greater attention to be paid to trans people's lived experiences regarding their gender and identities (e.g. Namaste, 2000; Prosser, 1998; Rubin, 2003; Serano, 2016). Like Rubin, I consider the phenomenological approach to be best suited to exploring lived experience in an in-depth and empathic manner.

Phenomenological research approaches are most appropriate for studies in which the aim is "to open up the individual level of experience for a more in-depth understanding" in order to "grasp the intricacies of human experience" (Churchill, 2022, p3). In a phenomenological approach, priority is given to the ways in which an individual has experienced their world, rather than looking to develop an 'objective' picture of the world or a particular experience (Spinelli, 2005). In this way, research subjects are understood to be experts in their own experience, rather than objects to be analysed or pathologized from afar, an approach which marks a contrast with some historic explorations of trans identity and interaction (e.g. Garfinkel, 1967; Kessler & McKenna, 2000). The phenomenological commitment to individual levels of experience is appropriate for research with the trans community given the limited attention that has historically been given to trans voices in mainstream academic disciplines. As Stryker (2006, p11) noted: "[o]nly rarely did we speak to others on our

own behalf – in the pages of infrequently published autobiographies, or from the shadows of the freak show tents.” Accordingly, the respect afforded to individual voices in phenomenological research is well suited to redress this historic imbalance.

In fact, and relatedly, it is my sense that the underlying theoretical principles of Trans Studies and phenomenological research directly complement one another through their shared interest in personal experience as a source of knowledge creation. The principles of phenomenological research are predicated on an assumption that experiential knowledge is as important and appropriate a way of understanding the world as other means of acquiring knowledge. This assumption can also be found amongst the foundations of Trans Studies, with Stryker (2006, p12) having asserted that Trans Studies considers the embodied experience of the subject to be “a proper – indeed essential – component of transgender phenomena” and that “experiential knowledge is as legitimate” as other forms of knowledge. Accordingly, phenomenological research approaches are particularly appropriate for work in the Trans Studies field.

In the following sections I will lay out the philosophical foundations of phenomenological research, before exploring how they are applied in this particular study.

3.1.2. Phenomenology

Although often characterised as a ‘school’ or ‘wave’ of philosophy, phenomenological thinkers argue that phenomenology is best understood as a ‘method’ or ‘approach’, the focus of which is “the investigation of our experience of the world” (Spinelli, 2005, p3). At its root, the phenomenological method is a mode of inquiry underpinned by the belief that a person’s perception of the world is always influenced by their individual consciousness. Accordingly, the phenomenological method seeks to explore those perceptions, or experiences, rather than the raw material of the world itself. This section will explore the aspects of phenomenology that have had the greatest influence on the present study, looking in particular at the transcendental and interpretative phenomenologies of Husserl and Heidegger respectively.

3.1.2.1. Husserl and transcendental phenomenology

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) was the first to propose a theory of the phenomenological method (Beyer, 2020). This method was rooted in Husserl's contention that when we perceive the world, or the 'things' within it, we do not perceive them as they 'really' are but only as they appear to us. This appearance of the world exists only in our consciousness and consists of real things that we perceive, as well as assumptions that we have already formed (Large, 2008). Drawing on the original Greek root of 'phenomenon' ('φαίνεσθαι' = to appear, become visible), Husserl used 'phenomena' to refer to things as they appear to the subject. For example, if I were to study the glass of water in front of me using the phenomenological method, I would accept that the glass of water as it appears to me in my consciousness is constituted not just by the raw matter that I perceive in the world, but all the pre-conceptions and assumptions that I already hold about that object. If I am currently thirsty, then that glass of water appears not just as it is, but also as a means by which I might quench my thirst. If I have recently spilt a similar glass of water, then this glass also appears as a reminder of my recent folly. In this way, the *phenomenon* of the glass of water is highly personal to me, as my own assumptions and interpretations of the thing are drawn from my own past, present and future experiences.

Through devising the phenomenological method, Husserl sought to offer scientists a means by which they might see beyond their interpretations and assumptions of phenomena to gain a closer understanding of how they *really* are, rather than how they appear. For Husserl, it was the aim of phenomenology to "strip away, as far as possible, the plethora of interpretational layers" (Spinelli, 2005, p16) and instead to "endeavour to focus on each and every particular thing in its own right" (Smith et al., 2022, p8) to arrive at a closer understanding of "what is" (Spinelli, 2005, pxi).

Husserl's phenomenology is grounded in a belief that it is possible, through rigorous attendance to the phenomenological method, to come close to an understanding of the true nature of things, and in doing so, to 'transcend' the distorting effect of one's own interpretations and assumptions. It is this aspect of the philosophy that gives transcendental phenomenology its name. As Spinelli (2005, p7) notes:

The rallying cry of early transcendental phenomenologists was: 'To the things themselves!' By this, they made it absolutely clear (at least to other philosophers) that their aim was to find the ultimate true nature of reality.

Husserl's faith in the possibility of returning 'to the things themselves' was not shared by later interpretative phenomenologists, who did not believe it possible to step outside of the prism of one's own assumptions. Nevertheless, an understanding of certain constituent elements of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology is necessary for understanding the interpretative phenomenology that succeeded it.

3.1.2.1.1. Intentionality

In conceiving of the phenomenological method, Husserl was influenced by Franz Brentano's notion of 'intentionality', which is characterised by the idea that consciousness can only ever be understood as *consciousness of something* (Huemer, 2019; Large, 2008). For Brentano and Husserl, it would not be possible to conceive of a person's consciousness independently from those things *of which* the person is conscious, meaning that the objects of consciousness are a necessary part of what consciousness *is*. As Large (2008, p5) put it:

[C]onsciousness is already outside of itself, already related to things in the world from the very beginning. The world is not something out there, rather we are our world.

Phenomenologists have characterised intentionality as the means by which the mind 'reaches out' to real world stimuli and converts them into meaningful phenomena (Spinelli, 2005). Thus, intentionality is the means by which the phenomenon of the glass of water appears in my consciousness as a meaningful object (i.e. a glass of water), rather than simply as its raw matter (i.e. a cylindrical transparent object with something clear and wet inside). With this theorisation, we can understand phenomena to be 'intentional constructs', constructed from both real world stimuli and our pre-existing knowledge and assumptions about those stimuli. Understanding the interaction between worldly stimuli and our mental faculties is central to understanding the phenomenological view of how we make meaning out of the world around us. If it is not possible for me to perceive things outside of the context of my own meaning making, as phenomenologists believe, then everything that I perceive

is partly constituted by that which is out there in the world and that which is already in my consciousness.

3.1.2.1.2. Epoché

Like intentionality, the concept of epoché was a fundamental aspect of Husserl's phenomenological method. Epoché refers to the process through which a phenomenologist seeks to 'bracket' or 'set aside' their pre-existing assumptions and interpretations about a phenomenon, such that they may gain closer knowledge of the thing itself. The goal here is to be able to develop a view of real-world stimuli that we would ordinarily "not be able to see through the distorting lenses of our existing assumptions and beliefs" (Churchill, 2022, p9). Accordingly, if the way that something appears to us is an intentional construct built of worldly stimuli and our pre-existing assumptions, the process of epoché seeks to minimise the extent to which our pre-existing assumptions impose on our perception of the worldly stimuli. Through the process of epoché, I might seek to set aside the associations that I hold with the glass of water in front of me (i.e. its potential to quench my thirst and the memories of my recent spill) and see it more clearly for what it *is*.

Recalling Husserl's presumption that it is possible to return 'to the things themselves', epoché is (partly) the means by which this return may be achieved, as the transcendental inquiry turns away from distraction and misdirection and back towards "the essence of [the] experience of a given phenomenon" (Smith et al., 2022, p10). The aim of epoché, as far as possible, is to bracket off the aspects of consciousness that engage in instinctive meaning-making, such that we may encounter phenomena supposition-less and free from perspective.

3.1.2.2. Heidegger and interpretative phenomenology

The development of interpretative phenomenology, also known as existential or hermeneutic phenomenology, represented a break from Husserlian transcendental phenomenology. For the purposes of the present study, I will focus on the interpretative phenomenology of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), exploring how Heidegger's conception of phenomenology differed from that of Husserl and how

these differences have informed the interpretative phenomenological approach used in this study. The relationship between the phenomenologies of Husserl and Heidegger is complex and, at times, ambiguous (Wheeler, 2020). However, I shall concentrate primarily on Heidegger's rejection of a possible supposition-less consciousness, as it is this departure from transcendental phenomenology that is most relevant to the interpretative approach that underlies IPA.

As discussed above, Husserl maintained that, through rigorous adherence to the phenomenological method, it was possible to turn away from the distraction of existing assumptions and beliefs about the world and to gain closer insight into its true essence. The presumption here is that, even if we cannot achieve it perfectly, there exists the possibility of a consciousness that is free from perspective and instinctive interpretation. Heidegger's phenomenology rejected this claim, arguing that perception is always interpretation, and that our understanding of things is always informed by presupposition and assumption:

Whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon the...fore-conception. An interpretation is never a pre-suppositionless apprehending of something presented to us.
(Heidegger, 1962, p191-192)

In this way, Heidegger contended the notion that we can ever approach the world free from our contextual assumptions of it. As Large (2008, p60) put it: "[c]ontext-free knowledge is an illusion."

For Heidegger, the goal of the phenomenological method differed from the goal as laid out by Husserl. Rather than seeking to transcend assumptions to access 'true' knowledge free from interpretation, Heidegger considered interpretation to be an essential aspect of our knowledge of the world. Instead of seeking knowledge that is not contingent upon assumption and presupposition, the interpretative phenomenologist seeks to understand how those assumptions and presuppositions have informed our understanding of reality. The goal is to acknowledge the fundamental contingency of knowledge and to systematically deconstruct and articulate how and why phenomena have been constructed in our consciousness in the way that they have.

Our first, last, and constant task in interpreting is never to allow our...fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out the fore-structures in terms of the things themselves. (Heidegger, 1962, p195)

In other words, it is the task of the interpretative phenomenologist to interrogate their assumptions and interpretations ('fore-structures') to understand how they contribute to the intentional constructs that make up phenomena as they appear in consciousness. Thus, while I may not be able to transcend those assumptions of the glass of water that inform my perception of it, I should instead acknowledge them and seek to understand how they have contributed to my interpretation of that glass.

3.1.2.2.1. Dasein

Part of what separates Heidegger's phenomenology from the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl is his notion of *Dasein*. Dasein, often translated as *being-in-the-world*, is Heidegger's conception of the human way of being. For Heidegger, it was Dasein's awareness of the world that separated it from inanimate objects, and Dasein's awareness of its awareness of the world (and, by extension, its existence) that separated it from other animate beings (e.g. animals) (Spinelli, 2005). Large (2008, p16) describes Dasein thus:

[W]e are the only beings for whom the question of Being can be a question at all. Stones, trees and lizards do not ask what it means to be, only ourselves.

Given that part of what makes Dasein unique is its awareness of the world, this awareness is thus taken to be a constituent part of what (or how) Dasein *is*: *[i]t belongs ontologically to what Dasein is"* (Large, 2008, p46).

Dasein can be interpreted as a re-formulation of the intentionality of consciousness as described by Brentano (1874) and Husserl (2001). Given that consciousness of the world is an essential part of what Dasein is, Dasein is conceptualised as being *worldly*, or *thrown* into the world, in such a way that its consciousness can never be meaningfully detached from that world. Drawing upon this idea, Smith and colleagues (the thinkers that developed IPA) note that a person is always and

unavoidably a “person in context” (2022, p13). It is this unavoidable worldliness that necessitates the interpretative view of how humans perceive the world. If a person is indelibly situated in the world in such a way that they cannot be meaningfully detached from it, then it is not possible for them to gain knowledge of the world that is free from their situation within it. This notion is central to interpretative phenomenology and central to the theoretical basis of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis used for the present study.

3.1.3. IPA

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a qualitative research methodology with a focus on the detailed investigation of individuals’ lived experiences and the meaning that individuals find in those experiences (Eatough & Smith, 2008). The theoretical bases of IPA are firmly located in the phenomenologies explored in section 3.1.2 above, with a focus on individual human experience and how humans make meaning out of these experiences. IPA was conceived by psychologist Jonathan Smith in the 1990s as an alternative to other approaches to psychological research that he saw to predominate at the time (Smith, 1996). Smith developed IPA as a qualitative approach grounded in phenomenological psychology, a psychology that draws on the philosophy of Husserl and which is “concerned with an individual’s personal perception or account of an object or event as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself” (Smith, 1996, p263).

The main aim of IPA is:

[T]o explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world, and the main currency for an IPA study is the meanings particular experiences, events, states hold for participants. (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p53)

This section will lay out four key concepts that give IPA its distinctive character: lived experience, meaning making, double hermeneutics and idiography. These sections will highlight how these concepts are drawn from the theories of interpretative phenomenology as discussed above as well as how they are relevant to the present study.

3.1.3.1. Lived experience

In IPA, the focus of the research is always *lived experience*, that is, the way that participants consciously experience the world (Spinelli, 2005). Investigation of lived experience is phenomenological in that it seeks to understand how an experience *appears* to an individual, rather than what the essence of that experience *is*. This approach has its roots in Husserl's conception of phenomena as they appear in an individual's consciousness. IPA often focuses on psychological phenomena, for instance participants' experiences of "wishes, desires, feelings, motivations, belief systems" and, crucially, how participants make meaning out of those phenomena (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p4). This is an epistemologically relativist approach, in that the IPA analyst does not seek to gain some 'true' understanding of the world, but rather to gain insight into how the participant structures their own knowledge of the world (see section 3.1.5 for more detail). The focus on lived experience was crucial to the present study, in that my goal was not to understand how transmasculine negotiate their gender identities in interactions from a removed or 'objective' position, but to understand their own (lived) experience of this process.

3.1.3.2. Meaning making

The theory of IPA draws on 'hermeneutics', which is the study of interpretation and the meaning making process (George, 2021). In IPA, it is assumed that our perceptions of phenomena are based both on real worldly stimuli and pre-existing understandings and assumptions. This conception stems from Heidegger's hermeneutic understanding that it is never possible to experience phenomena outside of our assumptions about them. In this way, the meanings of phenomena are understood to exist in our consciousnesses (as intentional constructs, see section 3.1.2.1.1), rather than in the things themselves: "[m]eaning is not in the things themselves but in the way we speak and talk about or even judge them" (Large, 2008, p7). Thus, phenomena do not hold essential meaning, but meanings that are person and context dependent.

Drawing upon Brentano's intentionality and the notion that our consciousness is always part of the world that we perceive, it is the contention of phenomenological

psychologists that human beings are constantly imposing meaning upon the world around them (Spinelli, 2005). If one is to accept that things do not hold essential meanings on their own terms, then one must accept that humans are constantly constructing that meaning. Without meaning making, there is meaninglessness and: “[w]e cannot tolerate meaninglessness” (Spinelli, 2005, p7).

Accordingly, understanding this meaning making process is the currency of IPA, which looks to explore human lived experience “via an examination of the meanings which people impress upon it” (Smith et al., 2022, p28). In the present study, the focus on meaning making facilitates exploration of why participants have interpreted their experiences in the ways that they have and what thought processes or past experiences or emotional responses, etc, have contributed to their conceptualisations of the phenomena under study. As an interpretative phenomenological researcher, I consider it to be my task to be open to however participants might interpret the concepts relevant to the research, meaning that I seek not to understand what transmasculinity or passing or gender *are*, but what they *mean* to the participants in the study.

3.1.3.3. Double hermeneutics

Double hermeneutics in phenomenological research refers to the notion that it is not just the participant that is attempting to make sense of the meaning of their world, but the researcher as well: “phenomenological research is about ‘meaning making’ on the part of both participant and the researcher” (Churchill, 2022, p60). This is understood as a “two-stage interpretation process, or a double hermeneutic” (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p53), in which the participant and subsequently the researcher are developing a contingent and subjective understanding of a given experience. The double hermeneutic approach acknowledges that both the participant *and* the researcher are ‘Dasein’ (see section 3.1.2.2.1). That is to say, both the participant and researcher can only understand the world, and the specific experiences in question, from a worldly and situated perspective. In practice, IPA’s commitment to double hermeneutics can be found in an encouragement that the researcher acknowledge their own situated position within the research process. Thus, just as Heidegger (1962, p195) encouraged the phenomenologist to “work[...] out the fore-

structures in terms of the things themselves”, the IPA analyst is encouraged to question what assumptions and fore-meanings they may be bringing to the analytic process and how these may be informing their interpretations of the experiences under study. I have explored my own position in the research in the reflexivity section of this thesis, found in section 3.1.6 below.

In fact, the concept of double hermeneutics holds two meanings within the context of IPA research. The second meaning is linked to the work of hermeneutic philosopher Paul Ricoeur, who proposed a dual level approach to interpreting texts based on complementary interpretative attitudes of faith and suspicion (Ricoeur, 1970). For Ricoeur, while a hermeneutic of faith involved an interpretation of the face value meaning of a text, the hermeneutic of suspicion involved a more sceptical approach, delving beneath the meaning as it initially appears. In IPA, Ricoeur’s philosophy is parsed into two layers of interpretation: the first layer of interpretation, or hermeneutics of empathy, involves trying to get as close as possible to the participant’s personal world to understand the *intended* meaning of their account . The second layer of interpretation, or hermeneutics of suspicion, involves looking for deeper meanings underneath the surface of the participant’s account (Willig, 2017). At this level, the analyst asks critical questions of the text and offers an interpretative account of what it means for the participant to have interpreted the phenomenon in the way that they did (Larkin et al., 2006). Here the researcher offers their own interpretation of the interpretation that the participant has offered, based on the understanding that there may be additional meanings under the surface of the participant’s account. I will further demonstrate how Ricoeur’s double hermeneutics influenced my own approach to IPA analysis in section 3.2.2.2 below.

3.1.3.4. Idiography

At the heart of IPA lies a commitment to “uncovering/expressing/illuminating individual subjective experience” (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p181). This involves the researcher getting as close as possible to each participant’s individual experiences and trying to understand what it means for that specific person to have experienced a phenomenon in the particular way that they did. The individual focus is central to the idiographic approach, in which attention is placed on the particular rather than

the universal, and each aspect of an individual's experience is considered meaningful and significant (Eatough & Smith, 2008). The emphasis on idiography here is related to the notion that meaning making is a fundamentally individual process. Phenomena exist within an individual's consciousness and, given that this consciousness is not shared, the phenomena can only exist in the way that they do for each person individually. Accordingly, IPA focuses on speaking in detail about the experiences of individual participants, rather than tending towards more general claims (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2003). The aim is to try to enter: "as far as possible, the psychological and social world of the respondent" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p59) with a depth that is difficult to achieve with a wider population of people. For this reason, IPA samples tend to be small, such that the researcher can produce a depth of analysis that "matches and does justice to the complexity of human psychology itself" (Smith et al., 2022, p31). Cross-case analysis does form part of the IPA process, and it is also the task of the IPA researcher to interpret how participants' experiences converge and diverge from one another in ways that are enlightening and meaningful, nevertheless it remains the priority to do "full justice to each individual in a study before attempting cross case analysis at within and between levels" (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p6). The IPA commitment to idiography is most apparent in the present study in its small sample size (discussed in section 3.2.1.1.1), as well as the approach that I took to the analytic process, in which each participant's transcript was analysed in detail individually, before turning to the wider sample. This process is laid out more thoroughly in section 3.2.2.2 below.

3.1.4. Rationale for choosing IPA

I chose to use IPA for this study due to its theoretical grounding in the phenomenological tenets that are so central to this study. In IPA, the experience of the self is considered to be of great importance, meaning that it is not uncommon for IPA to be used in studies of identity, where there is "a concern with identity and a sense of self...and an attention to bodily feeling within lived experience" (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p10). Similarly, its detailed idiographic focus on the way in which participants experience the world makes IPA particularly appropriate when exploring complex, emotional topics (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2003). In addition, phenomenological approaches allow for a close examination of the role of

embodiment in people's lived experiences, and Eatough and Smith (2008, p188) note that IPA analyses can pay attention to the "lived existential body" and how the body contributes to the experience and communication of meaning. This aspect of IPA draws from the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty (1962), who considered the body to be inextricably entwined with our sense of self and experience of the world. Paying attention to the 'lived existential body' in this way is suitable for research with trans people, for whom gendered embodiment can be saturated with personal meaning. For these reasons, I determined IPA to be an appropriate method for exploring transmasculine people's experiences of gender identity in interactions, and one which would enable me to reach the level of interpretative depth that I hoped to achieve with this study.

3.1.5. Ontological and epistemological position

Questions of ontology (the study of being) and epistemology (the study of knowledge) are central to the foundations of interpretative phenomenology. This section provides an explanation for how the interpretative phenomenological approach can be reconciled with conventional notions of ontology and epistemology, and subsequently how these twin concepts are conceptualised in the context of this study.

This study draws on the traditional phenomenological view that real matter exists (Spinelli, 2005). That is to say, there is physical matter that exists as separate from our consciousness, and this matter can include tangible objects, natural phenomena, our own bodies, etc. Put simply, this approach can be understood as a form of ontological realism, in which aspects of the world are understood to exist independently of human minds (Niiniluoto, 2002). Central to this view is the idea that the world, or an aspect of it, does not have to be being currently perceived in order for it to *be*. In other words, if I were to get up from my desk now and walk to another room, I would assume that my desk still exists in the world, even when I am not looking. The raw matter that I perceive to be a desk is separate from my consciousness and thus that thing does not disappear in the absence of my consciousness.

However, as discussed in section 3.1.2.2 above, the focus of interpretative phenomenology is not how the world *is*, but instead, how the world *appears to us*. That is to say, while an interpretative phenomenologist would not refute the idea that in front of me exists a real-world stimulus that I am perceiving to be a desk, they would accept only the raw matter as real, not the notion of 'desk' itself. Instead, they would consider my notion of 'desk' to be an intentional construct, formed by a mixture of real-world stimuli and the various interpretations and assumptions that I already hold about the concept of 'desk' (Spinelli, 2005). In this way, while the real world does exist on some level, the knowledge that I have of that world is contingent and incomplete, inextricably linked to my own context and mental processes (Spinelli, 2005). Unlike in Husserlian transcendental phenomenology, which understood there to be a true essence of things, obscured by assumptions and interpretation (the "essential characteristics of the phenomenon without which it would not be the phenomenon" (Dahlberg, 2006, p11)), interpretative phenomenology rejects the very notion of true essences, suggesting that things only *are* as they are constituted for each individual in their consciousness. That is to say, there is no necessary and essential idea that is 'desk', there is only what 'desk' means to me. When I get up to leave my office, the raw matter that makes up the desk remains, but my notion of desk does not. It is the work of interpretative phenomenology to explore *how it is* that things constitute themselves in each individuals' consciousness. This approach to knowledge, or epistemology, can be understood to be a form of relativism, in which knowledge or truth claims can only be evaluated relative to one another, rather than in comparison to an ultimate truth or reality (Baghramian & Carter, 2022). This is in contrast with "epistemic absolutism", a position that considers there to be a *correct* or *true* way of understanding and assessing the world (Luper, 2004, p272). Epistemic absolutism is fundamentally at odds with the theoretical framework of interpretative phenomenology, which holds knowledge to be personal and interpretative, rather than shared and absolute. Accordingly, the present study is best understood as drawing upon relativist principles of epistemology in its phenomenological approach.

3.1.6. Reflexivity

A key aspect of interpretative phenomenological research is the acknowledgement of the researcher's interpretative presence. This is due, in part, to the commitment to double hermeneutics, and the idea that both participant and researcher are situated, interpretative beings (ideas introduced in section 3.1.3.3 above). One of the means of making the researcher's interpretative presence explicit is through a process of researcher reflexivity. Reflexivity refers to a researcher's explicit acknowledgement of their influence on a research study, often through an exploration of their values and perspectives, whether personal, social or political. The researcher may also consider how their own history and biography may have had an impact on the research (Burr, 2015).

The notion of reflexivity is rooted in an assumption that transparency around a researcher's subjectivity is important, and that the presence of subjectivity should not be considered to have a negative impact on qualitative research. Indeed, instead of framing subjectivity as a shortcoming in research that might otherwise seek to be 'objective', Olmos-Vega et al. (2023, p249) argue that subjectivity should be celebrated as an advantage:

Embrace your subjectivity; abandon objectivity as a foundational goal and embrace the power of your subjectivity through meaningful reflexivity practices. Reflexivity is not a limitation; it is an asset in your research.

Through acknowledging our intrinsic involvement in the research process, researchers can draw attention to the fact that data does not flow independently from participants. Instead, it is co-produced by both the researcher and the researched, in what Edley and Litosseliti (2018, p1) describe as a "collaborative" event, with both interviewer and moderator playing "an important, participative role".

To explore the presence of my own subjectivity in this research study, I will provide some personal reflections on the study's conception and my experiences of undertaking this research. Further reflections on the data collection and analysis stages specifically can be found in sections 3.2.1.3 & 3.2.2.3 respectively.

There were a number of strands that contributed to the development of this research and my choice to explore experiences of interactions from the perspectives of transmasculine individuals. My interest in Trans Studies is both personal and political;

as a transmasculine person, I feel personally invested in work that explores the wide-ranging diversity of gender, sex and sexuality as experienced by all different kinds of trans people. I am also committed to the notion that academic research that centres, rather than problematises, trans identities is an essential component of the political struggle for trans liberation. In a world where existing as a trans person can, at times, feel so difficult, I see the production of rich and empathic qualitative research to be a way that I can use my skills to make some small difference.

My own training in linguistics and long-time interest in the exchange of social meaning in conversation led me to the specific focus on trans people's experiences in social interactions. Social interactions are, at the best of times, highly complex and multilayered phenomena, in which all manner of meanings, implications and assumptions are being shared between interlocutors on a multimodal level. Personal identities are always relevant in these situations, as interlocutors perform an elaborate dance through different power dynamics and intersubjective positionings during the course of any one interaction. It is my sense that the presence of a person with a particularly socially marked identity, such as a trans identity, can have a significant impact on how interlocutors experience and behave in these situations. Indeed, this has been my own experience, where I have found myself having to manage various strange and unexpected dynamics in interactions, driven by other people's responses to my trans identity or my identity as someone that they perceive to be a man. These experiences lie at the heart of this study, as I wished to gain greater insight into how transmasculine people manage and negotiate these situations, and to understand how it feels for them to do so.

Throughout the research process, I have been mindful of my own identity as a transmasculine person and conscious of the impacts that this might have on the study. At first, I was concerned that I might have a 'biased' perspective, in which I was unable to elicit or analyse my data from an 'objective' perspective. However, as I came to better understand researcher subjectivity, this concern faded away. My position is, of course, 'biased' (although I would now prefer the term 'situated'), but I am comforted in the twofold knowledge that: a) all qualitative researchers approach their work from a situated perspective, whether as 'insiders' or not, and b) that my subjectivity can in fact be approached and used as a benefit to the research

endeavour, not as a shortcoming. With this in mind, I was conscious of the encouragement of other 'insider' researchers to try to "take advantage of [my] insider knowledge" in performing the research (van Heugten, 2004, p207). To do this, I engaged in the practice of self-interviewing prior to beginning my data analysis. Goldspink & Engward (2019, p246) state that:

Self-interviews are an excellent opportunity for researchers to explore personal experiences and the theories and research that have shaped their views on their topic.

In order to do this, I recorded myself answering each of the questions in my topic guide as if I were a participant.

Answering the same questions as my participants helped me to better understand my own fore-meanings and the theoretical assumptions that I bring to this research project. The key aspects of these concerned my own understanding of trans identities and gender identities more widely. While I find that the specifics of my views on gender identity as it is *felt* are in constant flux, I am aware that my understanding of gender as it is made manifest in the world are strongly constructionist, reminiscent of the positions described in section 2.3.1.4 and attributed to feminist and queer theorists such as de Beauvoir (1953) and, later, Butler (1990). Crucially, I reject essentialist notions of gender roles as being inherent to any specific gender or sex category, and instead consider most, if not all, of what society classes as 'gendered' to be the product of sociohistorically contingent social constructions (Serano, 2016). This is not to say that those constructions cannot *feel* real, however, and it is my sense that we are so incontrovertibly saturated with discourses around gender that it can be difficult, or impossible, to ever see outside of this context (Rubin, 2003).

Be that as it may, I find my constructionist understanding of gender to be troubled by my own, and others', experiential knowledge of living in and with a trans identity, particularly one that involves moving towards an embodiment specifically associated with a particular sexed identity (e.g. Prosser, 1998). I do not feel certain that a standard social constructionist understanding of gender provides a compelling explanation for why a physical transition can feel like the only way to continue to exist. This tension is particularly strong when, as is described by Serano (2016), many trans people are not drawn to the socially constructed gender norms that are

associated with the gender identity that feels congruent for them. I can understand why Prosser (1998) emphasised how some trans people experience their gender as ontological, despite remaining unsure about how this interacts with my own sense that the social significance of gender is essentially 'made up'. There lies a question mark at the heart of all my thinking and theorisation around gender, and it is this question mark that, I believe, ultimately makes gender what it is. Beyond this intellectualism, however, I know that transitioning feels existentially necessary to many trans people, as indeed it did and does for me. It is important to me, as a researcher and a person, to respect and champion through my work that which feels most liberating to all. To return, as I do again and again, to Butler: "[w]hat makes for a livable world is no idle question" (2004, p17).

I have lingered on my own understanding of gender here as it was important for me to interrogate my own views when exploring the perceptions and experiences of the transmasculine people in this study. I was keen not to portray my position on gender as the theoretical norm, with alternative conceptions thus being treated as aberrant or 'wrong'. It has been important for me to try to stay open to participants' alternative conceptions of gender and their own identities, and I hope that this openness is apparent throughout this research. Nevertheless, in keeping with an interpretative phenomenological acknowledgement that all interpretation is necessarily situated, I can acknowledge that my own fore-meanings and assumptions will have impacted my interpretations, whether I have been aware of them or not. Through exploring them here, I hope to have created a level of transparency that will enable a reader to understand why and whence I may have made the interpretations that I have. Further reflections on the impact of my insider perspective during the data analysis process specifically can be found in section 3.2.2.3 below.

3.2. Methods

In the following section, I will lay out the practical stages used in undertaking this research study. I will first explore the data collection process, including how the participants were selected and how the interviews were carried out. I will move onto describing the data analysis procedure in greater detail, demonstrating how I applied Smith et al.'s (2022) guidance to undertaking IPA research in this study. I will

examine the ethical issues that I took into consideration in designing and undertaking this study, followed by an discussion of how I was led by Yardley's (2008) framework for demonstrating validity in qualitative research as I worked. Ethical approval for this project was granted in February 2023 by the City, University of London School of Health & Psychological Sciences Research Ethics Committee after a full ethical review (see section 3.2.3 below for more details).

3.2.1. Data collection

The data collection process for this study consisted of ten semi-structured interviews with transmasculine participants, exploring their lived experiences of negotiating gender identity in interactions. In the following sub-sections, I will explain how participants were located and recruited as well as how the interviews were designed and carried out.

3.2.1.1. Participants

3.2.1.1.1. Sample size

A sample size of ten was chosen for this research study with one interview for each participant. This is a standard sample size for a doctoral IPA study, and Smith et al. (2022, p105) state that: "a sample of ten is gaining currency as an optimal number for many such research projects". My intention in recruiting ten participants was to ensure that some range of experience was reflected in the research, while guaranteeing that the sample remained small enough that the commitment to idiography and depth of analysis could be maintained. IPA's commitment to idiography and related preference for small sample sizes were explored in section 3.1.3.4 above.

3.2.1.1.2. Inclusion criteria

As with other qualitative approaches that use a small sample, IPA sample selection is based on "purposive" rather than "representative" sampling (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p56). With purposive sampling, participants are intentionally selected as

“information-rich” cases whose experiences relate to the phenomenon of interest (Churchill, 2022, p35), and there is no attempt to provide a representative sample of the population under investigation (something that would not be possible with such a small group of people). The main inclusion criterion in IPA tends to be that participants have experienced the phenomenon that is under investigation, and IPA studies generally look to maintain relative homogeneity in the sample (Eatough & Smith, 2008). In the present study, the phenomenon was identified as the experience of having been a transmasculine person in interactions with others. Accordingly, the inclusion criteria for participation in the study were as follows:

- i. All participants had to identify as transmasculine people.

All participants were asked to self-identify as transmasculine people. During the recruitment process I provided the following definition and asked if it felt congruent for potential recruits:

For the purposes of this study, I am defining a transmasculine person as anyone who was assigned female at birth, but who is not a woman and instead self-identifies as a man or with another masculine identity. This includes transgender men as well as non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals.

I also specified that participants could be at any stage in their social or physical transition.

- ii. All participants had to be adults

The age lower bound for the sample was 18 such that all participants were adults. The experiences of trans children and adolescents are specific and complex, and I did not have the scope to address them in the present study.

- iii. All participants had to live in the UK

In order to maintain some level of sociocultural homogeneity for the cross-case analysis, I required all participants to be currently living in the UK.

3.2.1.1.3. Recruitment

3.2.1.1.3.1. Locating participants

Prior to beginning the recruitment process, I developed recruitment flyers stating that I was looking for transmasculine participants for a trans-led research study about gender and communication. I specified that the research study was exploring transmasculine people's lived experiences of being in interactions with other people and that we would be exploring participants' feelings about their gender identities, their understandings of masculinity and their feelings about passing.

Prior to beginning the recruitment process, I had developed a recruitment plan that would have involved both posting about the research on social media and placing physical copies of the flyers in relevant community spaces around London. My first actions were to post the research flyers on my personal social media (Instagram) and in two private Facebook groups dedicated for transmasculine people in the UK. Upon seeing my post, five of my personal contacts also shared this post on their own social media accounts, one of which was a community organisation for transmasculine people. At this point I started to receive a number of inquiries from potential participants via email, as well as several people indicating their interest on the Facebook posts I had created. Following this initial interest, I decided to pause further recruitment activities to process the interest that I had already received. I was conscious that I did not wish to have to turn many people down from participating in the research after they had shown willingness to be involved.

During the screening and recruitment of the initial set of participants, I paid attention to the demographic characteristics of my recruits as I wished to ensure some level of diversity within the sample. While the purposive sampling approach for IPA does not strictly require demographic heterogeneity, it was nevertheless important to me to make sure that I had the experiences of a variety of different kinds of people included in the study. After screening the first six recruits, I was comfortable with the variety in levels of education, professional backgrounds and geography. There was also representation of those identifying as being neurodivergent, disabled or having a long-term health condition. However, at this point, all of my recruits were white, all were on testosterone and all but one were in their 20s or 30s. In order to offset this demographic homogeneity, I chose to modify my recruitment flyers, making clear that I was particularly interested in hearing from transmasculine people of colour, those

who were not on testosterone and those who were over the age of 35. I reposted these flyers on the original Facebook groups from which I had garnered the majority of the interest in the study. This strategy was successful, and I was able to recruit four further participants with greater variation in age and ethnic background, including one person who was not taking testosterone. The original and amended recruitment flyers can be seen in appendices 8.2 and 8.3 respectively.

3.2.1.1.3.2. Participant screening calls

Prior to beginning the main interview process, I held a 20-minute screening call with each of my ten participants. Nine of these were audiovisual calls using Zoom. One participant chose to do the call using a standard telephone call for accessibility reasons. The objectives of these screening calls were threefold:

i. Checking inclusion criteria

On these calls, I checked that participants met the inclusion criteria. I also asked a number of set demographic and related questions in order to get a sense of the diversity of my sample. Participants were informed that they did not need to answer these questions in order to participate in the study. I further asked participants what their pronouns were and whether they had any specific accessibility needs.

ii. To check that participants were comfortable taking part and able to provide voluntary consent

Prior to the screening calls, I had sent participants a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and the consent form to review (see Appendix 8.4 and 8.5). On these calls I checked that they had read and were comfortable with these documents and gave them an opportunity to ask any questions that they might have had about the research process.

iii. To build rapport and introduce myself to participants

These screening calls also served as an opportunity for me to meet and build rapport with participants. My hope was that it would help them to feel comfortable when we came to the main interview itself. I was conscious that the interview process would

ask for emotional openness from participants, and I wanted them to feel as comfortable and safe in opening up to me as possible.

3.2.1.1.4. Participant demographics

The details of the final participant sample can be found in this section. For the sake of ensuring participant confidentiality, I have chosen to list each participant with only a limited set of their demographic details. Where a further detail is relevant to a participant's experience, you will find it referenced as part of the findings and analysis.

Table 1: Participants' demographic details

Name¹	Gender identity²	Pronouns	Age	Region³
Kyle	Transgender man / male	He/him	25	North East
Jake	Trans man	He/him or they/them	30	North East
Marlowe	Trans man	He/him	20	East of England
Michael	Male / trans male	He/him	42	Northern Ireland
Scott	Male	He/him	30	Yorkshire and the Humber
Sam	Binary trans man	He/him	25	North West
Z	Transmasculine	They/them	33	London
Corey	Non-binary / transmasculine	They/them	44	London
Charlie	Male	He/him or they/them	22	London
Benji	A guy	He/him	24	London

¹All participant names used in this document are pseudonyms.

²Participants were asked to self-define their gender identities in their own words.

³Participants' geographical regions are identified in terms of ONS International Territorial Level 1 (ONS, n.d.)

In addition to these demographics, the following applied:

- Of the ten participants in this study, eight identified as White British, one as British Pakistani and one as Black British.
- Nine participants were currently taking testosterone. One was not taking testosterone and was not sure whether he would in the future.
- Four identified as being disabled or having a long-term health condition that impacted their day to day life.
- Six identified as neurodivergent while one person was not sure.
- Three participants had a college-level diploma or BTEC as their highest educational qualification, four had an undergraduate degree and three had a master's degree.

3.2.1.2. Interviews

3.2.1.2.1. Semi-structured interview rationale

Qualitative interviewing is the most common method of data collection in IPA studies (Eatough & Smith, 2008). This is due to the dialogic and flexible nature of semi-structured interviews, which allow the interviewer maximum opportunity to tailor the interview to each participant:

[I]t remains the case that the interview is by far the most common way of collecting data in IPA and for good reason – the real-time interaction with the participant gives major flexibility for the researchers in facilitating the participant in exploring their lived experience. (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p12)

The discursive nature of such interviews, when facilitated by an empathic and receptive interviewer, provides a safe and comfortable forum for participants to discuss sensitive topics, such as their gender and transition. The conversational format adds a collaborative element to the research (Reid et al., 2005) and enables the creation of rich and nuanced data in a warm and supportive setting. By 'rich' data in this context, I refer to data that is "experiential" (Bearman, 2019, p3), reflecting participant life as it is "lived, felt, undergone, made sense of, and accomplished" (Schwandt, 2007, p100). In practice, I interpret this to mean nuanced data that reflects participants' emotional experience of an event or part of their life, in which I

seek to explore what it was *like* for a participant to have the experiences that they have had, rather than looking for a 'factual' or superficial description of an event or experience.

A number of prior studies have indicated the effectiveness of using interviews with trans people to explore their experiences of the self. For instance, Teti et al. (2020) used interviews, along with image submission and group sessions, to investigate experiences of chest binding with transmasculine people. These qualitative methods elicited rich data, and the inclusion of individual interviews in the process improved accessibility for those who did not wish to reveal personal details about themselves in a group setting. Similarly, Corwin (2009) used interview data in exploring how genderqueer people construct their genders beyond the gender binary, demonstrating the efficacy of using interviews to collect thorough accounts of the self as it relates to gender and non-normative gender identities. Accordingly, I determined that qualitative interviews were an appropriate method of data collection for the present study.

3.2.1.2.2. Understanding interview data

In choosing whether or not to use semi-structured interviews for this study, it was further necessary to consider what form the interview data would take and, indeed, whether semi-structured interviews could be relied upon to produce data that would be a trustworthy representation of participants' experiences. Some have criticised qualitative interviewing in the past, suggesting that it is not possible to trust participants' account of their experiences in the interview setting (Chowdhury, 2015; Kvale, 1994). These objections have contained suggestions that participants will prioritise saying what they think researchers want to hear, or that they will change their accounts to 'come off better', failing to mention details of which they are ashamed or regretful.

A concern that participants might 'change' their accounts in the interview context is predicated by the assumption that there exists a real account that pre-exists the interview and the interviewer's questions. Edley and Litosseliti (2018) have suggested that such views are grounded in positivism, in that they assume there

exists somewhere an objective truth that is or is not recounted to the interviewer. Kvale (1994, p156) stated that this attitude likens the interviewer to a kind of collector, who is able to “collect verbal responses like botanists collect plants in nature.” For interviewer-botanists, the ideal interview is presupposed to be a “neutral device” used to gather data that are “essentially free-standing or independent of the (discourse of the) interviewer/moderator” (Edley & Litosseliti, 2018, p198; p199).

The positivist approach to interviewing is not compatible with IPA, in which the interviewer is understood to be an active participant in the construction of interview discourse with the participant (Eatough & Smith, 2008). Instead of being ‘free-standing’ and waiting to be collected, interview data are understood to be co-constructed, with both interviewer and participant navigating and shaping the context of the interview. The approach to interview discourse in IPA does differ from some more radically constructionist approaches, in which language and discourse are understood as the means by which phenomena themselves are produced “at both the social and personal levels” (Burr, 2015, p21). With these approaches, the way in which a phenomenon is expressed linguistically would be taken to be partly constitutive of the phenomenon itself, with language conceptualised as the means by which social reality is constructed (Willig, 2008a). Instead, a phenomenological epistemology assumes that there does exist a real phenomenon in the participant’s consciousness, and that they are seeking to *represent* this phenomenon through discourse, rather than constructing the phenomenon anew. In this way, a phenomenological approach would tend to understand language as a tool for communicating, rather than constructing, meaning (Large, 2008). Nevertheless, I agree with those IPA researchers who emphasise that, even while a participant might attempt to communicate the meaning of a phenomenon through language in the interview setting, their ability to do so is necessarily “contingent upon and constrained by the language of [their] culture” (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p8). Given the fundamental contingency of language as a semiotic system, even if there exists a ‘real’ experience or phenomenon within a participant’s consciousness that they are trying to communicate, it is only possible to do so through a constructed representation of that phenomenon.

Accordingly, if one is to understand a participant's talk to be a contextually dependent linguistic construction, it is necessary to understand the contextual factors that may influence the participant's construction. These factors might include the specific questions that the interviewer has asked, the participant's sense of the objectives of the research, how the participant feels in the interview setting, or indeed how the participant feels about the interviewer themselves. Holstein and Gubrium (1995, p42) have described how "the mere identity of the researcher primed respondent's stories", noting that, in response to talking to an expert, some participants were inclined to develop extensive and detailed accounts, while others felt "inhibited" by the authority figure. There are numerous factors that will have a bearing on how participants construct their experiences in the moment, but it is the context of the interview interaction that gives interview data its specificity. All interactions, including interviews, are unpredictable and dynamic, and both parties have a role in the discourse that is created. The participant relies on the presence of the interviewer and numerous other factors to create the context for their responses. Thus, that interactional context is an important constituent aspect of the participant's responses. To this point, Edley & Litosseliti (2018, p206) state that:

[A]ll such accounts are designed in ways that are sensitive to the contexts in which they make their appearance. In other words...there is no such thing as a context-free domain; no pure realm in which people simply 'tell it as it is'.

Accordingly, I did not view participant's accounts in this research study as a direct window into their experiences, but rather as contextually dependent linguistic constructions, where "knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p2). In this study, I understand the interview data to represent a participant's constructed account of their experiences and mental phenomena, contingent upon the specific interview context and the language available to them. With this in mind, my analysis focuses on the participants' accounts and descriptions, while also honouring the assumption that underlying these accounts exists a real experience that participants have sought to communicate to me.

3.2.1.2.3. Topic guide design

Before beginning my interviews, I designed an indicative topic guide to help me structure the interviews. In designing this guide, I was guided by recommendations that IPA interview questions should be phrased as neutral rather than value-laden or leading, should avoid jargon, and should be open, such that participants can respond in an expansive fashion that feels natural to them (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2003). In designing the guide, I created main questions as well as meaningful prompts that I could use with participants if they were not immediately comfortable answering the questions in depth.

The topic guide for the present study had six main sections, laid out below. Rather than strictly following the structure in this order, these sections served as a reminder to me of the main areas that I wished to cover in each of the interviews. This is a standard approach to undertaking semi-structured interviews across different disciplines (J. A. Smith et al., 2022).

Table 2: Topic guide structure

Section	Aim/ Focus	Detail
1	Introduction	An opening section in which I thanked participants for attending the interview, informed them about how the interview would proceed, reminded them about their rights to withdraw, stop or pause the interview at any time and gave them the opportunity to ask questions.
2	Experiential/narrative	A section in which I asked questions to elicit expansive and open descriptions of participants' experiences of being transmasculine and how they interpreted their experiences in different contexts. I was minimally directive in this first main section, hoping to help participants to gain comfort in the interview setting through speaking in whatever way felt best for them about their life as a transmasculine person.

3	Passing	In this section, I sought to understand participants' interpretations and feelings about passing. I was looking to understand both what participants did to pass in interactions and whether these strategies were impacted by specific interactional contexts.
4	Masculinity	Here I asked participants about what masculinity meant to them. I explored whether there were any ways of speaking or behaving in interactions that they saw to be particularly masculine, and how they related to their own masculinity.
5	Identity intersections	In this short section, I asked participants about how their experiences of being transmasculine in interactions intersected with any other aspects of their identity or self.
6	Wrap-up	In this final section I wrapped up the interview, asking participants to choose a pseudonym for use in the thesis, eliciting any further questions or comments, and checking in on how participants were feeling after the interview.

The full indicative topic guide can be found in Appendix 8.6.

3.2.1.2.4. Pilot interview

Prior to beginning the main interviews, I performed one pilot interview with a test participant. I used this interview to practise the interviewing process, to check that the topic guide was accessible to participants, and whether it would elicit data with the richness that I needed to undertake interpretative phenomenological analysis. At the end of the interview, I asked my pilot participant to evaluate the interview process, and to suggest anything that could have been changed to improve their experience of the interview.

The interview went well, and the participant did not offer any suggestions for improvement of the topic guide or my interviewing style. While superficially gratifying, this may have been due to a feeling of reticence on the part of the participant to offer critique to me, especially if they considered me to be the expert on the research process. I attempted to make the interaction sufficiently comfortable for them to share their thoughts, but they nevertheless still may have felt uncomfortable doing so due to a reluctance to criticise me or my work. With this in mind, in the future I would consider alternative ways to elicit pilot participant feedback in such a way that they might feel more comfortable to offer constructive criticism. This could include asking the participant to write down their thoughts, perhaps when no longer with me, or alternatively asking them more directive questions about the interview experience.

Upon listening back to the pilot interview, I myself identified some areas for improvement that informed how I undertook later interviews. While the pilot interview ran smoothly, I believe that I benefitted from having a fluent and willing pilot participant who seemed to feel comfortable describing their emotional experience. There were a few moments where I felt that I had been unclear in my questioning or prompts. For instance, at one point I asked the following question in response to a comment the participant made about feeling more confident in how they were perceived since having transitioned:

Is that confident in terms of- is it that sense of feeling more like your outward expression aligns more closely with how you feel you kind of "should" look, or is it in terms of um feeling like you're going to be perceived- is it about kind of perception or kind of embodiment, or both?

In listening to this question back, I was not pleased with my interviewing technique. For one, I felt that I had phrased this question unclearly in a way that most participants would have found difficult to understand; indeed, I myself found it difficult to parse the meaning of my question in retrospect. In addition, I felt that the question I asked had been insufficiently open, leading the participant to respond with one of the two options I had given, rather than giving them scope for a more expansive answer. Furthermore, I felt that the term 'embodiment' might be too theoretical a word and not one that all would understand or naturally use.

For this interview specifically, the participant did not seem to take issue with the question, and responded:

I think it's both. You know it's a lot [pauses] it's a lot easier to like go out when I'm already happier with who I am when I'm not being perceived.

While my lack of clarity or potentially inaccessible language had not derailed the interaction in this instance, I felt conscious of how it could have done so in another interaction with another participant. Similarly, if I had not framed the question as an 'either/or' choice, even this participant may have answered in a way that was more congruent with their own sense of their experience, rather than my binary framing.

I did not make any significant changes to the topic guide itself after the pilot interview as I felt that the guide had worked well. However, I did add in some more prompts that I could use to elicit answers from participants that were not leading or unclear. In addition, and most notably, I thought carefully about my interviewing technique, and remained mindful throughout the following interviews of the need to be clear and understandable in my interviewing style, and not to shut down any conversations with closed or binary questioning.

3.2.1.2.5. Doing the main IPA interviews

Five of the interviews for this study were undertaken using videoconferencing software over Zoom, while the other five took place in person. I used Zoom to interview those who lived too far away for me to easily access from London, and interviewed participants from London and the South East in person. For these participants, I offered the option of doing the interview in their own home or in a private room at City in central London, stressing that they should choose whichever felt most comfortable for them. Three of the in-person interviewees chose to do the interviews in their own homes, while two chose to come to City. I recorded the video interviews using Zoom, while the in-person interviews were audio recorded on my laptop. The interviews varied in length, ranging from Jake's interview (1 hour and 15 minutes) to Kyle's (1 hour and 54 minutes). Across all ten interviews, the average interview duration was 1 hour and 30 minutes and the total length of the dataset came to 15 hours and 2 minutes.

In practice, the manner in which IPA interviews are conducted is much the same as other qualitative semi-structured interviews. Given the phenomenological focus, focus is always placed on the participant's lived experiences, how they felt about these experiences and the significance that they held for them. In doing these interviews, my intention was to be warm and receptive to participant experience and to help them to feel as comfortable as possible in the interview context. My approach was led by Churchill's (2022, p42) guidance as follows:

The interviewer should...be empathic where compassion is called for, and allow the time and space for interviewees to feel safe and comfortable to reveal themselves. The researcher who generates a warm, embracing quality within the encounter is sometimes rewarded with the most fascinating revelations.

Given the semi-structured nature of these interviews, I tried to remain flexible such that I could respond to participant responses and be open to the areas that they wished to discuss, acknowledging participants to be the "experiential experts of the topic under investigation" (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p13). The interviews in this study were fairly expansive and tended towards an unstructured approach, although I was still able to cover all the topics in the guide with each participant. It was my sense that taking such an open approach allowed for richer data and gave participants scope to organically move the interview towards aspects of their experiences that felt most meaningful or resonant for them (Eatough & Smith, 2008).

3.2.1.3. Reflections on the data collection process

3.2.1.3.1. Recruitment reflections

The recruitment for this research was fairly swift and straightforward. In this respect, I was able to benefit from being a member of a number of in-group social media groups that enabled me to easily publish my research flyers to transmasculine people across the country. I did not struggle to find participants to fill the sample, and indeed had to turn a few people down due to oversubscription. I believe that there were a few factors that influenced the enthusiasm from the community. Firstly, I was offering a thank you payment (£20 in shopping vouchers) to all those who attended the interview. I imagine this served as an incentive for some who might have

previously been undecided about volunteering. Further discussion of the ethical implications of this thank you payment can be found in section 3.2.3.1 below. In addition, I believe that my participants may have been particularly inclined to take part due to the researcher (me) being another transmasculine person. While I did not ask participants directly, a number of them intimated as such, and this interpretation aligns with Rosenberg & Tilley's (2021) findings that trans people feel more trusting and comfortable in engaging in research that is led by a trans person. Expecting this to be the case, and hoping to put my participants at ease, I had stated explicitly on the recruitment flyer that the study was 'trans-led'. Furthermore, a few participants expressed enthusiasm to participate due to a sense that the research was important or meaningful. In these cases, I believe that participants felt that contributing their time to the study could be beneficial to the transmasculine community at large.

3.2.1.3.2. Interview reflections

Overall, the interviews for this study went well. In almost all instances I felt satisfied that I was able to produce the richness of data with participants that I had hoped for. As discussed in section 3.2.1.2.5 above, five of the interviews took place in person and the other five took place using Zoom teleconferencing software. Prior to beginning the interviews, I had been concerned that I would not be able to achieve the same level of rapport and connection with participants online as I could in person, whether due to technical issues or the fact of being in dialogue in a more (physically) remote way (Olliffe et al., 2021; Weller, 2017). Having primarily done interviews in person prior to this study, I had wondered if being physically in the same room was a necessary factor in developing sufficient rapport for a comfortable and expansive interview. In the end, however, these concerns were not realised, and I noticed no difference in the richness of data that I was able to produce with participants online as compared to in person.

While I did set out to cover participants' experiences with a loose order in mind (as per the topic guide), I was surprised to find that participants would often spontaneously direct the conversations themselves towards the areas that I wished to cover. For instance, my initial questions about participants' experiences of being transmasculine would often organically lead into discussions of masculinity and

passing without me leading them there directly. I considered this to be significant in that it emphasised the extent to which these concepts felt, at least to some, to be intuitively linked. In addition, while I had planned to discuss intersectional identities in section 5 towards the end of the interview (see topic guide structure section 3.2.1.2.3 above), in almost all cases, participants had already raised and discussed other elements of their identity that they found to be significant earlier in the interview. These aspects were often richly generative in our exploration of their experiences, for instance as regards Z and Charlie's experiences of being transmasculine people of colour, Sam's experiences of being a transmasculine birthing parent, and Kyle's experiences of interacting as an autistic person. I still tended to draw the interviews to a close with an open question about other aspects of the participants' identities, however there was generally a sense that this was something that we had already covered in depth earlier in the conversation.

Throughout these interviews, I felt conscious that at times we were touching upon highly sensitive topics, including conversations around grief, mental health struggles, sex and various others. During these conversations I tried as far as possible to be intentional about the emotional flow of the interviews, seeking to move between different topics as and when it seemed most appropriate for participants. Despite having made clear that participants did not have to discuss anything that was distressing for them, I was aware that they might feel uncomfortable or awkward steering the conversation of their own accord. With this in mind, I felt it was my responsibility to be sensitive to any shifts in their mood as the interviews progressed. While it did not seem to be the case that the interviews caused significant distress to any of the participants, I had safeguarding procedures in place should this have happened (see section 3.2.3.2 below for further details). In the end, no safeguarding action was needed.

3.2.2. Data analysis

To perform the analysis for this study, I have used the analytic terminology and stages laid out in Smith et al.'s (2022) 2nd edition of their guide to performing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. In the following sections, I will explain how I undertook each of their recommended stages in analysing my transcripts using IPA.

3.2.2.1. Transcription

Before beginning the analysis process, I created a verbatim transcription for each interview from the recording. In transcribing the interviews for this project, I was conscious of the idea that transcription is not a neutral phenomenon (“transcribing always relies on choices” (Mondada, 2018, p89)), and that the very manner in which a researcher chooses to transcribe their data can have a significant impact on the way that the data is studied. For this study I chose a transcription style that prioritised content over form, with a focus on *what* was said, rather than a detailed investigation of *how* it was said (as would be more common in a phonetic or conversation analysis study, for instance). This aligns with standard practice in IPA, for which transcription is recommended to be at the “semantic level” (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p65). In keeping with this style, I included all the words that were spoken, along with those paralinguistic features that I interpreted as being salient, for instance: false starts, significant pauses and laughter (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2003). I did not, however, include a detailed transcription of all the participants’ recorded prosodic features and phonetic characteristics. I transcribed all the interview recordings by hand without the assistance of transcription software. Through doing so, I hoped to ensure maximum familiarity with the recordings and transcripts ahead of beginning the analytic process. The transcription was time-consuming, with each interview taking at least a day or two to transcribe in full. Nevertheless, I was glad of my familiarity with the transcripts when it came to the analysis stages, particularly when developing themes within and across the transcripts. Feeling immersed in the data helped me to stay grounded in the specificity of participants’ accounts, even when taking a more removed perspective at a later stage in the analysis.

3.2.2.2. Analytic stages

Once the interview transcriptions were complete, I began the analysis phase as laid out by Smith et al. (2022, p78-104). Due to the “idiographic commitment” in IPA, it is preferred that the analytic stages are performed on each transcript individually prior to engaging in cross-case analysis (Smith et al., 2022, p78). Accordingly, I performed all these stages up to and including the development of Personal Experiential

Themes for each transcript in turn, before moving on to establishing Group Experiential Themes.

3.2.2.2.1. Step one: reading and re-reading

Smith et al. (2022, p78) advise that the first step of an IPA analysis is “immersing oneself” in the original data. Thus, to begin my analysis of a transcript, I read it through several times. In line with Smith et al.’s caution against “‘quick and dirty’ synopsis” (p78), my intention here was to slow down my analysis process and to ensure that the individual participant and their experiences became my focus. In line with Smith et al.’s recommendation, I created a set of initial notes for each interview, in which I noted down my recollections of the interview, my experiences of doing it, and any other observations that stuck out to me. This document was not structured, but rather a loose collection of all my initial thoughts and observations. This helped me to reduce the “noise” in my head around each interview and, in noting down my thoughts, I no longer found myself feeling the need to actively remember them, giving me mental space to think more creatively and interpretatively about the data.

3.2.2.2.2. Step two: exploratory noting

I next moved onto the exploratory noting stage of the analysis. This process is intended to ensure “a growing familiarity with the transcript” and to allow the analyst to begin “to identify specific ways by which the participant talks about, understands and thinks about an issue” (Smith et al., 2022, p79). This stage involved the closest line-by-line engagement with the text throughout the process, and I spent a significant amount of time going through each interview by hand, making my notes on printed copies of the transcripts. Smith et al. (2022) describe the exploratory noting process as being close to a “free textual analysis” (p79), in which the researcher is free to comment upon whatever sticks out to them, without feeling the need to create analysis that must be included in the final set of interpretations. Their key recommendation here is that the exploratory noting phase is designed to *grow* the dataset; crucially, these notes should “clearly show your input and be *more* than the original data” (Smith et al., 2022, p86). In order to organise this noting, they recommend arranging these notes into separate categories. I chose to separate my

notes into *descriptive* and *interpretative* notes, as I felt that these categories best reflected the dual layers of interpretation at play in an interpretative analysis. I used Smith et al.'s (2022) presentation of Ricoeur's double hermeneutics to inform my descriptive and interpretative noting categories, with my descriptive noting loosely aligning with a hermeneutics of empathy, and my interpretative noting aligning with the hermeneutics of suspicion, explored below:

3.2.2.2.1. Descriptive noting

With the descriptive noting, I set out to create a set of annotations that reflected participant experiences in the way that they had described them to me. Here, I was led by Smith et al.'s (2022, p79) comment that: "there is likely to be a core of comments which have a clear phenomenological focus, and stay close to the participant's explicit meaning." While Smith et al. (2022) do not seem to state this explicitly, I understood this set of notes to reflect Ricoeur's 'hermeneutics of empathy', in which the researcher tries to see what the experience was like "from the participant's view" by trying to "stand in their shoes" (Smith et al., 2022, p30). In making these notes, I was attempting to stay as close as possible to participants' own accounts of their experiences and, as far as possible, to keep my own interpretative footprint to a minimum.

3.2.2.2.2. Interpretative noting

Additionally, I developed another set of exploratory notes led by Smith et al.'s (2022, p79) description of a form of noting that involves:

[T]hinking about the context of [the participant's] concerns (their lived world), and identifying more abstract concepts that can help you to make sense of the patterns of meaning in their account.

With these notes, the analyst is advised to "work at a more abstract level", representing "a move away from the explicit claims of the participant" (p84). I interpreted this activity to be related to Ricoeur's hermeneutic of suspicion, which Smith et al. (2022, p30) describe as motivating the researcher to take an interrogative approach to the data, with the analysis "mov[ing] away from representing what the participant would say themselves, and becom[ing] more reliant

on the interpretative work of the researcher”. With the interpretative noting, I sought to look at the data through a more abstract lens, interpreting participant experiences within the wider context of their other experiences and sociocultural context. I was encouraged by guidance that phenomenological interpretation *should* involve some kind of transformation or work by the interpreting researcher, even if this interpretation should remain always grounded in participant experience (Churchill, 2022). I made both the descriptive and interpretative notes directly onto the transcripts, distinguished by different coloured ink.

Below is an example of a short interview transcript from my interview with Scott. Here Scott is describing what it used to feel like for him when he was misgendered. This image shows both the descriptive and interpretative noting. With the descriptive noting, I have tried to stay close to Scott’s interpretation of his experience. My intention here was to create a set of notes that functioned like a summary of the most salient aspect of Scott’s narrative. With the interpretative noting, I have engaged in a more inquisitive level of analysis of the text. I have asked questions around Scott’s deeper meaning and been thoughtful about the language that he was using to describe his experiences. Here, my own language has strayed from Scott’s as I have interpreted his words in the ways that I would conceptualise them. I have been free with my interpretations of Scott’s experiences knowing that nothing I write at this stage will necessarily be included in the final analysis.

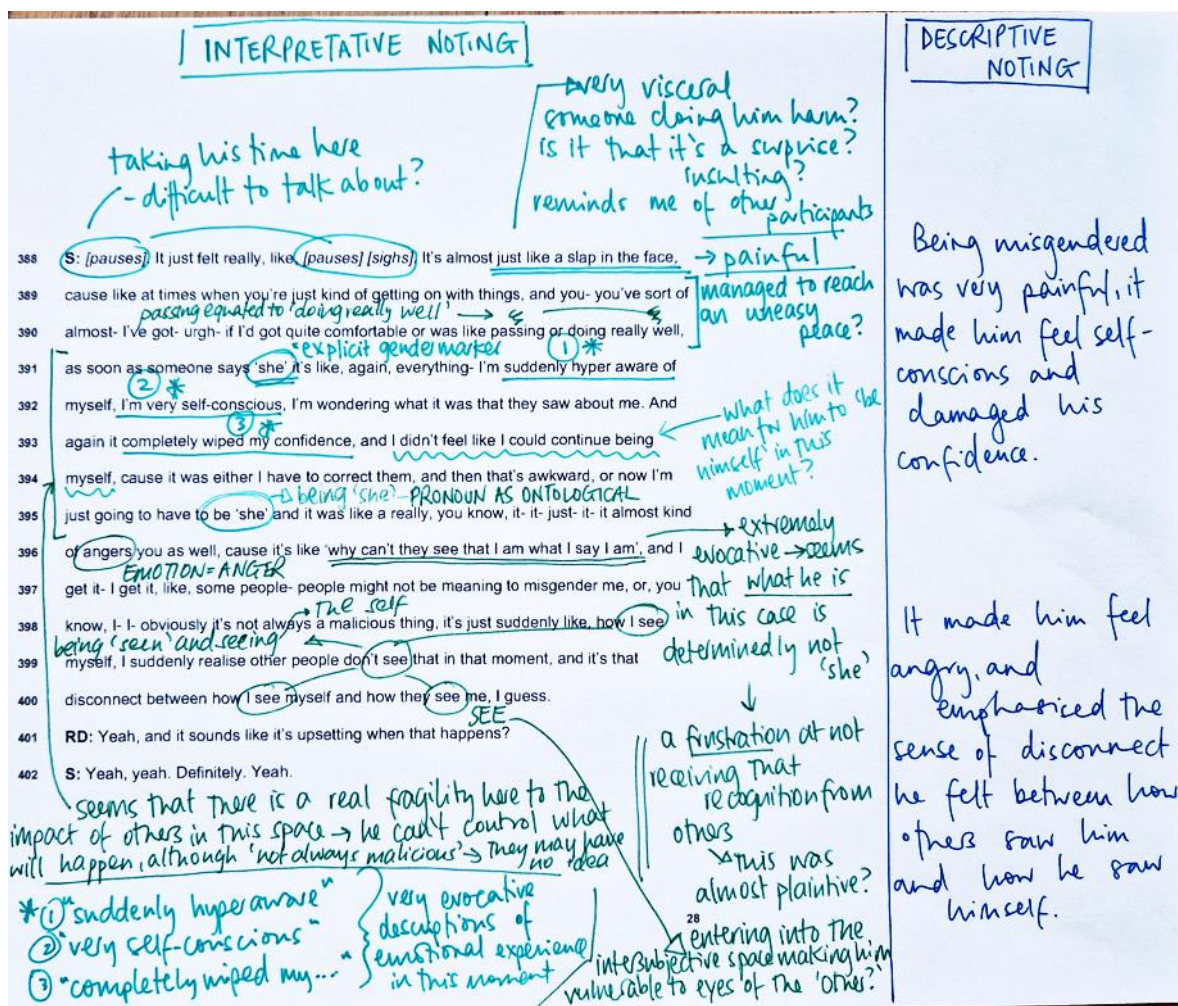


Figure 1: Annotated transcript extract demonstrating exploratory noting

3.2.2.2.3. Step three: constructing experiential statements

After completing my exploratory noting, I moved on to the process of developing experiential statements. Smith et al. (2022) state that these statements should be concise and pithy summaries of what was important in the exploratory noting, serving to consolidate and crystallise the analysis from the exploratory noting stage. The intention here is that these statements should both speak to specific elements of participant data as well as reflecting researcher interpretation:

Statements are usually expressed as phrases which speak to the experiential core of the piece and contain enough particularity to be grounded and enough abstraction to be conceptual. (Smith et al., 2022, p87)

With the experiential statements, Smith et al. (J. A. Smith et al., 2022) state that the analyst should seek to re-consolidate the data after it was grown during the exploratory noting stage. At this point, I was finding that I had amassed a very large quantity of notes, so paring this down into experiential statements felt appropriate. This stage involved a breaking up of the narrative flow of the interviews, and through the formation of this set of statements, I found that my analytic focus started to shift from the participants' words to this higher level of analysis. For each transcript I developed 60-80 experiential statements. I kept the interpretative process carefully documented in an Excel spreadsheet where I could trace all experiential statements back to the original transcript sections that had contributed to them.

The extract below shows the section of Scott's transcript from Figure 1, with the experiential statements included. Here you can see how I have distilled the interpretative and descriptive noting into two short experiential statements, attempting to maintain the most salient aspects of both sets of notes.

EXPERIENTIAL STATEMENTS	INTERPRETATIVE NOTING	DESCRIPTIVE NOTING
Being misgendered causes pain and significant hyperawareness of the self	<p>taking his time here - difficult to talk about?</p> <p>very visceral someone doing him harm? is it that it's a surprise? insulting? reminds me of other participants</p> <p>→ painful managed to reach an uneasy place?</p> <p>→ explicit gender marker (1)*</p> <p>(2)*</p> <p>(3)*</p> <p>what does it mean for him to be himself in this moment?</p> <p>→ extremely evocative → seems that what he is</p> <p>→ The self</p> <p>→ being 'seen' and 'seeing'</p> <p>→ in this case is determinedly not 'she'</p> <p>→ SEE</p> <p>→ a frustration at not receiving that recognition from others</p> <p>→ this was almost plaintive?</p> <p>→ entering into the intersubjective space making him vulnerable to eyes of the 'other'?</p>	<p>Being misgendered was very painful, it made him feel self-conscious and damaged his confidence.</p> <p>It made him feel angry, and emphasized the sense of disconnect he felt between how others saw him and how he saw himself.</p>
Self was vulnerable to disaffirmation by others in interactions → not being seen.	<p>of anger you as well, cause it's like 'why can't they see that I am what I say I am', and I</p> <p>EMOTION: ANGER</p> <p>know, I-I obviously it's not always a malicious thing, it's just suddenly like, how I see</p> <p>being 'seen' and 'seeing'</p> <p>myself, I suddenly realise other people don't see that in that moment, and it's that</p> <p>disconnect between how I see myself and how they see me, I guess.</p> <p>RD: Yeah, and it sounds like it's upsetting when that happens?</p> <p>S: Yeah, yeah, Definitely, Yeah.</p> <p>seems that there is a real fragility here to the impact of others in this space → he can't control what will happen, although 'not always malicious' → they may have no idea</p> <p>* (1) 'suddenly hyperaware'</p> <p>* (2) 'very self-conscious'</p> <p>* (3) 'completely wiped my...'</p> <p>very evocative descriptions of emotional experience in this moment</p>	

Figure 2: Annotated transcript extract demonstrating experiential statements

3.2.2.2.4. Step four: developing Personal Experiential Themes (PETs)⁴

After constructing a list of experiential statements, I proceeded to the development of Personal Experiential Themes (PETs). In order to search for connections across the experiential statements, Smith et al. (2022) recommend printing and cutting out each individual experiential statement and shuffling these pieces of paper around, trying out different thematic clusters as feels appropriate. Here I was looking for convergences between different elements of a participant's experience, seeing if there were aspects that fit together through some similarity in the participant's account. For each participant I tested a number of different clusters as I tried to find appropriate ways of grouping the data. This process was difficult at times, and I found that I had to test out many formulations in some cases before I found something that felt like a coherent structure. With these thematic groupings, I was looking to develop structured clusters that comprehensively communicated the most important aspects of a participant's experiences along with my interpretations from the earlier noting stages. Once I had established clusters that worked for the participant, I gave names to the clusters (the PETs) and also established a set of sub-themes within each PET. For example, the following table lays out the PETs and related sub-themes developed from my analysis of Kyle's interview transcript:

Table 3: PETs and sub-themes: Kyle

	Personal Experiential Theme (PET)	PET sub-theme
1	A sensitive and fluid approach to gender	Kyle is highly sensitive to intersubjective gender dynamics
		He has a fluid approach to gender
2	Constructing his gender identity is just one part of a	Constructing his gender identity is one way in which he constructs an identity he considers to be socially appropriate

⁴In writing up this stage, I have amalgamated Smith et al.'s (2022) 'step four: searching for connections across experiential statements' (p90) and 'step five: naming the personal experiential themes (PETs) and consolidating and organising them in a table' (p94) for the sake of concision.

	wider identity construction in the social world	Both constructing his gender identity and constructing his wider identity feel like a part of his experience as an autistic person
3	A consistent draw to a masculine identity, with periods of identity instability and hyperfemininity	Constructing a masculine identity has always felt more congruent for him than feminine identities, in which he feels like an imposter
		In times of emotional ill-health and uncertainty about his identity, he constructed a hyperfeminine identity
4	The more comfortable he feels in an interaction, the more freely he feels he can express his gender identity	As he becomes more comfortable in his body and identity, gender is a less prominent concern for him
		As his body becomes more perceptibly masculine, he feels more comfortable expressing himself in a feminine way that feels right for him
5	He engages in strategic semiotic constructions of masculinity, in some instances driven by fear	Part of his experience of being trans in public space is characterised by fear, in particular of being clocked
		At times he experiences extreme self-consciousness around the way he is being perceived
		In some interactions he consciously constructs a masculine presentation
		But the masculinity he constructs doesn't always feel congruent for him

For each transcript, I established up to 5 PETs, each of which consisted of up to 4 sub-themes. Remembering the IPA directive that analysis and interpretation should always be firmly grounded in the participant data, I kept thorough accounting for each participant, linking the PETs and sub-themes through the experiential statements to the constituent transcript extracts in my analytic Excel spreadsheets. Once I had established this spreadsheet of PETs and all subordinate categorical

groupings for a transcript. I was then able to move on to the next transcript and start the process again. Tables of the PETs and sub-themes established for each participant can be found in Appendix 8.1.

The image below is a screenshot of a section of Kyle's analysis spreadsheet, showing how the PETs can be traced back to the raw data in each instance. The PET in question is PET K5: 'He engages in strategic semiotic constructions of masculinity, in some instances driven by fear', and the sub-theme being shown is sub-theme K5d: 'But the masculinity he constructs doesn't always feel congruent for him'. There are five experiential statements constituting this sub-theme.⁵

PET.K5	He engages in strategic semiotic construction of masculinity, in some instances driven by fear			
<i>PET.K5d</i>	<i>But the masculinity he constructs doesn't always feel congruent for him</i>			
	EXPERIENTIAL STATEMENT	PAGE	LINE	TRANSCRIPT EXTRACT
	He feels negatively towards prescriptive or harmful norms of masculinity	94-95	1366-1382	K: Yeah, so FTM Passing is, um, it's one of my most hated, um, places on the internet for FTM people. And what it is basically, it's a sub-a subreddit dedicated to giving other FTM people at various stages of transition passing tips. What ends up happening is alternative guys or alternative masculine people, but I'll say guys for the sake of ease, so alternative guys or people who have their hair longer, or people who wear glasses—I saw somebody tell someone else to take their glasses off to pass better. RD: [makes a face] K: I know right! RD: [wearing glasses] No chance for me [laughs]! K: [also wearing glasses] I know right [laughs] like I don't wanna be blind to pass, like damn. I mean at least I'll pass because I can't see myself, but that's not good [laughs] RD: [laughs] K: You know those guys get told to take out their piercings because cisgender guys don't have piercings, and it's very, in my opinion, very toxic. And it's that other side of passing that has to be acknowledged, that in some degree, certain members of the- there's transphobia through internalised transphobia, or other models growing up, they enforce social rules on themselves which don't exist.
	There is an internal tension related to the euphoria of passing	45	640-647	K: Yeah absolutely, I was totally shocked because there was that- I guess that inner demon, being like 'oh my god, you pass, well done', it was that small part of us that was like secretly a little euphoric that I pass well enough to be, I guess, ostracised a little bit by people who were jealous of medical transition. Which kind of made me feel worse [laughs] RD: Why did it feel like a demon, why does that make you feel worse? [10.50.16] K: Because, I dunno, it was kind of weird because like, I felt- I felt bad about it. I don't know why I felt bad about it, actually.
	He consciously employs masculine personas that make him feel safer, despite the ideological issues he has with the persona	73	1049-1061	K: It feels like- it definitely feels like a masculinity, but it feels like I'm conforming- 'conforming'? That is not a word. Conforming to, like the cisheteronormative ideology, like the idea of what a masculine person should be. RD: Sure K: Like, when I'm embodying that persona, it's like I've gone back to toxic masculinity and I'm applying all the tenets that I associate with that. When I'm doing that persona, that's kind of, like, the idea of like male that you see in like textbooks, or like that you learn about through language books and things like that. It's the kind of pack mentality, like this is a group of lads, and lads do these things. RD: Sure K: I like that, but with a smidge of not misogyny, would be great [laughs]. Like, I feel like it very much comes from there, like it gives us like modernised 1950s kind of workaholic man vibes
	He semiotically constructs a macho version of masculinity	77	1110-1116	K: Oh my god, so much. Like Wetherspoons [laughs], just- I just have to put it out there, Wetherspoons in general I've used that approach, especially if I'm trying to get in or out of a seat, or I'm trying to get by someone or whatever, the bus driver, the postman, people in ASDA sometimes. I just use it as my sort of like outside, and I don't always go the full like 'ah mate' thing like that, but I kind of use that body language, like the sort of very open- open chest, like wide shoulders, the relaxed chill vague manspread, maybe walking like you need to go to the bathroom kind of vibe.
	He's less scared about being perceived to be trans now but it still feels like something risky - how will people respond	29	401-407	K: And that gets you through. And it works for me, at the minute. I think it's changed because I don't go outside and I'm not like scared anymore because like, there is some fear I guess in being clockable, like in that thing of like, especially with the right wing media and stuff like that, there is a fear in, like, if people see me as a transgender person, like what are their reactions gonna be? Like if they see me and assume I'm transgender, like, obviously I have a husband so I'm gay, so they're more likely to focus on that than the trans thing.

Figure 3: Analysis spreadsheet section for Kyle's transcript

3.2.2.2.5. Step five: looking for themes across the cases: developing Group Experiential Themes (GETs)

⁵ I have omitted two additional transcript extracts under the first experiential statement for the sake of space.

Once I had completed each of the analysis stages for all the transcripts, I moved on to establishing Group Experiential Themes (GETs) across the whole dataset. In doing so, I followed Smith et al.'s (2022, p100) guidance that: "within cross-case analysis, we are trying to highlight the shared and unique features of the experience across the contributing participants". To achieve this, I undertook much the same process as I had when establishing the PETs, engaging in a manual clustering exercise. Instead of looking for convergence within the transcripts, here I was looking across the dataset, establishing where participants' experiences had converged and diverged in ways that felt meaningful. As with the PETs, while some of these clusters emerged quickly and organically, others required more thinking and interpretative work. Some versions of GETs that I tried out were akin to scaled up versions of PETs. Others were new creations, consisting of an amalgamation of experience and interpretations from across multiple transcripts. This process took many attempts until I had achieved a grouping that seemed to do justice to the key experiential concerns of the participants, while also ensuring a coherent and persuasive narrative through the GETs (Nizza et al., 2021). As with the PETs, there were a number of sub-themes constituting each GET. Tables displaying the GETs are reflected here:

Table 4: All GETs with sub-themes

	Group Experiential Theme (GET)	GET sub-theme
1	Re-interpreting masculinity in interactions	Congruence and meaning in masculinity
		Doing masculinity in interactions
2	Feelings of vulnerability in interactions	Fearing harm from others in interactions
		Hyperawareness of the self
3	Experiences and interpretations of passing	Doing passing
		Complex relationships with passing

Table 5: All GETs with sub-themes and sub-sections

	Group Experiential Theme (GET)	GET sub-theme	Sub-theme sub-sections
1			"It just feels right, I guess": finding congruence in

	Re-interpreting masculinity in interactions	Congruence and meaning in masculinity	transmasculine identity and expression
			<i>"I think for me it's just a feeling?"</i> : finding meaning in masculinity
		Doing masculinity in interactions	<i>"I'm so scared of making people feel uncomfortable"</i> : doing alternative masculinities
			<i>"It feels like a power that I don't want to have"</i> : experiences of interactions with women
2	Feelings of vulnerability in interactions	Fearing harm from others in interactions	<i>"Why can't they see that I am what I say I am?!"</i> : experiences of being misgendered
			<i>"It's a scary time to be a trans person"</i> : fears of violence and harassment
		Hyperawareness of the self	<i>"I'm so aware of how I'm perceived, all day, every day"</i> : feeling looked at
			<i>"Do they think I'm a girl?"</i> : feelings of vulnerability during the early stages of transition
			<i>"I'm just a dude on testosterone and I'm happy"</i> : increasing comfort in interactions as transitions progress
3	Experiences and interpretations of passing	Doing passing	<i>"Men kind of tend to be more like this"</i> : masculinising speech
			<i>"I hate the way that my body tends to do certain actions"</i> : masculinising appearance and behaviours
		Complex relationships with passing	<i>"You get the vibe pretty quickly that this is not an LGBT friendly space"</i> : passing in context
			<i>"It's that other side of passing that has to be acknowledged"</i> : passing as cisnormative
			<i>"Passing in the way that makes me feel nice"</i> : passing beyond gender

3.2.2.3. Reflections on the data analysis process

For the most part, the data analysis process for this study went well. I was glad to have access to step-by-step guidance from Smith et al. (2022) that helped me to maintain a structured and systematic approach to the analysis process. The in-depth nature of the analysis process meant that I felt I had a close understanding of each of my participant transcripts before moving away from the idiographic and looking across the sample. Through the analysis journey, I felt that I was able to establish the depth and intimacy of analysis that was appropriate for an IPA study.

The most significant challenge encountered throughout the analysis process involved maintaining momentum despite the enormous amount of data that there was to analyse. With around 15 hours of interview data in total and an iterative analytic process, the analysis took me a substantial amount of time: around 5 months full time from starting the first transcript to having my first coherent draft of GETs. I spent an average of 7 days transcribing and analysing each interview, coming to around 49 hours per interview. This equated to around 490 hours of analysis in total, or 70 days, followed by an additional period in which I engaged in cross-case analysis and the development of the GETs. During this time, there were moments where it was difficult to remain motivated and to maintain my concentration, and I experienced self-doubt about the fact that the analysis process was taking so long. In retrospect, I am glad that I performed the analysis so thoroughly, as this contributed to the richness of analysis that is required for an idiographic study, however there were times where the process was difficult.

Throughout the analysis process, I generally considered my status as an in-group member to be helpful and additive. In being a transmasculine person like my participants, I found that we often had some level of shared knowledge and experiences which, I felt, helped me to contextualise and understand what it felt like for participants to negotiate their experiences of transmasculinity in interactions. I was also mindful, however, of how being an 'outsider' might have been useful in certain instances. For example, in one case I re-read a transcript after I had undertaken the exploratory noting and found that I had given very little attention to a participant's story about feeling too scared to speak in public prior to transitioning

due to the pitch of his voice. While I had noted that this was meaningful from the perspective of attitudes towards vocal pitch, I had not paid attention to the emotional gravity of what the participant had been saying, I think largely because this is a story that sounds familiar to me. I have heard something similar from a number of trans peers and, in its familiarity, I believe that I did not initially afford this story the significance that it deserved. It is my expectation that an outsider might have treated this differently, particularly if they were hearing about this aspect of trans experience for the first time.

While I was certainly conscious of the things that I had in common with participants, I was also mindful of the fact that there were aspects of our identities that we did not share. I resonated with Rosenberg & Tilley's (2021) treatment of trans researchers in trans research as having an insider-outsider perspective, feeling a balance between both points of experiential convergence and divergence with participants. In performing my analysis, I tried to stay mindful of the negotiation of this dynamic in my interpretations, particularly trying not to project interpretations of my own experiences on to theirs. While an interpretative approach holds space for my own fore-meanings to impact my interpretations and analysis, I was keen to stay grounded in participant experience and meaning making, preferring to be mindful of and careful with my own footprint on the data.

3.2.3. Ethical considerations

Before beginning the interviews for this research, my study proposal underwent a full ethical review by the City, University of London School of Health & Psychological Sciences Research Ethics Committee. In this section I will summarise the key ethical considerations and actions to address them that I identified in my ethics application. The full ethics application and committee approval letter can be found in Appendices 8.7 and 8.8.

3.2.3.1. The need for informed and voluntary consent

In ensuring an ethical approach to this study, it was important that participants were able to provide consent to participate that was both informed and fully voluntary. On informed consent, Mallinson (2018, p64) stated that:

Informed consent is at the core of human subjects research. This concept rests on the premise that an individual must voluntarily give permission to participate in research – without coercion, with full opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time and without repercussions, and with full understanding of the risks and responsibilities.

In order to ensure that participant consent was fully informed, all participants were emailed a Participant Information Sheet and consent form (see Appendix 8.4 and 8.5) to review upon expressing interest in taking part in the research.

In order to ensure that participant consent was voluntary, I made clear to participants that they were under no obligation to participate and that they could withdraw from the research without any penalty or need for explanation. Before beginning the interview, I restated that they could stop the interview at any point and retroactively withdraw their consent if they wished to. Participants were also made aware that they could withdraw their data from the research after their interview up until the point where I began my analysis. I contacted them prior to this date to remind them that they were still able to withdraw if they wished to, although none chose to.

As a thank you for participating in the research process, I offered all participants who attended the main research interview a £20 shopping voucher. These payments were intended to show my gratitude to participants for giving their time to the research and to ensure that it was not only me as the researcher who was benefiting from the information exchange. In choosing to compensate participants for their time, I was aware of the risk that providing financial payment may serve as a form of manipulation or coercion, and may cause someone to participate who may not otherwise have wanted to (Mallinson, 2018). If a payment is coercive, then a participant's consent cannot be considered to be fully voluntary. With these concerns in mind, I chose a £20 payment in line with Sullivan & Cain's (2004) suggestion that research payments should be commensurate with the time given. £20 was roughly equal to a payment for 2 hours at the National Living Wage of £10.42 (as of April 2023 when this sum was calculated) (Low Pay Commission, 2022). Given that I was

not recruiting specifically from those on a low-income or with no stable income, I hoped that this sum would not be coercive, nor would it make the cost of not participating too high to refuse (Goodman et al., 2004). In response to Head's (2009) comment that the promise of payment could make participants feel obliged to continue with the research process even if they felt uncomfortable doing so, I gave the vouchers to participants at the beginning of the research interviews with a clear statement that they were a thank you for *attending* the interview, and that if participants chose to stop the interview or withdraw, they would still be welcome to keep the voucher.

The participant thank you payments were funded by the School of Health and Psychological Sciences Research Expenses fund, which became available during the course of my doctoral study. I had not planned to provide thank you payments for participants prior to the establishment of this fund but was glad to be able to do so once the funding became available. I submitted a modification to my ethics application to reflect this change which was duly approved by the Committee. The application and approval letter can be found in Appendices 8.9 and 8.10.

3.2.3.2. Potential risks for participants

In developing this study, I identified three main ethical risks or burdens for participants in taking part. While this was not a high-risk project, it was nevertheless important to be aware and transparent about any possible repercussions for participants in being involved and to take specific steps for minimising participant risk, as described below.

3.2.3.2.1. Time burden

In order to participate in this research, I was asking for a time commitment of around 2 hours from each participant. This consisted of 20 minutes for the screening call and around 90 minutes for the main interview, as well as time spent reading the information and consent materials prior to the interview. To mitigate the impact of this time burden, I tried to be flexible in accommodating convenient times and interview locations for participants to reduce any inconvenience. Additionally, and as

mentioned above, in the awareness that participants were offering their time and emotional labour to take part in this research (Vincent, 2018), I chose to reimburse them financially with £20 shopping vouchers. Finally, I made clear to participants that their participation in the research was voluntary and that they could choose to withdraw should they feel that the time burden of participation was too high.

3.2.3.2.2. The risk of emotional distress

During this research, I was asking participants to consider and discuss in depth their experiences of living as transmasculine people and interacting with others. Life for trans people can be challenging, and I was aware that there was a chance that participants could experience some emotional distress in describing their experiences to me. Throughout the interview process, I was mindful of Churchill's (2022) comment that researchers must be aware of how powerful it can be for some participants to be given the space to discuss their experiences in detail. With this in mind, I designed the interview guide in such a way as to allow for the open discussion of participant experiences in as much or as little detail as they felt comfortable with. The semi-structured nature of the interview meant that I was able to be flexible in moulding the flow of the interview in line with participants' responses and moods. Drawing on recommendations around qualitative interviews on sensitive topics, I took care to show no judgement in response to participant disclosures, to give participants the space to talk at length about their experiences, and to try to reflect warmth and patience when discussing difficult issues. I also made repeated reference to the fact that participants did not need to respond to nor discuss anything that made them feel uncomfortable (Campbell et al., 2009). In each of the interviews, I offered participants a five or ten minute break at an approximate halfway point if they felt that they wanted or needed some time away from the interview.

At the end of the interviews, I provided all participants with a contacts sheet listing relevant support services and organisations that participants could contact if they felt they needed to. This contacts sheet can be found in Appendix 8.11. I also took care to avoid organising interviews on Fridays or late in the day so that participants were able to access support services if they needed to after the interview. At the suggestion of the City Safeguarding Team, I had a safeguarding protocol in place for

responding to any safety concerns I had during the interview process, although I did not end up needing it. This safeguarding policy can be found in Appendix 8.12. Finally, I followed up with participants via email on the day after their interviews to check in and ask if they had any questions for me. Despite having these various procedures in place, I did not leave any of the interviews feeling concerned about participant wellbeing.

3.2.3.2.3. The risk of participant data being compromised

Prior to beginning the fieldwork portion of this research study, a data management plan was produced and reviewed in order to assure that I was meeting my obligations under the UK General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) (ICO, 2023). This ensured that the risk of participant data being compromised was as low as possible, with a proportionate plan in place to manage this risk. This data management plan was assessed as part of my general ethics application and was further reviewed as part of a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) Threshold Test by the City Information Assurance Team. The data management plan and related risk assessment were deemed to be acceptable and a full DPIA was not needed. This data management plan can be found in Appendix 8.13.

In order to ensure that participant data remains secure, all participant data used in this thesis has been de-identified, with names and any identifying features changed or removed. All participant names have been replaced with pseudonyms. Individuals' participation in the research has stayed confidential and will remain so. All data collected during this research process has remained only on my password protected laptop and backed up on my secure City OneDrive account. Any hard copies of consent forms were immediately scanned and saved, and the hard copies destroyed.

3.2.4. Evaluating the research

As with all research, it is important to think critically about the value and relevance of this study. For quantitative research, quality is often evaluated in terms of its reliability, validity and generalisability (Miyata & Kai, 2009). However, it has been variously noted that the different epistemological assumptions in qualitative research

necessitate different approaches for demonstrating its quality (Yardley, 2017). A move away from a quantitative validity approach is certainly necessary for phenomenological research, the foundation of which is based in an assumption that the world can only be studied as it appears, and where the aim is to interpret rather than to make truth claims about the world.

This section will explore how this study aligns with Yardley's (2008) framework for demonstrating validity in qualitative research. Yardley (2008) has stated that this framework does not constitute an essential checklist that must be followed in order to produce valid qualitative research. Instead, she recommends using the framework flexibly to indicate which aspects a study excels in particularly. In the following section, I will explore how this study lines up with Yardley's (2008) four key areas of concern: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, coherence and transparency, and impact and importance.

3.2.4.1. Sensitivity to context

The sensitivity to context in this study is apparent primarily through its attendance to the relevant theoretical literature and to participant perspectives. The alignment with relevant theoretical literature is indicated through this study's firm grounding in the phenomenological tradition and in theory around interpretative phenomenological research. While phenomenological theories may seem superficially esoteric, at its heart the phenomenological approach relies upon a recognition of, and faith in, individuals' meaning making of their own worlds. Throughout this research I have adhered to a double hermeneutic approach, in which my own interpretation of the data is understood to be personal and contingent, and as much a part of the study data as the participants' own words. In their guidance for producing excellent IPA research, Nizza et al. (2021) re-affirm the complementary nature of researcher and participant interpretation in a double hermeneutic approach, something that I have remained committed to throughout this research process.

Yardley (2008) states that another way to demonstrate sensitivity to context is through the use of open-ended research materials and questioning that enable participants to speak openly about what is important to them, rather than being

constrained by the researcher. This approach to questioning aligns closely with the recommended technique in IPA and reflects the style and content of the interviews in this study. Throughout the interviews for the present study, my primary aim was always to allow participants maximum latitude and comfort to discuss their concerns in whatever way felt most intuitive for them. While this may have meant that certain interviews were longer or more wide-ranging in scope than was initially expected, it nevertheless meant that primary focus could always be placed on how participants perceived and conceptualised their own experiences.

3.2.4.2. Commitment and rigour

Yardley (2008) states that a study's commitment and rigour can be indicated through the depth and breadth of the analysis, as well as through an in-depth engagement with the research topic. A commitment to depth of analysis is central to the IPA approach, in which deep idiography is prioritised over generalisability or community level claims. This idiography was the focus of analysis in the present study, with a commitment to understanding individuals' experiences as well as on wider group claims. Further discussion of the idiographic approach can be found in section 3.1.3.4 above. In developing the findings, I attempted to maintain a balance between the two, mindful of Nizza et al.'s (2021, p22) guidance that good IPA does not eschew generalisation, but rather:

[I]t insists on that generalisation being built iteratively and inductively from the careful reading of each of the analysed cases.

Accordingly, I made sure to spend a significant amount of time with each transcript, ensuring that I knew them well before beginning my cross-case analysis. I made every effort to stay open minded and empathic to what the transcripts were revealing to me. As discussed above, the aim with IPA research is to enter "as far as possible, the psychological and social world of the respondent" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p59), and this was my primary intention with this research.

3.2.4.3. Coherence and transparency

Yardley (2008) goes on to explore coherence and transparency in qualitative research, discussing the need for a good fit between the research theory and

method, and a transparent presentation of the data and methods. In order to maintain coherence, this research has retained an interpretative phenomenological focus throughout. The method (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and semi-structured interviews) lends itself well to my epistemological assumptions around relativism (section 3.1.5), Dasein (section 3.1.2.2.1), and a focus on phenomenological intentionality (section 3.1.2.1.1). With this in mind, I have maintained a commitment to hermeneutic interpretation and an avoidance of truth claims or generalisation from these participants to all transmasculine individuals.

Regarding transparency in research, Yardley (2008, p250) states that this should be indicated through the presentation of data in quotations and text excerpts with an intention “to show the reader what the analytic interpretations are based on”. Throughout the Findings chapter 4 in this thesis, I have taken care to link my interpretations to transcript extracts such that readers are able to trace the course of my analysis from raw data to interpretation. This approach is possible due to the documentation that I kept throughout the analysis process linking all higher orders of interpretation to their constituent transcript extracts (as is indicated in Figure 3). In this way, I could ensure that all interpretations were firmly based in participant data: “grounding the interpretation and conceptual claims firmly in the participant data” (Nizza et al., 2021, p20). My actions here are aligned with Heidegger’s assertion that, while we must acknowledge and hold space for our own fore-meanings and interpretative process, the focus should remain on the phenomenon under investigation (Heidegger, 1962), as discussed in section 3.1.2.2.

3.2.4.4. Impact and importance

Finally, Yardley (2008, p250) discussed the significance of the impact and importance of a research study, noting that its quality stems in part from its impact in the wider world. She notes that this impact can be theoretical, with a focus on improving understanding “which may in turn lead to applications that achieve practical, real-world change”. I understand the impact of this study to be fourfold, with implications for theory, practice and future research in this area. These impacts relate to this study’s novel methodological approach as well as to the rich phenomenological data that has been collected around transmasculine people’s use of different speech

signifiers and their emotional experiences of being in the social world with others. The Discussion chapter 5 (section 6.3) will explore this study's implications in greater depth.

3.3. Methodology & methods: summary

This chapter has explored the methodological foundations of the present study, as well as the means by which it was carried out. In this chapter, I have explored the roots of phenomenology from the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl to the interpretative phenomenology of Heidegger, looking at how central tenets of interpretative phenomenology have informed the IPA approach with its focus on meaning making and situated, interpretative knowledge. In this chapter, I have also explored how this study was carried out, how participants were recruited and screened, and how I went about conducting the research interviews. I explored the stages that constituted the analytic process for this study and explained the formulation of the Group Experiential Themes that inform the structure of the following Findings chapter 4 of this study.

Finally, in this chapter I explored Yardley's (2008) criteria for assessing validity in qualitative research, exploring how this study fits into her framework. Here I have explored the areas that this study excels in, particularly those that concern depth of analysis, inquiry into participant concerns and transparency through researcher reflexivity. The notion of researcher reflexivity is a thread that runs throughout this chapter, in which I have frequently returned to my own reflective assessment of how the research process went and what form my role as the researcher has taken throughout the process.

4. CHAPTER FOUR: Findings

4.1. Group Experiential Themes (GETs)

This chapter outlines this study's findings. Analyses of participants' accounts will be laid out in accordance with the three GETs established for this study. These are:

1. Re-interpreting masculinity in interactions
2. Feelings of vulnerability in interactions
3. Experiences and interpretations of passing

The GETs are broken down into sub-themes and sub-sections as demonstrated below.

While GETs 1&3 are closely linked in topic to the two subsidiary aims for this research (exploring participants' experiences of masculinity and passing in interactions), I did not set out explicitly to create GETs that reflected these aims. Rather, this is the thematic grouping that emerged for me during the analytic process as the most coherent way to structure these findings. I created GET 2 ('Feelings of vulnerability in interactions') as this reflected the aspect of participants' emotional experiences of negotiating interactions that I interpreted to be the most prominent across the dataset.

GET1: Re-interpreting masculinity in interactions (4.2)

GET sub-themes		Sub-theme sub-sections	
4.2.1	Congruence and meaning in masculinity	4.2.1.1	<i>"It just feels right, I guess"</i> : finding congruence in transmasculine identity and expression
		4.2.1.2	<i>"I think for me it's just a feeling?"</i> : finding meaning in masculinity
4.2.2	Doing masculinity	4.2.2.1	<i>"I'm so scared of making people feel uncomfortable"</i> : doing alternative masculinities
		4.2.2.2	<i>"It feels like a power that I don't want to have"</i> : experiences of interactions with women
		4.2.2.3	<i>"Stop crying, it's really embarrassing"</i> : navigating expectations for men in interactions

Table 6: GET1: Re-interpreting masculinity in interactions

GET2: Feelings of vulnerability in interactions (4.3)

GET sub-themes		Sub-theme sub-sections	
4.3.1	Fearing harm from others in interactions	4.3.1.1	<i>"Why can't they see that I am what I say I am?!"</i> : experiences of being misgendered
		4.3.1.2	<i>"It's a scary time to be a trans person"</i> : fears of violence and harassment
4.3.2	Hyperawareness of the self	4.3.2.1	<i>"I'm so aware of how I'm perceived, all day, every day"</i> : feeling looked at
		4.3.2.2	<i>"Do they think I'm a girl?"</i> : feelings of vulnerability during the early stages of transition
		4.3.2.3	<i>"I'm just a dude on testosterone and I'm happy"</i> : increasing comfort in interactions as transitions progress

Table 7: GET2: Feelings of vulnerability in interactions

GET3: Experiences and interpretations of passing (4.4)

GET sub-themes		Sub-theme sub-sections	
4.4.1	Doing passing	4.4.1.1	<i>"Men kind of tend to be more like this"</i> : masculinising speech
		4.4.1.2	<i>"I hate the way that my body tends to do certain actions"</i> : masculinising appearance and behaviours
4.4.2	Complex relationships with passing	4.4.2.1	<i>"You get the vibe pretty quickly that this is not an LGBT friendly space"</i> : passing in context
		4.4.2.2	<i>"It's that other side of passing that has to be acknowledged"</i> : passing as cisnormative
		4.4.2.3	<i>"Passing in the way that makes me feel nice"</i> : passing beyond gender

Table 8: GET3: Experiences and interpretations of passing

4.2. GET1: Re-interpreting masculinity in interactions

This section explores the first Group Experiential Theme, 'Re-interpreting masculinity in interactions'. In this section, I will discuss transmasculine participants' interpretations of their own masculine identities, their interpretations of masculinity on a conceptual level, and their experiences of doing masculinity in interactions with others.

Section 4.2.1 ('Congruence and meaning in masculinity') explores participants' accounts of feeling congruence in transmasculinity. While these feelings were highly individual, they were often characterised by a sense of intangible authenticity and 'rightness' in masculinity that participants struggled to define. There was a strong sense that feelings of masculinity could be difficult to describe, but that this difficulty did not mitigate the force of feeling with which transmasculine participants felt drawn to masculine identities. When asked to describe masculinity on a conceptual level, participants provided diverse descriptions, focusing variously on masculine presentations, gender roles and feelings of confidence. Crucially, there was a generally shared sense that it is difficult to delineate masculinity from femininity in any clear terms, and only one participant seemed to hold a clear distinction between the two concepts. While some participants described complex past journeys through masculinity and femininity in realising their transmasculine identities, most seemed confident and comfortable in their identities at time of interview.

Section 4.2.2 ('Doing masculinity in interactions') explores how participants felt masculine identities were relevant in interactions with others. Here, participants' accounts tended to focus on desires to do and be masculine in ways that were considerate and safe for others, with a keen sense of wishing to avoid recreating the harmful masculinities that some participants had felt subject to in the past, particularly prior to their transitions. Drawing on their own pre-transition experiences, participants described feeling a marked responsibility to do their masculinity considerately when around women, particularly women who were strangers. They described feeling that the dynamics of their interactions with women had shifted as a result of their transitions, often feeling sadness around the new and unusual distance that this created. This section explores participants' descriptions of these

experiences, the actions that they explained taking to mitigate any expression of threat in interactions with women, as well as the gendered expectations that they felt held to in interactions as a result of being perceived to be men.

4.2.1. Congruence and meaning in masculinity

In this section 4.2.1, I will discuss how participants interpreted masculine identities, looking first at their feelings of congruence in transmasculine identities (4.2.1.1), before exploring how they interpreted masculinity on a conceptual level (4.2.1.2).

4.2.1.1. *“It just feels right, I guess”*: finding congruence in transmasculine identity and expression

In describing their experiences of their own gender identities, participants tended to describe transmasculine identities as being the identities that felt most congruent with ‘who they were’. In some cases, this was portrayed as a feeling that it was ‘right’ for them (*“it just feels right, I guess”* (Marlowe)), while in others, it was portrayed as feeling like a true reflection of the self. Kyle described this feeling saying, *“for me, being male is, like, honestly just being me”* while Michael said, *“I dunno, I just- I feel like myself in this gender”*.

For some, close relationships with masculinity were described as having stemmed from childhood. These included descriptions of being ‘tomboys’ as children, although Scott noted that being labelled a tomboy as a child could have been related to a lack of understanding of trans terminology and identities: *“there was no other, sort of, word really”*. Both Corey and Z described exploring their relationships with masculinity through play. Corey, who noted that they were *“seen as a tomboy”*, enjoyed engaging in play and toys that might traditionally be associated with boys. They had aspired to be like the young male film stars of the 1980s, and even briefly went by the name of one of their childhood heroes, before changing it back when they went to an all-girls secondary school, thinking that they had to *“fit in”*. Similarly, Z, who loved to dress up as a child, described always gravitating towards the *“masculine man or man-adjacent characters”*. They played as The Hulk, Aladdin and

James Bond, and re-enacted Bollywood dance scenes with their best friend, always taking the role of the male love interest.

Beyond play, Marlowe and Kyle described becoming aware of their sense of masculinity through their childhood relationships with other boys and those boys' gender identities. For instance, Marlowe explained that his sense of his own masculine identity in childhood was driven, in part, by the envy that he felt for his brother but not for his sister. For him, this envy indicated that his identity as a girl was not congruent for him, going on to state: *"I always knew something wasn't quite, you know, right"*. Kyle similarly described how he related to the gender identities of those around him, stating that he felt so much like one of the boys, that he failed to understand why he was unable to use a urinal in the same way that they could. He described this experience as one of the first indications that elements of his body were not right for him, something which became increasingly difficult when he hit puberty, and he *"realised that [his gender situation] was a horrific reality"*. Upon getting his period for the first time, he described a *"sense of wrong, like absolute wrong"* which led to him keeping it a secret and fearing that he might be unwell (*"I thought I was dying to be honest"*). He remembered being aware that getting a period was common for girls but thinking: *"but I'm not a girl though, so I must be dying"*.

Like Kyle, others described feelings of intense discomfort with being perceived to be girls. These feelings seemed to be particularly great when participants felt pressured to abide by traditionally feminine gender norms. For instance, Jake described feeling *"forced into femininity [his] whole life"*, saying that it had made him *"really, really uncomfortable"*. It was predominantly his grandparents that had pushed him towards traditionally feminine expressions and behaviours, and he described being encouraged to wear rings and use a handbag because, according to his grandmother, *"that's what teenage girls do"*. Similarly, Sam described feeling *"uncomfortable"* about being *"forced into feeling like I had to wear skirts and things like that"* and Charlie described wearing a skirt as something that he *"had to do"* in order to appease his parents. Michael explained that his friends had tried to convince him that his life would be 'easier' if he dressed in a more feminine way, but he was clear that it *"always felt like cross-dressing to [him]"*.

The notion of ‘cross-dressing’ invoked a shared feeling among some of the participants that traditionally feminine gender presentations were, on some level, ‘wrong’ for them. For instance, Marlowe noted feeling as if he were wearing a “costume” when dressed in women’s clothing, while Sam described feeling that the more he “pushed” himself to be feminine, the “further away” he got from himself, a feeling that worsened over time. Kyle explored these feelings of ‘wrongness’ in depth when describing his experiences of a year he spent studying abroad while at university. While Kyle had already begun his social transition, his passport still read female and carried his birth name. He did not feel sufficiently comfortable to make his transgender identity public, so he was required to live in the women’s accommodation block for the year that he was abroad. Kyle described this period as one of real emotional instability, during which he was uncomfortable, unhappy and, in his own words, “kind of a mess”. He did not want to be there and described struggling with depression and excessive alcohol consumption. Living under his birth name made him feel like he was “impersonating someone” and he described, only half-jokingly, that he was worried about being deported. He said: “I can’t even describe...that feeling, but I really felt like I was committing a crime”. During this time, Kyle experimented with different gender expressions, both more masculine and more feminine. When he engaged in a more traditionally feminine gender expression, it felt “messed up” and he now interprets these times as a form of ‘self-punishment’. Given that he was going by his birth name, he felt a pressure to be feminine (“I was trying to fulfil the idea of what my birth name was”), although he now takes a critical view of any pressure to perform gender in a binary way: “I was performing femininity in the past as a way to force myself within the binaries that society has told us that I have to ascribe to”. Despite coming closer to his sense of how he was ‘supposed’ to express his gender, Kyle still felt a sense of wrongness when expressing himself in a more feminine way, saying that it was “not who [he] actually was”.

Kyle’s experiences on his year abroad speak to a complicated relationship with femininity that was not uncommon. Instead of a straightforward journey toward a traditionally masculine gender expression, participants described going through various stages, oscillating between periods of both traditionally masculine and

feminine expressions. For some, this included a period of “*hyperfeminis[ation]*” (Marlowe) during which they moved away from androgynous and masculine styles of expression with a preference for traditional femininity. In some cases, this rejection of masculinity was driven by a conscious effort to be accepted by peers. This was the case for Corey who moved towards more stereotypically feminine behaviours when they went to secondary school in order to “*fit in and all that crap*”. The same was somewhat true of Kyle who, further elaborating on his time abroad, suggested that he was “*forcing [himself] to be feminine to present to society in a specific way so that [he] wasn’t feeling as if [he was] being ostracised*”.

Others described this move towards femininity as representing a complex aspect of their journey to self-discovery. In some cases, participants appeared to hope that presenting as feminine ‘girls’ might help them to understand their own identities better and even, perhaps, to help them to feel comfortable in femininity and girlhood. For instance, Marlowe described “*hyperfeminising*” himself through wearing skirts and make-up, not just because he felt pressured to do so, but because he was “*trying to figure out who [he] was*”. He noted that he had felt confused previously and had hoped that constructing his gender in this way might help him to feel comfortable. It did not: “*it just made me more uncomfortable*”. Similarly, Sam described becoming “*the most feminine that [he] could*” shortly before he transitioned, thinking that it might help him to feel happier. He tried to replicate the style and appearance of a singer that he admired, hoping that if he could just look like her, then he might feel comfortable with his own identity and expression. Nevertheless, while he was able to achieve the appearance change that he had hoped for, it did not bring him the comfort that he sought. Such periods of ‘hyperfeminisation’ prior to transition appear to have generally been short-lived. As Jake put it, while he tried more feminine expressions to “*convince [himself] that [he] was okay being a girl*”, ultimately he just “*couldn’t take it*”, and he came to understand that transitioning was the path that felt most congruent for him.

Accordingly, the journey to a masculine gender identity or expression was not always straightforward for these participants. For a number of them, presenting in a traditionally feminine way prior to their transitions felt like a pivotal part of their journey of self-discovery. While some were trying out traditionally feminine gender

expressions with a view to becoming more comfortable with their femininity, this may in fact have had the opposite effect. Instead, through trying out those expressions that felt uncomfortable, they were better able to understand what *was* comfortable (masculinity), and to chart a more congruent path forward.

Conversely, it was also the case that this discomfort could be felt around pressures to present masculinity in a rigid or traditional fashion. While all the participants in this research felt most comfortable with a transmasculine gender identity, the ways in which they expressed that identity differed from person to person. An uncomfortable pressure to be masculine seemed to be most keenly felt by Z, a non-binary transmasculine person who described receiving significant pressure from their family to present in a traditionally masculine manner. During the early part of their transition, Z had been living in a city that was very accepting of queer identities, before moving back in with their family in London. In their previous home, Z had felt free to express their masculinity flexibly in a way that felt congruent for them. However, upon returning to the family home, they felt they had less freedom to explore different modes of expression. While they felt happiest with a gender expression that was not traditionally masculine, their family were not always comfortable with this. They illustrated their family's perspective, saying:

You're a man now, why are you painting your nails? You're a man now, why are you wearing that shirt? Why are you dressed like this? You're a man now, this is what your hair should be like.

In this extract, it appears that Z's family were not just forcing particularly rigid standards of masculinity upon them, but also not acknowledging Z's non-binary identity. Z's family appeared to be suggesting that they would only accept Z's transition if Z were to embrace the kind of masculinity that was respected in their sociocultural context. Z characterised their decision to take testosterone as being related to this pressure from their family, and they noted:

So, taking testosterone was part of that as well...that ease to pass as the kind of man they wanted me to be, the kind of man I need to be to fit in here.

I interpreted Z's comments here as illustrative of the stifling aspects of traditional expectations of masculinity, as well as the impact of the family pressure that some transmasculine people felt around their transitions. It seemed that Z's masculinity and transition could only be accepted by their family under the condition that they

presented the form of masculinity that their family found easiest to receive. Z described this masculinity as being one without any hints of femininity (*“hypermasculine”*), saying that *“any deviation from that is not okay”*. Z paraphrased the attitude of their family, saying: *“You should be doing the man things, because if you’re not doing the man things, then we have questions”*. Z’s account here provided a counterpoint to the pressures that some transmasculine people felt around maintaining a feminine gender identity and expression. From these participants’ accounts, it appears that any pressure to conform to a gender expression that did not feel congruent could be experienced as difficult and disaffirming. While this was explored more frequently in reference to femininity in this study, the same could be true of pressures to present incongruent masculinities as well.

4.2.1.2. *“I think for me it’s just a feeling?”*: finding meaning in masculinity

When I asked participants to explain what it meant to them to be a man, male, transmasculine, or however they described their gender identity, they tended to avoid concrete descriptions, presenting their gender identities as intangible and difficult to describe, but central to their sense of selves. Words used to describe their identities included ‘vibe’, ‘energy’, and even ‘essence’. Sam’s answer typified these characterisations when I asked him what it meant for him to be a man, and he responded: *“I think for me it’s just a feeling? Like it’s who I am, erm, inside”*. Using ‘who I am’ and ‘inside’ here, Sam seemed to be positioning his manhood as being internal, relating to an aspect of how he understands his sense of self. He went on to further affirm this sense, by clarifying that, for him, masculinity had no particular look or expression, stating: *“it’s not specifically anything really to do with the way somebody looks, I think that people just give off vibes”*. This use of ‘vibe’ was repeated by others, for instance Kyle, who described how being masculine to him felt like: *“just a vibe, it’s an energy, it’s a way of existence”*, and Benji, who similarly characterised masculinity as *“a vibe”* and *“an essence”*, both *“a way of putting yourself out into the world”* and also *“it comes from I think within...I feel like it’s a non-tangible sort of thing”*.

In further exploring the notion of a masculine ‘energy’, it became clear that the implicit communication of this energy/vibe could be considered to be a more salient

way of signifying masculinity than other conventional signifiers of gender identity, such as clothing. For instance, Sam noted that *“you could meet somebody that’s wearing a dress- a cis man wearing a dress, and they could be really masculine, like depending on how their vibe is, and their personality”*. With this statement, Sam invoked the idea that wearing a dress might traditionally be considered to index womanhood or femininity, while simultaneously rejecting the notion that it must necessarily do so. For Sam, it seemed to be the case that a person’s gendered *vibe* could outweigh other supposedly gendered signifiers. Kyle invoked a similar scenario when describing his mother, saying

[M]y mum has such a masculine energy, I can’t even tell you what that means. You could put my mum in a dress, heels, full make-up, and she’d still be masculine.

As with Sam’s hypothetical cis man in a dress, Kyle’s description here challenged the traditional semiotic link between a particular form of dress and femininity. In this case, it was Kyle’s sense that his mother *could* be deploying signifiers conventionally associated with femininity, but that her masculine ‘vibe’ would shine through and offset these signifiers. In this way, both Sam and Kyle troubled traditional understandings of gender identity and expression while emphasising their sense of a person’s *energy* or *vibe* as being a highly salient aspect of their identity and expression.

In trying to understand the nature of this masculine ‘energy’, it became clear that its meaning could vary significantly from person to person. Most descriptions did share at least some resemblance with traditional discourses around masculinity, but with a variety of areas of focus and an almost universal lack of definitiveness. When I asked Charlie what it meant to him to be masculine, his response focused on the visual signification of masculinity. For instance, he described embodied signifiers, such as: *“being more toned, or like being hairy, or having a deeper voice”*, as well as signifiers that related to male grooming: cutting his hair, lining up his emerging beard, applying face and skincare products, and using deodorant and aftershave. Charlie also described how his clothing choices could make him feel masculine saying:

Putting my outfits together and feeling, like, masculine, I don’t know, I think those are small things, even like wearing sports socks, I’m always wearing sports socks. Once they get dirty, that makes me feel masculine.

In Charlie's account, the most salient aspects of masculinity appeared to lie in its signification, although the deployment of these signifiers seemed to function as much to make Charlie appear masculine as to feel masculine, and he repeatedly described how these signifiers made him feel: *"in a strange way [they] make me feel masculine"* and *"even just putting on deodorant and aftershave, stuff like that, makes me feel good in myself"*.

Like Charlie, when I asked Corey what masculinity meant to them, they initially focused on presentation, saying:

Erm, I don't know. Masculinity is just about- I- for me, it's how I look in the mirror and it's how I present to the world.

They later emphasised this point saying: *"for me, being masculine is more about an actual physical image"* and *"presentation, image, and what I see- me, as being masculine"* (sic). It was Corey's sense that a person's understanding of masculinity would differ according to where they were from, as well as the dynamics that were around them as they were growing up: *"that's what is going to be my view of what's more masculine, because it's what I see"*. They discussed how their parents' dynamics had troubled their own understanding of traditional masculine and feminine gender roles, with their mother having tended towards a more 'dominant' position in their household than their father. While Corey's father was the *"main earner"* in the household, he also took on more of the labour around the house at the behest of Corey's mother: *"he also does most of the housework, because my mum just tells him to do it because she don't wanna do it"*. Despite having prefaced their response as being based on physical image and presentation, Corey touched often on gender roles as well, describing a view of masculine and feminine roles that converged and diverged variously from a traditional understanding. Thus, while Corey did not see masculinity as being related to the dominant role in a household, they did associate masculinity with traditionally 'masculine' tasks, for instance: *"I'd say in my relationship, I'm more masculine because I'll do the DIY, I'll take on any carrying, any smelly tasks, I'll do all of that"*. Like Corey's father, they described doing more of the traditionally 'feminine' household labour themselves, saying:

I do more than my fair share, I'm way more into laundry and cleaning probably, I'm quite at home in like- everything's got to be like this- and that's not particularly male [laughs].

From Corey's account here, it appears that they do not seem to associate this kind of household labour with being 'male' (unlike the DIY and carrying which was 'masculine'). However, they later specified that the attitude to household labour described here represents a certain *kind* of male-ness, something that they identified as 'Hoxton maleness'. Corey seemed to perceive 'Hoxton maleness' to be desirable, describing it with: "*you look all male but you're kind of- Like you take on the roles in the house*". I now regret that I did not ask Corey to further define their understanding of 'Hoxton maleness'. It is not a term that I understand to be in general use, but it does invoke a particular understanding of masculinity for me. Hoxton is an area of Hackney, a diverse and multicultural borough of East London. While Hackney was historically an economically deprived area of the city, it has seen increasing gentrification over recent years, bringing with it rising property prices and an influx of wealthier residents (Lagadic, 2019). Crucially, the Hoxton area, and neighbouring Shoreditch, were historically centres of alternative culture, known for their artists, galleries and nightclubs (Rayner, 2018). Despite its gentrification, the area retains a semblance of alternative and progressive culture: it is 'trendy'. It is this detail that I believe was relevant to Corey's notion of Hoxton maleness, which I interpreted to represent an alternative form of heterosexual masculinity, in which cisnormative understandings of manhood remain paramount ("*you look all male*"), but an adherence to modern feminism is considered socially prestigious, and, with it, a critique and rejection of traditional gender roles. This interpretation does seem to match the masculinity that Corey described as feeling congruent for them; Corey was drawn to expressing their masculinity through clothing traditionally associated with men ("*I won't wear clothes that's come from a female part of a shop, never*") and a muscular body achieved through working out six days a week ("*[the gym is] a real feature of my life, proper full on*"), but also prioritised a gentle and non-dominant approach to being with others and women in particular. Thus, Corey's understanding of masculinity seemed to be both traditional and non-traditional, with their interpretation of masculine presentation and gender roles seemingly bound up in the complex and nuanced ways that they negotiated their own and others' gender identities at home and in the world.

In describing what masculinity meant to him, Kyle was initially hesitant ("*it's something that I can't quantify because I don't actually know. It's not a real thing, it's*

metaphorical”), before tentatively describing masculinity as being related to a kind of stance or bearing, a particular presentation and a sense of confidence:

It's got to be a combination of body language and, like, I guess openness, closedness, maybe the way you walk, maybe the kind of clothes you wear. Like, to build up this idea, maybe it's confidence.

The concepts of being ‘open’ and ‘closed’ returned at other times in the interview with Kyle (e.g. *“I think body language, um, tends to be for men like they tend to be sort of open, like this more: [here Kyle moved his hands from being together in front of his body to being apart, with his fingers spread and taking up more space], like they tend to be wider, like square”*). It seemed that, for Kyle, the idea of masculinity was related to an open way of being, both physically and emotionally, with wide gesticulations and a relaxed way of being with others.

Benji's conceptualisation of masculinity resonated with Kyle's, and he also made reference to what he considered to be a relaxed, masculine way of moving and being in the world. When I asked Benji to describe the masculine ‘vibe’, his first instinct was to describe people that he had seen at a club night for transmasculine people in London (*“it's a very, I guess, maybe niche version of masculinity, because it's for transmasculine people...But in my mind, that's where my head goes”*). Benji described associating the movements of the people at the club with masculinity, saying:

It's the way they move, the way they walk. Um, they've got like, some, maybe some swagger. They've got, like...it's so hard to explain but they've just got this thing that's going on.

Reminiscent of Kyle's reference to confidence, Benji went on to further articulate this ‘thing’ by saying:

I think, maybe it's a- a certain amount of self-assurance. Not like necessarily cockiness. Not cockiness at all. Or not even necessarily a huge amount of confidence, but it's an assurance that, like, you're a certain way, and it's like good to be that way.

Benji, who was not on testosterone, seemed to be the participant who had the most questions and uncertainty about his gender identity. While he had been out as transmasculine for a few years by the point of our interview, he was still unsure about what his future would look like, what gender meant to him, and how, if at all, he

would pursue a medical transition. With this context, I interpreted Benji's discussion of other transmasculine people's self-assured masculinity here to represent a contrast with how he interpreted his own understanding of his gender:

I struggle a lot with my gender but I think there's a big part of me that struggles with personal identity in general.

and

I feel like I'm approaching an important age where my brain's doing a lot of fucked up shit and it's trying to sort itself out, and it's just like in a constant state of panic and terror and anxiety all the time.

Accordingly, it was my sense that Benji's interpretation of masculinity was connected to his uncertain understanding of himself, with other transmasculine people seeming to Benji to have a kind of self-assurance that still felt out of reach for him at the time of our interview.

Strikingly, for most participants, it was unclear where, if anywhere, sat the boundary between masculinity and femininity. Sam initially suggested that a masculine energy was related to a feeling of being powerful or confident (*"maybe more grounded and powerful, in control, kind of a level feeling. Yeah, like confidence, maybe?"*). This description was tentative, and he immediately contradicted the implication that these characteristics were indicative of masculinity alone, asking: *"but then, why should confidence be a masculine thing? I don't know"*. Similarly, Scott initially suggested that masculinity was related to strength, before making clear that, for him, femininity could also be linked to strength, saying: *"when I think of masculinity, I kind of think of strength [pauses] but also femininity I also think of strength. But maybe in, again, a different way?"*. After Kyle described confidence and openness as being masculine traits, I asked whether they could also be associated with femininity (*"Could confidence and openness be part of her femininity, or is that always a masculinity thing?"*). Kyle responded by saying *"for sure, it could be part of femininity"*, before explaining that, to his mind, the performance of masculinity or femininity depended on confidence in a person's intention: *"I feel like, whatever you were intending to do, if you do it confidently, then you are, to some degree"*. Thus, for Kyle, masculinity and femininity did not seem to hold inherent meaning or be necessarily associated with different signifiers, instead the success of a person's gender performance was dependent primarily on their confidence and intention.

Kyle was the only participant to explicitly reference gender theory in his answer, saying: *“I’m giving myself like Judith Butler doing gender vibes when I’m thinking about this, like, I’m very much governed by gender performativity, love that”*. As with Corey’s reference to ‘Hoxton maleness’, I regret not asking Kyle for further clarification here. Nevertheless, I interpreted his reference to Butler’s gender performativity to relate to an emphasis on the active doing of masculinity and femininity, with the ‘energy’ of the performance (the perceived confidence or lack thereof) holding more weight for Kyle than its constituent signifiers. There was a certain circularity to this argument, although Kyle did not argue that his explanation was watertight: *“that is a horrible explanation, I’m not in any way trying to co-opt gender performativity”*. Nevertheless, he seemed to be clear, like Sam and Scott, that masculinity and femininity were complex concepts, and difficult to delineate in clear and decisive terms.

In Jake’s case, and others to a lesser extent as well, the conceptual difficulty in defining masculinity seemed to be accompanied by feelings of emotional discomfort. There was a sense not only that masculinity was a complex phenomenon to pin down (*“it’s such a difficult thing to try and put into words”* (Scott) and *“um, I dunno...it’s really hard to explain”* (Marlowe)) but that the act of trying to define masculinity was ideologically charged. This caused anxiety for Jake, who said:

You can see loads of TERFs on Twitter like, ‘what does it actually mean to be a man?’ and I’m like: ‘I don’t have a freaking clue! I just am!’.

Similarly, when asked what it felt like to be a man, Jake responded: *“I hate that question! Like everyone asks that and I’m so confused, like, I don’t know how to explain!”*. Jake’s responses here seemed to reveal a sense of frustration. I interpreted his reference to ‘TERFs on Twitter’ to mean that he may have experienced trans-exclusionary feminists online asking him similar questions in a combative manner. For Jake, it appeared that the very act of being asked to explain his gender identity could be frustrating, as it reminded him of times in which these questions had been used to undermine him or his identity.

Finally, it is important to note that the uncertainty around masculinity and its associated overlap with femininity was not shared by all of the participants in this

study. One participant, Michael, held more traditional associations with masculinity than the others in the study. Michael described a masculine person as someone who is 'aggressive', 'self-confident', 'professional', 'easily heard' and 'successful'. He made clear that, while he did not aim to be aggressive, the others were characteristics that he aspired to embody: *"I don't try to be an aggressive person, [but] that's hopefully the only difference. Everything else I think I try to be"*. Furthermore, Michael explained his belief that men and women think differently from one another, explaining that the longer that he is on testosterone, the more he feels himself to think about things differently from his wife. Michael described having moments of miscommunication with his wife, something that he felt to be related to their gender identity difference, saying:

It's just thought patterns sometimes, like sometimes I'll have a little bicker with my...wife over just the way we're saying something. And it seems like we're saying different things, but we're saying the same thing in just different ways.

I interpreted Michael's account to mean that he believed there to be fundamental differences between men and women, and masculine and feminine identities, something that was not expressed by the other participants in this study. Michael's interpretation here suggested a form of binary gender essentialism, in which men and women have innate emotional and cognitive differences based on their hormonal profile (hence Michael's testosterone treatment moving him further away from his wife's way of thinking). While Michael's interpretation did not appear to align with that of others in this study, in exploring Michael's conceptualisation of masculinity, I was reminded of the ideological and interpretative heterogeneity that exists within the diverse transmasculine community. Masculinity is an elusive concept, and it does not, and cannot, hold the same meaning for all.

4.2.2. Doing masculinity in interactions

In this section, I will explore transmasculine participants' experiences of masculinities in interactions, looking at how they navigated doing masculinity and being perceived to do masculinity in interactions by others. This section will explore participants' priorities around doing non-harmful alternative masculinities (4.2.2.1), their interpretations of their interactions with women (4.2.2.2) and the ways in which they

navigated expectations placed upon those perceived to be men in interactions (4.2.2.3).

4.2.2.1. *“I’m so scared of making people feel uncomfortable”*: doing alternative masculinities

When exploring the ways in which the transmasculine people in this study chose to embody their masculinity in interactions with others, there was frequent mention of the concept of ‘toxic masculinity’ and a shared desire to avoid the reenactment of harmful masculine behaviours. In some cases, this was a result of having experienced behaviours in the past that they interpreted as being toxically masculine. For instance, Jake described how he had *“had a lot of dodgy men in [his] life”* and how he consequently did not *“want to be that person”*. As a result, Jake was deeply concerned about not making people feel uncomfortable in the ways that he had in the past: *“I don’t want to make people uncomfortable. I’m so scared of making people uncomfortable”*. Like Jake, Michael had also been impacted by the masculinities of others, especially when he was growing up. He described his father, who was ex-military, being *“hyper-rigid [and] hyper-masculine”* and said that he *“had a really bad childhood and a really toxic masculine figure”*. He noted that this experience had had an impact on him (*“I’m sure it must have changed me in some way”*), with one of the possible impacts being that he had not transitioned until later than he might have otherwise: *“I think, had I not experienced so much trauma as a kid, I probably would have transitioned earlier”*. In response to the behaviours that he had experienced as a child, Michael described the ways in which he actively tried to avoid reenacting the same patterns. For instance, he explained that he takes care to always avert his eyes when around his children so that they do not feel that they are being observed in a sexual manner: *“that kind of behaviour I experienced as a kid, so I don’t want to pass that on”*. Michael’s account here seemed to speak to experiences of a harmful and traumatic nature. Accordingly, it felt extremely important to him not to replicate such behaviours when interacting with those around him as a man. Similarly, Kyle described his frustration with the *“casual misogyny”* of some men, saying that he took care to challenge any misogynistic behaviour that he came into contact with (*“I’m not having that”*). While Kyle liked the idea of being a man whose bodily gender expression could be perceived to be stereotypically

masculine (*"I'm trying so hard to be a gym bro, I want to be jacked, I'm gonna get there"*), he described feeling keen to make sure that this was not accompanied by misogyny or toxic masculinity. For Kyle, the 'gym bro' persona went *"hand in hand with...toxic masculinity, misogyny and internalised, like, many phobias"*, however he wanted to be *"that kind of person, but without all of the isms and the misogyny"*. Accordingly, these participants revealed themselves to be thoughtful and intentional about how they wished to be perceived in interactions as men. Having experienced harmful and toxic masculinities from men around them, it seemed to feel important for these transmasculine participants to challenge those ways of being and avoid replicating them in their own manhood and masculinity.

The struggle to find a masculinity to embody that felt safe and comfortable was most vividly explored by Z, who spoke at length about the tensions they felt in trying to do masculinity in a healthy way. Providing the context for their views around men and masculinity, they described how their involvement in feminist and LGBT+ activism had led to feelings of intense negativity towards cis men. They said: *"in our circles, we're constantly talking about how much we hate men...and I've internalised a lot of that"*. These conversations had left Z with an especially critical view of masculinity, saying that they associated it with *"toxicity"* and *"harm"*. This position was particularly emphasised by an abusive ex-partner who had experienced gender-based violence at the hands of cis men. This person criticised Z's transition and identity, leaving them asking themselves: *"why am I transitioning to someone who has raped [her] or assaulted [her] or oppressed [her]...or upholds these huge systems of oppression?"*. Z described their partner drawing parallels between Z's masculinity and the masculinities of the men that had assaulted her, and Z was left asking: *"why do I want that? Why do I align myself with that?"*. It was these difficult questions that they now interpret as the *"foundation for [their] feelings about being transmasculine"*. These tensions left Z in a challenging position. They felt drawn towards transition and a transmasculine identity, while at the same time fearing that they were taking up an identity that was harmful to others. Recalling the conflicted feelings they had felt at the beginning of their transition, they spoke evocatively, asking:

I'm aligned with all these things that we all say about how shit men are, and then I'm like, well then...why do I want to be this way? Why do I want masculinity? Why do I want it?

There was an air of desperation to Z's words here, along with a suggestion that, perhaps, in wanting to transition towards masculinity, they were showing themselves to be just as harmful as the men that had enacted violence and oppression upon women like their ex-partner.

While the intensity of Z's concerns around these issues had softened over time, they discussed how their uneasiness about masculinity had left them with feelings of intense self-criticism. They described feeling reluctant to extend compassion or forgiveness to themselves when they did anything that did not live up to their standards around non-harmful masculinity and gendered liberation, however small. In a joking manner, they described reprimanding themselves by saying: *"oh my god, I can't believe I did that, I'm the worst person in the world, I am a toxic man, I am an oppressor"*. While I interpreted some humour intended with Z's words here, they also hinted at the difficulty that they felt in forgiving themselves for anything that is *"just a bit bro-y"*, fearing that these behaviours might serve as evidence of their supposed toxicity or oppressive masculinity. For Z, as with Kyle, Michael, Jake and others, there was significant concern about doing masculinity in ways that might end up being harmful for those with whom they interacted, and a high level of motivation to try to avoid this.

Further to the tension that Z described feeling around their masculinity, they also explored the ways in which they were trying to find an alternative version of masculinity that felt congruent for them. They described this as looking for a masculinity that *"feels comfortable"* and which wasn't *"propped up"* by male privilege. In order to do this, they talked about spending time with cis men and discovering their similarities. They described feeling a sense of closeness to some of these men, coupled with the realisation that they all *"go through the world in the same way"*. Through finding cis men that they felt comfortable with, they described hoping to get to a point where they did not feel that they were *"just doing masculinity alone"*. In searching for a congruent version of masculinity, Z described their goal to no longer feel afraid of the parts of themselves that looked masculine. They said: *"I want to be kind to myself"*, explaining that when they look in the mirror and see *"something that looks...masculine, or like a man"*, they do not want to be afraid of that: *"I don't want to be scared of my masculinity"*. Doing masculinity felt particularly fraught for Z, and

their experiences with their ex-partner left them with fear around how their masculinity would be perceived by those with whom they interacted. Nevertheless, Z described themselves as being committed to finding a masculinity that worked for them and that sat comfortably with their values and ideological positions.

Z was not the only participant who discussed actively seeking an alternative way of doing masculinity with others. Jake, Kyle and Sam also described the ways that they sought to construct alternative masculinities through their gender expressions and related behaviours. For some, this involved using expressive signifiers that might traditionally be associated with femininity, for instance through dress and make-up. Jake spoke to this phenomenon, saying: *“I’ve always wanted to be seen as, like, a feminine man. Not a feminine woman, if that makes sense”*. For Jake, it felt good to be able to perform signifiers that might be stereotypically considered to be ‘feminine’ (*“like bright colourful clothes and that”*), but, crucially, only if he could be sure that he would still pass as a man. Kyle and Sam described similar feelings, with both noting that they had enjoyed experimenting with make-up again as their transitions progressed. As Kyle interpreted it, his use of make-up was not an expression of femininity because he himself was a man, thus what he did was inherently masculine (*“even when I’m wearing make-up...to me that’s masculine because I identify as male, or masculine”*). Nevertheless, he did worry about how others would perceive his make-up choices, and he said:

I love make-up, but I stopped wearing it for a while because I felt like I was too feminine in it...And that kind of affected my perception of how other people perceive me.

In this way, Kyle suggested that, although *he* interpreted his use of make-up to be an expression of his masculinity, he remained afraid that others might perceive it to be an expression of femininity due to pre-existing assumptions. Finally, Sam also spoke about his use of make-up, exploring how using it brought him feelings of authenticity in his gender expression. Unlike in the period before his transition, Sam said that wearing make-up now felt like a *“happy choice”*, rather than something he ‘needed’ to do *“so that society accepts [him]”*. For Sam, wearing make-up functioned as *“a little pick me up”* and something that helped him to feel that he was getting closer to himself: *“it’s just being more authentically me”*.

In exploring why alternative masculinities felt important for participants, some spoke explicitly about how their trans or queer identities had been instrumental in the formation of their attitudes towards masculinity in interactions. For instance, Kyle explained that being trans was such an integral part of who he was that it necessarily impacted the way that he interacted with the world around him: *“I’m trans and that shapes the way that I view patriarchal society”*. Similarly, Sam described feeling that his identity as a queer man contributed to him not subscribing to the kind of masculinity that he deemed to be *“boisterous”* and *“laddish”*. On the one hand, he actively chose to avoid this kind of masculinity out of a sense that it could be *“silly”* and *“toxic”*. On the other, Sam described feeling ill-equipped to respond to this kind of behaviour due to not being *“raised as a cis man”*. It was his sense that if he had been a cis man, he might have better understood how to respond to, and engage with, other men’s ‘laddish’ behaviours. As it was, however, he struggled to know what to do in these interactions, feeling that he had not *“learned how to navigate [the] situation”*.

Corey described being similarly impacted by their upbringing regarding their priorities around gender in interactions. They described feeling men’s communication styles to be monosyllabic and affectless (e.g. *“uhhh, alright mate, uhhh”*), and suggested that men were less sensitive to others in interactions (*“when a man comes into a meeting there’s a lack of awareness about others sometimes”*). By contrast, they considered women to be *“ultimately better communicators”* and *“better at reading the room”*. This was relevant to their own interactional behaviours in that they made clear their intention to keep communicating *“like a woman”*. In this way, Corey’s trans identity was of central importance to the way that they were with others in interactions. For Corey, it was meaningful that they developed their communication style before they transitioned, and they were keen to retain this style: *“if I’ve got the skills of communicating like a woman, then do you know what, I’m going to keep them”*. Corey’s interpretation of their own masculinity in interactions was inflected by their trans identity, an identity which had involved living as a woman for many years. As they saw it, this experience continued to have an impact on the way they communicated now: *“I can’t erase four decades of female socialisation”*.

4.2.2.2. *“It feels like a power that I don’t want to have”*: experiences of interactions with women

In considering their experiences of being in interactions, many of the transmasculine people in this study spoke about how it felt to be in interactions with women. Some of the participants who passed as men had experienced a feeling that women’s attitudes towards them had changed since transitioning. There was a sense that some women now approached them with more trepidation than they had done when they too were read as women. This shift was attributed to the fact that, in passing as men, these transmasculine people were more likely to be read as possible threats to the women with whom they interacted. Corey explained their experience of feeling that women had become more *“cautious”* since they had begun to pass as a man. They described this caution, saying:

If a woman has seen me more from a distance, the only thing I’ve noticed is that they’ve become a bit more avoidant, a bit more fearful, they don’t want to smile and say hello to me.

Jake described experiencing a similar phenomenon when at the chemist where he worked. He found that women had become less comfortable approaching him to talk about issues that might be interpreted as ‘women’s’ health issues, for instance regarding menstrual health or menopause. He noted that woman customers would now sometimes refuse his offers of help or go directly to his colleagues who were not men. Jake described feeling unaccustomed to this kind of behaviour from women and found it particularly disheartening given the high level of knowledge he had around these health issues. As he said: *“it’s really really strange to...not be able to speak to them about it, it’s...really really odd”*.

This feeling of distance from women in interactions was generally positioned as an unwelcome side-effect of transitioning. Participants described it as feeling ‘sad’ or ‘weird’, with Jake saying: *“it makes me kind of sad, but I get why”*. For Jake, there was a feeling of resignation around how his relationships with women, particularly women who were strangers, had shifted. He said that he understood why this shift had happened, and indeed, did not blame women for the change:

I fully understand why they’re less comfortable with me, like 100%, and...I’m not gonna fall into that whole like ‘not all men’ thing [laughs]. But it’s weird

to go from everyone being really comfortable with you to suddenly not, it's really strange.

It appeared that, while Jake understood the complex sociopolitical factors that might lead women to feel trepidation around men they did not know, it was confronting and sad to him to know that women experienced this around him specifically. Corey was similarly unhappy with this development, noting how unusual it felt for them: *"Yeah I don't like it because...I'm not used to that with women"*. Like Jake, Corey understood why some women might have felt less comfort around them than before they had started transitioning, but they longed to communicate to women that they did not in fact need to be concerned: *"I feel like saying, 'no I'm not a threat! I haven't got a penis! It's okay!'"*. There was a sadness here around the potential loss of connection with women, along with a kind of reluctant acceptance that this was a side-effect of transitioning that they could not change. Michael encapsulated this experience by saying: *"it feels like a power that I don't want to have...it's just scary to have that kind of power"*.

In response to these feelings around interactions with women, some transmasculine participants described the behaviours they undertook to try to actively help women to feel more comfortable around them. For instance, Scott described feeling mindful of the way that he came across around women, noting that it was important to him to make *"women more comfortable"* and to try *"to not appear threatening in any way"*. In order to do this, Scott described crossing the road if he found himself walking behind a woman on the street because: *"I don't want her to feel like I'm just following"* and to *"make it clear that I'm not interested in her in any way"*. In particular, he said that he tried to be conscious of his surroundings when he was out with a group of male friends to ensure that the group were not doing anything that could be perceived to be intimidating or alarming to the women around them. He described how he would caution his friends to calm down and to *"be aware that there may be people around who your behaviour is affecting"*. Scott contrasted his mindful approach with that of some cis men, who he felt could be *"boisterous and loud and not very self-aware"*. Jake described being similarly concerned about not making women feel uncomfortable, a discomfort that he remembered having felt around men prior to his transition. He stated that he sometimes felt afraid that women might interpret him to be *"creepy"* if he spoke to them as he had done prior to his transition.

Accordingly, he tried now to be conscious of what he said in interactions with women out of an awareness that the situation was now *“a little bit different”*. For instance, he took care not to compliment women in a way that might make them feel uncomfortable: *“I’m a little bit more conscious of doing that now”*. As Michael put it, when women saw him as a *“potential threat”*, it felt important to *“tr[y] to mitigate that”*.

The need to do masculinity sensitively to help others feel safe was felt particularly strongly by Charlie. As a Black man, Charlie worried that white women might consider him to be an especial threat to them on account of his race. Accordingly, he described taking care to avoid them, explaining how he would make sure to cross the street when he saw a group of white women or girls approaching him: *“even if I’m walking down the street sometimes, if there’s a group of white girls, I will automatically cross the street”*. This behaviour felt necessary to Charlie due to his sense that social attitudes had led people to believe that Black men were a homogeneous group, all posing some kind of particular threat to white women/people due to a combination of their race and gender:

Because in my head I’m like, well they’re not going to wanna walk past me because of how society is, or like if it’s dark...I will automatically cross the street if there’s anyone coming towards me, and usually if it’s women I will cross the street, because it’s that perception of, you know, ‘don’t walk past a Black man in the dark’, because duh duh duh. It’s just...how I’ve been embedded in my head that there’s this fear of...something’s going to happen, or all Black men are in the same category.

Beyond crossing the street, Charlie described other actions he would take to signal to those around him that he did not pose a threat to them, including smiling or nodding at others in order to seem ‘neutral’ (*“I feel like my smile can come across very, like, neutral”*). He described wanting to seem friendly or polite, for instance by making space for others to walk by him (*“I’ll be like, ‘oh you go’, to say that I’m polite”*), or by vacating his seat on public transport so that others could use it:

If I’m tired and I needed to sit down, I’ll be like, ‘no I should get up’, because there’s probably other people looking at this Black guy like ‘why’s he sitting there?’

He described ‘overthinking’ and ‘overanalysing’ situations due to his race and concerns about how he would be perceived. Conversely, he felt that white people did

not need to exercise the same level of awareness and concern: *“no one who is white is going to think of those things”*. Despite seemingly being someone who was particularly cautious and sensitive to the experiences of others, Charlie felt that he had to remain hypervigilant about the ways that his racial identity could be exploited by others as a means to paint him as a particular threat to (white) women.

Finally, it is worth noting that, while some transmasculine participants felt that their interactions with women had been impacted negatively by their transitions, this was not mentioned by all. For instance, Marlowe talked specifically about the ways in which he still found it easier to interact with cis women than with cis men, despite having transitioned. He described the ways that some men (*“lads”*) behaved as *“toxic”*, noting that he had witnessed men around him treating women with disdain and disrespect. By contrast, he was proud of the high levels of mutual trust in his relationships with women and felt glad that his woman friends felt able to talk to him about sensitive topics that they would likely avoid in interactions with cis men. In addition, Sam described feeling that his relationships with women had actually become better since he transitioned, noting that he found it easier to relate to women as a queer man than he had done when he too was living as a woman. It was his sense that people viewed his personality differently now that they interpreted him to be a man: *“the perception of people of me as a girl and of me as a guy is completely different...people are more friendly now”*. These interpretations spoke to the felt salience of gender identity in interactions. Even for those who did not feel that their interactions with women had been made more difficult since their transitions, considerations of gender identity in intersubjective relations remained prominent, and I had a sense that gender felt relevant and meaningful in a significant proportion of participants’ interactions in the social world.

4.2.2.3. *“Stop crying, it’s really embarrassing”*: navigating expectations for men in interactions

During the interviews, some of the participants described ways in which they found themselves expected to behave differently in interactions as a result of having transitioned. For those who passed as cis men, some felt expected to behave in ways that reflected traditional societal expectations of how a man ‘should’ be. Most

conspicuously, this seemed to involve a sense of being expected to limit their emotional expression in a way that was not expected of women. Scott spoke to this phenomenon, noting that men were often stereotypically expected to be 'strong', 'not very emotional', and 'stoic'. Since transitioning, he had found himself increasingly being expected to monitor and limit his expressions of emotion in interactions as someone read as a man. He described a feeling that *"not being emotional or not really showing a lot of emotion"* was still seen as *"quite a masculine thing"*, and noted that this was something that he had had to *"battle with"*. Scott described an experience he had had when out in public with his family when both Scott and his sister had ended up crying as a result of a difficult interaction. Scott noted that, while it was considered acceptable for his sister to cry, it became clear that his crying was deemed unacceptable. *"Stop crying,"* he was told, *"it's really embarrassing"*. As he said: *"because I'm male or perceived as male or whatever, I wasn't allowed to be upset by something that was, you know, quite an upsetting thing"*. Scott described such rigid rules around masculinity as *"ridiculous"* and, indeed, this story could be interpreted as drawing attention to a certain arbitrariness of gendered expectation. Scott and his sister were reacting to the same stimulus in the same way but, because Scott had transitioned, his emotional response was interpreted as 'embarrassing', while his sister's was deemed acceptable. Scott did not accept these expectations, however, and tried not to let them change his behaviour. As he said: *"I didn't stop crying, I kind of thought, well, bollocks to that, I'm angry...I'm going to cry in this restaurant, I don't care"*.

A strikingly similar experience was described by Z, who also had experience of crying alongside their sister and being similarly reprimanded for doing so. Z's experience was heightened in that the incident had occurred when they were grieving their father who had recently passed away. Their mother and sister were both crying, but when Z started to cry, one of their older male family members approached them and said: *"stop that, don't do that"*, motioning for them to be quiet. Z described this as a pivotal moment, in which they felt they understood what their 'role' was expected to be as someone who was perceived to be a man. This realisation made them angry, and they said in a frustrated tone: *"why?...why can't I cry? My Dad has just passed...my sister's crying!"*. Like Scott, Z felt exasperated by

the uneven expectations levelled at them and their sister in a moment of such sadness and stress.

Beyond the question of crying, Z spoke about other expectations that they felt subject to as someone perceived to be a man whilst practising Islam. They felt that the shift in these expectations had been particularly stark when they were engaging in the funeral rites for their father. Z found themselves expected to engage in customs and rituals with the men of the family and felt separated from their sister. This separation was emotionally difficult for Z, and they described feeling like they and their sister had experienced the funeral *“together, but very separately”*, something which differed from their previous experiences (*“we’ve done everything together”*). Z described being told what they were supposed to do, saying:

It’s not just like ‘men go pray there and women pray there’, it’s also like ‘men go there but they don’t do that and they don’t do this’...like, policing behaviours.

This was something that Z felt to be *“very heteronormative”*. This shift was jarring for Z, and it marked a significant change from their previous experiences of practising Islam as someone perceived to be a woman: *“there’s so much I know about what it means to be a woman in Islam”*. They described the disorientation of grieving their father as someone expected to behave like a man:

The things I wanted to do in the situation [with] Dad were actually women’s roles. So my sister would do that, then my Mum would tell me to sit down. And I was trying to figure out: is this where the gender roles are different?

In this way, Z’s experience of their father’s funeral was marred by this additional burden. Instead of focusing on their grief and being in community with their family, Z found themselves having to navigate a set of norms and expectations relating to a binary gender structure that did not align with their own self-interpretation as a non-binary person. I interpreted an air of melancholy in Z’s descriptions here. As a person who was already frustrated by pressures to live their life in a binary way, there was something especially challenging about the expectation that Z must do so during a time of such significant grief.

Beyond expectations of emotional repression, some of the transmasculine people in this study also spoke of feeling expected to be open to violence in ways that felt alien

to them. For instance, Sam described a situation in a pub he worked at during which a group of customers had become rowdy and aggressive. As the only man working in the pub that night, Sam found that the other employees looked to him to deal with the situation in a way that he felt unequipped to do. For Sam, being expected to step into this role felt like a new and unwelcome responsibility. A similar feeling was described by Z, who talked about feeling expected to be open to aggression in interactions in a way that felt incongruent to them. They described one experience in which they had calmly intervened to help a friend who had been being harassed in a nightclub. While they had tried to be non-threatening, they found that the interaction almost immediately escalated to aggression in a way that they did not feel prepared to handle. Z expressed their frustration with this situation, saying:

Everyone expects men to be violent...men expect men to be violent, women expect men to be violent, gender minorities expect men to be violent, like why is this okay?

Z described feeling sadness for men who find themselves in these situations, saying: *“it makes me so sad...I feel sad for men”*. They felt it to be disheartening how quickly men seemed to turn to violence, particularly when: *“there are so many other things that you, we, can do”*. For both Z and Sam here, there was a sense of frustration and alienation brought about by the ways that they were expected to behave by others. Neither of them felt comfortable responding to situations with violence, and they felt uncomfortable and alarmed by the implication that it was now expected of them to do so.

4.2.3. Re-interpreting masculinity in interactions: summary

This section has explored the ways in which participants experienced and interpreted their own masculinity and transmasculine identities, as well as addressing participants' experiences of doing and being masculine in interactions with others. Section 4.2.1 examined how participants described their masculine identities to feel, looking first at the experiences of congruence and authenticity that masculinity can hold for them. This section explored how some described these feelings of congruence as having originated in childhood, related to sensations of discomfort with femininity and girlhood identities. Participants discussed the unease that they had felt when pressured into stereotypically feminine gender expressions prior to

their transitions, with some feeling a significant tension between these discomforts and a desire to 'fit in'. There was a sense that, however much *other people* wanted the transmasculine people in this study to present in a feminine manner, it simply did not feel 'right' during the pre-transition period. This section also explored the complex journeys that some participants went on prior to realising their transmasculine identities, with some describing periods of 'hyperfeminisation' through exaggerated expressions of stereotypical femininity. These periods were generally short-lived and depicted as a means by which transmasculine people could better come to understand the expressions and identities that did feel right, through trying out those that did not.

Section 4.2.2 focused on masculinity in interactions, exploring both participants' experiences of other people's masculinities in interactions, as well as their experiences of embodying their own. This section discussed participants' interpretations of toxic and harmful masculinities in interactions and their own intentions of avoiding these ways of being with others. Participants described the emotional tensions that they felt around embodying masculinity in interactions, particularly for participants like Z who had spent a significant amount of time in spaces focusing on gender and queer liberation. There was a clear sense of the importance of finding safe and congruent ways to embody masculinity in interactions, particularly interactions with women, as well as discussions of how participants' trans and queer identities had moulded the ways that they interpreted different masculinities in interactions. Finally, participants explored the ways that they felt held to different expectations and standards of behaviour as a result of being read as men. There was a sense that expressions of emotion, such as crying, were perceived to be unacceptable in a way that had not been the case before participants transitioned. These expectations were portrayed as being limiting and constraining, and did not reflect the flexible and non-traditional conceptions that participants held of their own masculine identities.

4.3. GET2: Feelings of vulnerability in interactions

The first GET (section 4.2) explored the ways in which transmasculine participants described making meaning out of their gender identities and masculinity, with accounts emphasising the sense that participants' gender identities were, in many cases, central to their understanding of themselves. Section 4.2 also explored how transmasculine participants described approaching the social world as people with masculine identities, including the ways that they sought to deconstruct and diverge from traditional masculinities in interactions with others. However, while transmasculine participants may have described feeling authenticity and comfort in their masculine identities, it was clear that these identities were not always respected by those around them. Similarly, while they may have been thoughtful about how to mitigate any harm or threat felt by those with whom they interacted, the participants in this study also described having been subject to significant harm and threat themselves. This section will explore participants' feelings of vulnerability in interactions with others, with experiences of interpersonal harm leading some to exist in a semi-constant state of hyperawareness and vigilance when in interactions with others.

Section 4.3.1 ('Fearing harm from others in interactions') explores the fears that transmasculine participants described feeling when entering into the social world with unpredictable others. By its very definition, to be in interaction is to be in relation with an other, whose attitudes and behaviours can never be definitively anticipated. By being in interactions, transmasculine people make themselves vulnerable to a variety of threats relating specifically to their gender identities, including disaffirmation of their identity through misgendering as well as experiences of transphobic violence and harassment. The transmasculine people in this study described the pain and discomfort that they felt when misgendered by others, whether by accident or on purpose. These experiences were often characterised as feeling like a physical wounding, coupled with a sense that they were not being seen as the person that they felt themselves to be. Participants also spoke of their fears of verbal and physical violence in interactions, in a number of cases drawn from specific past experiences of harassment from others. These fears were particularly heightened for the participants of colour, who experienced further threat through

existing at the intersection of multiple marginalised identities. This section will explore how different contexts can impact these fears, in particular looking at how explicitly gendered spaces led to participants' trans identities feeling particularly dangerous and marked.

Section 4.3.2 ('Hyperawareness of the self') explores how, in response to these feelings of fear and vulnerability, transmasculine participants described existing in a state of hyperawareness of the self, in which they were highly conscious of how their gender identity was being perceived at all times. This was experienced as a kind of exhausting self-surveillance and caused some to limit the time that they spent in interaction with others as a way of lessening this burden. The accounts in this research suggested that this hyperawareness did not stay stable over time but modulated in accordance with the wider context of a person's transition. Participant descriptions suggested that these feelings could be most pronounced in the early stages of a person's transition, when they felt least secure in their ability to signify their gender identity to others. For those taking testosterone, it appeared that this hyperawareness could start to dissipate as the body became increasingly masculinised and they were better able to rely on passing as a man to others. This section will explore how participants described their experience of being in interactions with others as shifting in response to gender-affirming care, exploring the ways in which a greater sense of comfort in the body could ease intersubjective anxiety and open the possibility for more comfortable ways of being with others.

4.3.1. Fearing harm from others in interactions

This section will explore the fear of harm that participants described feeling in interactions with others, discussing first their fears and experiences around being misgendered (4.3.1.1), before turning to their fears of violence and harassment from others (4.3.1.2).

4.3.1.1. *"Why can't they see that I am what I say I am?!"*: experiences of being misgendered

Throughout the interviews, participants described challenging experiences of being misgendered in interactions with others, discussing how these experiences had impacted their confidence, happiness and self-esteem. It was not uncommon for the transmasculine people in this study to characterise the feeling of being misgendered as being like a physical pain. A number of metaphors were used, including feeling like “*water torture*”, “*like a slap in the face*”, and like being “*stabb[ed]*” with a “*knife*” (Jake; Scott; Marlowe; Sam). For some, there was a sense of being plagued by the fear of experiencing this pain, something which Jake described saying: “*when I’m out in the world I’m so scared of being misgendered. I’m sooo scared of being misgendered because it hurts, it’s horrible*”. These were visceral descriptions, bringing a physicality to the discomfort that these transmasculine participants described feeling when they were misgendered by others. Through characterising misgendering as a form of wounding, these accounts positioned the person doing the misgendering as the agent of the harm being caused to these transmasculine people. Indeed, this dynamic spoke to a central tension and vulnerability in interaction for transmasculine people. In interacting with others, they opened themselves both to the euphoria of having their gender identities affirmed by others, and to the possible pain and disaffirmation of misgendering, with them having limited control over which of these would come to pass. Indeed, in many cases the interlocutor was unaware of the significant emotional impact of their behaviour on the participants. As Benji noted, “*it means the world to me, but like absolutely nothing to them.*”

The challenges of being misgendered were felt keenly by Michael, who had experienced a period of concerted misgendering while he was in the military. Michael changed his registered gender at work when it became possible to do so, but despite making this official change, he was subject to a period of consistent misgendering by his peers and colleagues. Even after he had begun to pass as a man reliably outside of the workplace, he was still frequently referred to as a woman at work. He began to feel that this misgendering was not accidental, and complained about the treatment to his command. However, he felt that they did not take him seriously and were reluctant to escalate his complaints, suggesting that he may have misunderstood the interactions that he had had. Michael described the emotional toll that these interactions had on him, saying:

It just kind of accumulated to being this big deal thing where, it was almost like PTSD. I would drive into work and sit in my car for as long as humanly possible before I had to enter the building.

He described how *“it got to be pretty bad”*, and how he *“just kind of shut down really”*. It seemed that Michael had not only been hurt by the way others were treating him, but had also felt powerless to respond due to the lack of support from his superiors at work. He described how the emotional impact became so great that he had considered checking into in-patient psychiatric care: *“had I not had a dog for a good portion of that, I probably would have checked myself into, like, psych, cause it was really, really hard”*. Despite filing complaints with his Mental Health team in an attempt to be transferred to somewhere better, he found that nothing happened, and he was unable to remove himself from this difficult situation.

Michael was not the only person who had experienced issues at work, and a number of participants with public facing jobs described how it felt to be frequently misgendered by customers. Marlowe described the pain that he felt when he was misgendered, exacerbated by the fact that some customers appeared to be misgendering him deliberately, saying it felt *“hurtful”*. He described an interaction with two particular customers who had repeatedly misgendered him:

They kept using feminine terms, and I was just like, once or twice, okay I get it, you made a mistake. But when you’re doing it this much, it feels malicious.

In this instance, Marlowe felt particularly betrayed given that he perceived the men to be gay, thinking that *“people in our community”* should be more supportive. Similarly, when I asked Jake if he found himself being misgendered by customers, he responded: *“massively, yeah”*, before describing how it felt like *“drip-feeding all day of one after the other”*. He described how consistent misgendering by customers was hard to deal with and how it could feel ‘depressing’ to experience it *“constantly day in, day out”*. Benji echoed this sentiment, saying that when he got misgendered at work he thought: *“oh my god, this feels awful”*. Despite wearing a badge with his name and pronouns at work, Benji described finding that people often did not look at it (*“it’s so tiny and people don’t look at the badge anyway”*), instead calling him *“ma’am”* and *“miss”* a lot, something which *“kind of gets [him] down”*. For those in public facing jobs, the workplace seemed to be a particularly recurrent site of

misgendering, as the frequent contact with strangers increased the prevalence of interactions with people who had no knowledge of their transgender identity. As in Michael's case, it appeared that workplace guidelines or the disinterest of senior staff could further limit a person's ability to respond to misgendering as they might in another context.

Through participant descriptions, it became apparent that some experienced being misgendered as feeling like an aspect of their 'self' was being misrecognised or overlooked by others. Scott described an instance of being called 'she', saying "*it completely wiped my confidence, and I didn't feel like I could continue being myself*". This sense that Scott could not "*continue being [him]self*" after being misgendered was reflective of a wider sense amongst the participants of not being properly 'seen' by others in those moments. Jake described the emotional impact of such a feeling by saying: "*I think it's just knowing that the world doesn't see you for who you are, it just feels a bit rubbish*". Similarly, Benji described this feeling as being seen "*the wrong way*" and being misunderstood by others. These moments typified the sense of disaffirmation that could occur through being misgendered in interactions. For those transmasculine people who felt that their gender identity was a fundamental part of who they were, being misgendered could be experienced as a part of the self being undermined and misunderstood. This disaffirmation could spark frustration in some, who felt anger at the way they were being viewed by others. Marlowe expressed this frustration when he asked: "*why don't they see me as a boy?!*" while Scott explicitly described these moments as making him feel angry, asking: "*why can't they see that I am what I say I am?!*". He went on to explain how moments of being misgendered felt like an illustration of the crucial "*disconnect*" between how he saw himself and others' sense of who he was. I interpreted participants' frustration here to be an expression of the pain that lay at the heart of these experiences. Indeed, Benji captured this potent mixture of anger, pain and disaffirmation when he asked: "*why am I putting all this effort into trying to pass when I'm breaking my heart every time? Because they're not getting it, they can't see what I see.*"

4.3.1.2. "*It's a scary time to be a trans person*": fears of violence and harassment

Throughout the interviews for this research, it was striking how often participants mentioned feeling afraid of interpersonal violence. This fear emerged as a prominent factor in these transmasculine people's experiences of encountering others, underpinned by uncertainty around whether or not their identities would incite others to violence. In some cases, the fear of experiencing violence in interactions was precipitated by a fear of being 'clocked', or identified to be a trans person. Kyle described this feeling as a *"fear of revealing that [he] was brought up as female to cisgender men"*, saying that doing so would suggest to them that he was *"an outlier and an imposter"* and not who he said he was. Kyle's framing of this issue was interesting, positioning his trans identity as a secret that, if known, would delegitimise his access to certain spaces or gender positionings: he would be an 'imposter'. Accordingly, he went out of his way to hide the fact that he was trans until he knew that it would be safe for him to reveal his identity to others (*"I like to try and keep my trans, like, gender status hidden until I know it's safe"*). He described his fear as being exacerbated by a concern that those around him might have been influenced by the media to be hostile towards trans people, and he said:

Especially with the right wing media and stuff like that, there is a fear in, like, if people see me as a transgender person, like what are their reactions going to be?

Kyle's question here, 'what are their reactions going to be?', spoke directly to the vulnerable uncertainty at the heart of transmasculine people's fear in interactions with others: the reactions of others are unpredictable, and the stakes feel highest when that reaction could consist of violence or harassment.

The potential influence of anti-trans coverage in the media was also raised by Michael, who described feeling afraid when he saw discussion of anti-trans legislation in the news. Michael's feeling of fear around being known to be trans was prominent, and he was one of the only participants in this research who described wanting to live an almost entirely 'stealth' life – that is to say, a life in which he generally did not disclose that he was trans. Indeed, Michael told a story of how he had been identified as trans by a mutual friend very shortly after moving to the UK from the US. Knowing that this had happened was very concerning for Michael and in describing this, he said: *"I feel scared a lot"*. Michael found the people he had met in the UK to be less open than his friends in the US, and he described feeling that his

new friends were more like his ex-colleagues in the US military, saying: *“in my job people were, like, equally as conservative as I find they are over here”*. Michael’s fear at having been *“outed...to a bunch of people”* is perhaps best understood in the context of his past experiences, in which he had been at the receiving end of alarming anti-LGBT discrimination and harassment. In addition to the consistent misgendering that he had experienced during his time in the military, he also described a time from his youth when he and a group of friends were intimidated out of a billiards hall in the US by a threatening group of men carrying guns: *“there were these guys with guns on their hips, you know, making a lot of noise about us being in the hall”*. After experiences such as these, I did not find it surprising that Michael considered it to be a *“scary time to be a trans person”*.

Marlowe similarly described fear around interactions with others, although he focused less on a fear of being unwittingly clocked than a fear of how others might react when he did explicitly disclose his trans identity. Marlowe enjoyed meeting up with men for casual sexual encounters but experienced trepidation around how they would react when he told them that he was trans. He described these interactions as *“dangerous”* and *“scary”*, but equally felt that he had no choice but to disclose his trans identity to potential sexual partners. Marlowe’s preference was to message potential partners before they met, having experienced moments of rejection and transphobic harassment as a result of coming out in person. He described one such situation where he had been kissing a man in a club and they were preparing to return to one of their homes for the night. When Marlowe told the man that he was trans, the other man started *“being really transphobic”* and the evening was derailed as a result. In other instances, Marlowe had found that men would fetishise him for his trans identity, treating their encounters as heterosexual because they did not consider Marlowe to be a man. He described one such situation, in which a sexual partner repeatedly referred to him as a *“dirty little girl”*, despite Marlowe having clearly stated his identity as a man. Marlowe described the pain of these experience, saying that they made him *“feel shit”*. Nevertheless, he described feeling drawn to the sense of validation that he experienced when he hooked up with other men. He described finding it harder to date since his transition (*“as a trans person, it’s so hard to find someone who wants to date you”*), which he felt led to him being drawn to the

“*addictive*” validation of hook up apps, such as Grindr, despite the fear and danger that he experienced as a result.

In many of these accounts, participants explored fears of violence and harassment directly relating to their transmasculine identities becoming known to unpredictable strangers. However, this was not the only form in which a person’s transition could engender fear in interaction. In contrast, Z spoke poignantly about the danger that they felt in interactions as a person perceived to be a cis man, and specifically, a South Asian and Muslim cis man. Z described feeling more concerned about their physical safety than they had prior to their transition and they spoke about experiences of harassment and aggression that they felt had only happened because they were being read as a man. These included the hostility that Z had experienced in the nightclub (as explored in section 4.2.2.3), as well as a physical altercation that they had had on the tube. On this occasion, Z had challenged two men after hearing them use Islamophobic tropes to describe a recent murder in Z’s local area: *“they started saying stuff that was Islamophobic, and I was just like, ‘dude, just stop saying that, why are you saying stuff like that?’”*. While Z had attempted to approach the encounter in a non-violent manner, the other men had almost immediately become aggressive. Z described having to physically fight off one of the men, who had tried to pull them off the train while bystanders did nothing. Given the context of this altercation, Z felt sure that they had not just been targeted for challenging the men (*“that’s where I went wrong, I questioned a man”*) but also because of their racial identity (*“in that moment I realised it was also- that was because of my race”*). Z’s account of this experience provided some context for the way in which their intersecting South Asian and Muslim identities informed their fear of violence. While it was unclear exactly how the men were interpreting Z’s identity, it was my sense that they may have read Z as a Muslim and further conflated this with the identity of the perpetrator of the murder they discussed (despite Z noting that the crime had not, in fact, been religiously motivated). In this way, perceptions of Z’s identity placed them at an even greater risk of violence, due to others’ reductionist conflation of their identity with the identities of those perceived to be responsible for Islamist extremism. Indeed, Z noted that, while they were proud to pass as a Muslim, they were conscious of the risks of phobic violence that this could bring them in certain areas of London. Z’s experiences of aggressive men left them with a sense of

men's unpredictability and violence, saying "*men are unpredictable, and yet so predictable, like...what's going to happen?*". Z's question here hinted at my interpretation of interaction as a site of potentially dangerous uncertainty. Just as Kyle had asked '*what are their reactions going to be?*' in reference to disclosure of his trans identity, so too did Z ask '*what's going to happen?*' when they encountered male aggression. Z's description of men as both unpredictable and predictable seemed to speak to a tension that they held, in which they knew that violence was a possibility in interactions with men, but could never definitively predict when it would emerge. In such moments of violence, Z confessed that they were not sure how to respond, fearing that the calm responses that came naturally to them might mark them out as queer, thus still potentially placing them in a position of danger ("*I then kind of come off as like gay or like queer, and...that also doesn't put me in a situation of safety*"). It appeared that, while Z's primary fears in interactions seem to be focused on being read as a (cis) South Asian and Muslim man, their awareness of the potential dangers of being queer were always close to the surface. In a particularly poignant moment, Z described the sense of powerlessness they felt around men's aggression, saying that when something went wrong, all they could do was say "*get off, go away, no*".

In a similar vein, for Charlie, the fear of violence and harassment in interactions was heightened by his experiences of existing at the intersection of his Black and trans identities. As a Black man, Charlie described feeling the significant threat of experiencing interpersonal violence, as well as feeling that his actions would be judged more harshly than they would be if he were not Black. He said: "*being a Black man in this world, let alone a queer Black man, let alone a trans Black man in this world can be scary, and it's not easy.*" He described feeling "*more likely to get verbally abused*" and explained that there were some countries that he would never feel comfortable travelling to as a Black trans man. Being Black felt like a significant part of Charlie's identity, however he did not feel that experiences such as his were well understood amongst other non-Black people in the trans community: "*colour is a big thing and people don't realise that it still does affect us*". As explored in section 4.2.2.2 above, Charlie's sense of vulnerability in social situations was exacerbated by a feeling that people were more likely to consider him to be a threat because he was Black: "*because I'm Black, it just doesn't help*". For instance, he described

feeling that people watched him carefully when he went into shops, fearing that he might shoplift something: *“like walking into a shop, if I took too long looking for something I’d be followed by security”*. To manage these situations, Charlie found himself staying longer in shops to make clear that he had no intention of taking anything without paying for it. Charlie had experienced societal racism for much of his life, and he described having been the victim of racist bullying as far back as primary school. He explained that he had felt like *“a target to make fun of”*, and said that he had wanted to be seen *“just as a person”*, but was instead relegated to the sidelines as *“the ugly Black girl”*. Charlie’s past experiences of racist bullying had exacerbated the vulnerability that he now felt in social interactions, and it was my sense that his fears around existing as a trans person in the social world could not be understood outside of the context of his identity as a Black man. In navigating the intersection of multiple marginalised identities, Charlie had developed a particularly keen sense of hyperawareness and self-consciousness in society, describing himself to be *“too hyperaware”* in the way that he interpreted the world around him. Despite the challenges that he faced, Charlie remained compassionate to those around him, and described always prioritising others’ comfort over his own. Speaking to his tendency to ‘overanalyse’ situations, he said:

I’m going to have to do this for the rest of my life, because that’s just the way that the world made me feel. Just kind of being on edge. And wanting everyone else to be comfortable, even if I’m uncomfortable.

Looking at what Charlie had experienced, I felt that it was not hard to see how the world may have led him to feel less worthy than others of the kind of comfort and safety that he deserved.

In further exploring participants’ fears of harm in interactions, a common theme emerged around access to explicitly gendered spaces, particularly bathrooms and changing rooms. Some expressed anxiety around using public bathrooms related to the ways in which they were able to make use of the space. For those transmasculine people who were unable to use a urinal, going to the bathroom could mean waiting in line for a small number of cubicles, a practice that is less common in men’s than in women’s bathrooms, and which some participants described finding to be uncomfortable. Michael spoke of this discomfort, saying that, when he went to the bathroom and found the cubicles taken, he had to decide whether to leave or to

“stand [t]here and awkwardly wait”. These moments were prominent for Scott too, who described trips to public bathrooms as being among the moments that made him feel most conscious of his trans identity in public. Scott described this feeling as a ‘fear’, saying:

There’s some degree of discomfort going into public restrooms, just because you don’t know if there’s going to be a toilet free, and there’s always that kind of thing of having to wait around and just feeling very awkward.

Scott and Michael’s descriptions echoed one another here, both invoking a feeling of awkwardness, and Scott went on to say that he became *“very aware of [him]self in those moments”*. These characterisations suggested a shared feeling of self-consciousness, perhaps coupled with the idea of being looked at or observed. I interpreted Scott and Michael’s discomfort here to relate to a concern that their behaviour in the bathroom might mark them out as trans, with potentially dangerous consequences.

The discomfort that Michael and Scott described feeling in public bathrooms was shared by Sam, who spoke about feeling afraid of being physically attacked or verbally harassed in bathroom spaces. This fear was most prominent for Sam towards the beginning of his transition, when he felt unsure whether or not he could *“pass well enough to go in”*, and felt that if he were to be clocked as trans, then he might be attacked (*“I’d get hate crimed or something”*). Sam’s fears seemed to have been driven in part by the adverse experiences that he had already had in men’s public bathrooms. For instance, he described once being asked to leave the men’s bathroom by a member of venue staff who had followed him in to reprimand him. Similarly, he was once verbally harassed by men in a bathroom who challenged his right to be there, demanding that he leave: *“they were like, ‘ah, what are these girls doing in here?’ and, like, they were just being really gross and rude”*. Beyond bathrooms specifically, Sam described feeling the most afraid when he went into men’s public changing rooms. While Sam was generally able to rely on passing as a man when clothed, he worried that other elements of his body, such as the scars on his chest from top surgery, might mark him out as a trans person. In these instances, it felt *“very important [to Sam] to pass”*, and he described being in a changing room as *“a very dangerous situation”*. Sam had a sense that bathrooms and changing

rooms, due to being unobserved, lacked the barriers to violence that existed in other public spaces, for instance CCTV or the presence of staff. There is an irony to Sam's concerns about the absence of staff given that, as mentioned, Sam had already experienced staff intervention in a public bathroom, however the staff's intention was to reprimand him (*"they felt the need to come and tell me that I couldn't go in there"*), rather than to protect him from the violence or harassment of others. Expanding on his concern, Sam spoke of a difficult experience that he had had in a male sauna at his gym. He described being surrounded by a group of men having a "very *boisterous and loud*" conversation, which Sam considered to be infused with "*toxic masculinity*". Sam felt unsafe and afraid in this moment, saying:

If one of them clocked my top surgery scars and they decided to hurt me, then there's no camera. I don't have my phone, like there's literally nothing that I could do.

The situation was "scary" to Sam and, indeed, from that moment he ended up avoiding the sauna altogether due to a fear of what could happen. Speaking again to the idea of the unpredictability of other people in interactions, Sam noted that his fear of violence concerned the "*potential that something could happen*", and he did not know what form a future threat could take. To manage this unpredictability, Sam described keeping his head down and hoping that others would not notice him.

Of all the transmasculine people interviewed for this research, Corey alone described the fear that they felt in spaces that were designated for women. As Corey was at an earlier stage in his transition, they may have been one of the few participants still accessing spaces specifically for women. It was Corey's sense that the gendered segregation of a women's bathroom could amplify their risk as a non-binary person who did not reliably pass full time as either a cis man or woman. In contrast to the accounts above, Corey described feeling less surveilled in men's bathrooms than they did in women's bathrooms, and it was their sense that men were less likely than women to take issue with Corey's presence in the bathroom, given that they would not perceive Corey to be a threat. Conversely, Corey described women as being more likely to "*patrol their space*" and to question Corey's right to be there. Speaking to this phenomenon, Corey described an interaction that they had had in a women's bathroom at a wedding, at which they had noticed a particular woman staring at them throughout the course of the function. Eventually, Corey

ended up in the women's bathroom at the same time as this woman, who walked over to Corey and angrily stated that she "*thought [she] was in the wrong toilet*". Corey described her tone as being "*really nasty, looking disgusted at me*". This experience was unsettling for Corey, who described the bathroom as having become a "*no-go zone*" for the rest of the night. When I asked Corey what they felt that this woman had meant by saying this, they suggested that the woman was taking issue with the ambiguity of Corey's gender saying, "*what the fuck are you? You're an alien*". By entering into an ostensibly 'gendered' space, there seemed to be a sense that Corey's gender identity had become marked and relevant to their right to be there. Accordingly, this woman may have felt that she had licence to explicitly problematise Corey's gender identity in a way that she would not in the main body of the event.

The central thread throughout each of the experiences in this section relates to the unique intersubjective context of a gendered public space. By accessing a space normatively designated for people of one gender or another, each of these participants found themselves feeling surveilled, self-conscious, under threat and aware that at any time their right to be there could be questioned or denied. This added an additional level of concern to their experience of being in interactions in these spaces, exacerbated by frequent past experiences of having been harassed, asked to leave, or otherwise targeted on account of their gender identities.

4.3.2. Hyperawareness of the self

This section will discuss the hyperawareness that participants described feeling about their selves and their gender identities in interactions with others. I will first explore participants' feelings of being constantly 'looked at' by others (4.3.2.1), before discussing the particular vulnerability that participants described feeling in the early stages of their transitions (4.3.2.2), followed by their accounts of increased comfort and confidence in interactions as their transitions progressed (4.3.2.3).

4.3.2.1. "*I'm so aware of how I'm perceived, all day, every day*": feeling looked at

Following instances of being misgendered, some of the participants described feeling highly conscious of the fact that they might not be passing in the way that they wanted to. Jake noted that being misgendered made him feel “*paranoid*”, saying: “*I do think about it a little bit too much, and I’m constantly being really thoughtful about how I’m presenting to the world*”. Similarly, in describing the sense of increased self-consciousness that he felt in instances when he was misgendered, Scott said: “*as soon as someone says ‘she’...I’m suddenly hyper-aware of myself, I’m very self-conscious, I’m wondering what it was that they saw about me.*”

Descriptions such as these were typical and across these interviews there was a sense that the very state of being perceived by others could be itself discomforting. Michael drew attention to this feeling with his description of how he felt about his gender expression when he was alone compared to when he was with others. When alone, he did not describe experiencing significant self-consciousness: “*I don’t often think about it. I don’t think about mannerisms and that, you know the tone of my voice or anything when I’m alone*”. However, this consciousness emerged when he encountered others: “*as soon as I’m on the phone with someone or around other people, I become hyperaware*”. With this latter statement, Michael seemed to suggest that the mere presence of others could trigger a form of ‘hyperawareness’ of how he was being perceived. For Michael, this hyperawareness was linked to a fear that, if others perceived him to be trans, they would consider his trans identity to define him entirely. He said: “*there’s so much more to me, but people just see that one thing, and that’s all I am to them*”.

Michael’s sensitivity around being perceived was shared by Corey, who described having a keen sense of being ‘looked at’ due to their distinctiveness in the community where they lived and grew up. Corey grew up in an insular and socially conservative suburb and, while they had moved around to different areas in their young adulthood, they were, at the time of interview, settled back in the area in which they grew up. They described having always had a strong sense of standing out amongst the other people that lived there due, in part, to their sense that the culture of the area fostered a strong adherence to traditional gender norms. Accordingly, their gender nonconformity marked them out as being different:

I'm distinctive in this area, I stand out, I mean the amount of people that will, in this area, say hello to me because I just stick out...visually, cause people know me as being different.

In some cases, this sense of uniqueness could be innocuous, for instance Corey described how strangers would easily remember them after only a brief meeting because they remembered Corey's distinctive appearance. However, in other instances, sticking out from others could make Corey feel extremely uncomfortable. They described a social event that they had recently attended, saying: "*I fe[lt] so fucking uncomfortable, straight away*". In that moment, they felt that everyone was looking at them and they felt highly self-consciousness ("*I'm like, 'this is fucking horrendous, this is awful'*"). In reference to such situations, Corey described having anxiety in public and feeling hyperaware of their surroundings. They interpreted this hyperawareness as being a direct result of the high levels of queerphobia that they experienced when they were younger. When Corey came out as queer in nineties London, they faced significant street abuse and harassment. They described being called 'dyke', 'faggot' and 'battyboy', in addition to being spat on in public:

I was...14...I walked with my girlfriend down a road in London, hand in hand, 1993, and someone spat on us. And that- that was my first holding hands in public, and that was- that was the trajectory.

They ended up seeking counselling to deal with the anxiety that stemmed from these experiences, and this was an anxiety that they continued to experience at the time of interview, manifesting in a feeling of hypervigilant self-consciousness ("*I am so aware of how I'm perceived, all day, every day. I have been forever.*") In order to manage their anxiety in interactions, Corey described adjusting their behaviour significantly in accordance with the context of the interaction:

I'm quite- just really aware of everything about me and the other person when I interact. Every single element that's going on. And I adjust it like this [mimes turning a knob]. I'm like a radio and I tune into the frequency they're putting out.

In listening to Corey describe their anxiety in interactions, I was struck by a sense of how exhausting it must have been to exist in such a way in public. When I asked how this felt, Corey responded: "*God, tiring*". Indeed, Corey took active steps to reduce the amount of time that they spent with other people in order to limit their feelings of stress. Despite being senior in their workplace, they described choosing

to work from home and to attend as few virtual meetings as possible. It was Corey's sense that these strategies made their life feel more bearable, and they said: "*at least when I'm on my own, I switch off and I don't have to think about it,*" going on to describe the state of being with others as "*hard bloody work*". From these descriptions, it seemed that Corey existed in a constant state of heightened self-awareness in public, in which they were particularly aware of their queer identity, how they were being perceived and how other people were relating to them. This was a tiring way to live, and Corey described isolating themselves in a bid to preserve their energy and to cope with the anxieties that were born of the traumatic experiences of their youth.

A similar state of hyperawareness was explored by Kyle, who described a recent experience of extreme self-consciousness when he had been on a long haul flight. In this instance, Kyle's feelings of hypervigilance were triggered by the fact that he had not been able to style his body in the way that would normally help him to manage his gender dysphoria. Kyle had chosen not to 'pack' (to place something in his underwear to simulate the appearance of male genitalia) in case he had been patted down at security, leading to him consequently feeling "*super nervous*" and "*really scared*". In addition, he was not wearing a chest binder for the long flight due to the possibility of physical harm from wearing a binder for too long without a break. Masculinising his body with packing and binding would ordinarily bring comfort to Kyle, due to the sense that these actions were helping him to signify his identity as a man. Without them, he felt self-conscious, awkward, and highly aware of how his gender was being perceived: "*It almost made me hyperaware because, like, I wasn't comfortable, and that's what it comes down to I think*". In this moment, Kyle felt afraid of being misgendered, something that did indeed happen as soon as he arrived onto the plane. In a bid to avoid further misgendering, and to correctly signify his gender identity to the seat neighbour that he had begun chatting to, Kyle found himself obsessively looking around the plane to see how other men were behaving. He tried to mimic them, something he described as doing "*male socialisation 101 in my head*". Describing his thought process in the moment, Kyle said:

I was like, right, men manspread. What is an acceptable degree of manspreading? You know, and in my head I was genuinely doing mathematical formulas trying to figure out how much I should manspread.

Don't cross your legs, cause then he'll know that there's nothing between...every now and again my brain would freak out and I'd become hyperaware that I was trans.

With this description, saying that his “*brain would freak out*” and that he was “*hyperaware*”, Kyle vividly illustrated the heightened emotional state he experienced on that plane journey. In this state, he felt intensely aware of the ways in which his body and gender identity were being perceived by those around him and found himself unable to relax. In suggesting that he had to do ‘mathematical formulas’ to try to work out how to express his masculinity, Kyle drew attention to the intense cognitive effort that he felt he needed to harness in order to get his gender expression ‘right’. Additionally, in describing how he became ‘hyperaware that [he] was trans’, I was reminded of the reason for Kyle’s anxiety. In this moment, there was a fear and vulnerability for Kyle that came with being trans in interaction with others, especially a fear of being misgendered, with the pain and social discomfort that this could cause. Like Michael and Corey, Kyle’s account revealed a hyperawareness of the self that could emerge for transmasculine participants in interactions. Kyle’s description provided further illustration of the manner in which entering into the social space as a transmasculine person could engender feelings of vulnerability and fear, and the ways that a vigilant sense of self-consciousness could arise to manage these feelings.

4.3.2.2. “*Do they think I’m a girl?*”: feelings of vulnerability during the early stages of transition

All of the participants interviewed for this research expressed a desire to pass as men in interactions at least some of the time. There was a generally shared sense that passing as a man could bring feelings of safety and comfort in interactions with strangers. During the early days of their transitions, various of the participants described finding it harder to pass as men due to not having experienced the masculinising effects of testosterone. These early stages seem to have been accompanied by particularly high levels of self-consciousness and feelings of vulnerability in interactions, with participants being especially aware of how their bodies and appearance were indexing their gender identity.

For instance, Kyle described this feeling, saying: “*prior to HRT [hormone replacement therapy], like I thought about it all the time*”. He went out of his way to masculinise his appearance and said that his hope was to “*pass as me*”. In order to offset the perceived femininity of his body, he made sure to keep his hair short, to use make-up to contour his jawline, and to wear clothing with a traditionally masculine cut. Nevertheless, despite these efforts, he remained hypervigilant in his surroundings, saying that that he was always “*thinking about what toilets [he] should use*” and “*always keeping an eye out for the number of people around [him]*”. In fact, Kyle described how he would actively stop himself from going to public bathrooms at this early stage of his transition, even when he needed to, due to a fear that he would not pass once there. Marlowe similarly described the early stages of his transition as a time in which he was especially conscious of how he was being perceived. He described constantly wondering: “*do they think I’m a girl?*” when he was out in public, making it difficult for him to relax. Marlowe went on to explain how he would take pains to hide himself and any aspects of his body that could be perceived to be feminine. He described not wanting to speak in public (“*I was quite quiet, like I wouldn’t want to speak*”), as well as having a floppy hairstyle and wearing big hats and coats in order to cover his face. With the introduction of mask mandates during the Covid-19 pandemic, Marlowe was glad to be able to hide even more of his appearance (“*masks were my best friend*”) in the hope that it would help him to pass as a man. Jake similarly described feeling thankful for face masks because “*people can’t see your face*”, something that made him feel more safe, particularly when he accessed public bathrooms. For these participants, the feelings of self-consciousness that they experienced were especially prominent during the early stages of a transition and, as illustrated by Marlowe and Jake, this self-consciousness led to a desire to hide the self and their appearance, with a sense that the very fact of being perceived could itself pose a threat.

Participants’ accounts in this study suggested that it was not just visual but also behavioural signifiers that these transmasculine people felt particularly aware of in the early stages of their transition. Scott vividly described his experiences of the period before he was able to access testosterone, during which time he felt it necessary to “*lean into more masculine things*” and perform an exaggerated version of stereotypical masculinity with his actions. For instance, he jokingly suggested

offering to carry things that were too heavy for him as an example of this kind of masculinity. Scott spent a long time waiting to be prescribed testosterone due to an initial reluctance on the part of his medical providers and, during this liminal stage, he was highly aware of the ways in which he might be read as ‘not masculine enough’. He had hoped that performing supposedly masculine behaviours might help him to ‘prove’ that he should be allowed to access gender affirming care, and he described going “*almost over the top*” to “*hyper-masculinise*” himself in order to present a masculine identity. In retrospect, Scott acknowledged that he did not believe such performances of masculinity were necessary components of being a man, however he believed that periods of ‘hyper-masculinisation’ were not uncommon for transmasculine people towards the beginning of their transitions. Indeed, such behaviours were described by others in the research, for instance Kyle, who described spending some time dressing like a “*fuck boy*” when he was younger, and Sam who, in describing the early days of his transition, said: “*I had to be very rigidly masculine to feel okay*”. The period prior to beginning testosterone was a difficult and vulnerable time for Scott, and he spoke about the toll that this experience took on him. He described the amount of “*mental energy*” it took for him to get through the day, and noted that he would isolate himself so as to avoid being misgendered. Like Marlowe, he tried to “*avoid talking as much as possible*” and said that, “*if [he] could avoid people, [he] would*”. When Scott did find himself with other people, he would feel the need to concentrate on every signifier he could think of that could be communicating femininity to those around him, saying:

Every single thing that I [did], from the way I walk, how I stand, like everything was just- I had to monitor every tiny little thing just to make sure that people hopefully gendered me correctly.

This extract reveals the effort that Scott was putting into signifying his identity as a man, trying to avoid being misgendered. He spoke of that time saying “*I really don’t miss those days, because that took up so much energy...but now...it’s a breeze*”.

4.3.2.3. “*I’m just a dude on testosterone and I’m happy*”: increasing comfort in interactions as transitions progress

As participants described their experiences of interactions, the tone of their accounts seemed to shift and evolve over time, particularly as people moved further into their

transitions. For some, it appeared that interactions became significantly more comfortable as the masculinisation of testosterone therapy took effect. With this masculinisation came an increase in the likelihood of being gendered as men, something which seemingly led to a significant reduction in anxiety in interaction. With this being the case, feelings of hyperawareness and self-consciousness seemed to abate, and experiences of interactions were able to become more easeful. For Scott, this process involved feeling more relaxed and less *“preoccupied with gender”*. As his transition progressed and he began to consistently pass as a man, he described his gender identity as occupying his thoughts less frequently, and he said: *“I can kind of just get on with life, and I don’t have to kind of worry about things as much”*. He described this shift as feeling like he is less *“in [his] head”* about how other people are reading him, allowing him to relax a little more in interactions, and to feel less concerned about how others are judging his gender expression. He said: *“I don’t have to kind of worry about things as much. Um, so I think, like, I’ve just kind of relaxed quite a lot in that sense”*.

Kyle similarly spoke of an alleviation of his anxiety in interactions, saying that he no longer felt that he had to *“compensat[e]”* for anything in his behaviour. Since he had started testosterone, he described feeling more comfortable with himself (*“I’m comfortable with me now”*) and said that he was *“getting back to the baseline where [he] feel[s] that [he] should be”*. Looking ahead to the next stages in his transition, Kyle characterised any further changes as being a sign that he would be becoming more himself (*“I will just be me”*). He described feeling that being on testosterone had *“reduced [his] tie”* with his gender, with him no longer feeling so *“staunchly male”*. With this statement, he appeared to speak to a shift in the way that he related to gender identities as labels. He described having felt more definitive about his gender identity previously (*“I was like, ‘I am man, I am male, I am transgender man’”*), in a way that he was no longer drawn to: *“the longer I am on testosterone, the less attached to being male, or a man, that I become”*. Crucially, he felt this to be a positive shift, and he said: *“I’m just a dude on testosterone and I’m happy”*. With this happiness came an alleviation in the sense that he needed to firmly define his own identity: *“I guess I’m happier, so then I don’t like feel the need to so rigidly put myself in boxes”*.

In describing how transitioning had impacted him, Michael spoke specifically of the shift in his interactions with others. He noted that *“dealing with outside factors, like talking to people or just being in public aren’t as big of- they aren’t as taxing as they used to be”*. He described no longer feeling that others around him were *“trying to figure out [his] gender”*. As a result of which he felt as if a ‘wall’ had slowly come down, and helped him to see interactions *“as what they are”*, rather than feeling that his interpretations of them were clouded by pervasive anxiety around his gender. He spoke about how transitioning had improved his self-esteem, saying: *“[n]ow that I feel like my true self, it’s just easier to be out in public”*. With this improvement in self-esteem, Michael described feeling more able to speak up for himself and express his emotions around others. Unlike previously, when he used to *“overthink everything”*, he increasingly felt like his *“mental health, or my mental state, is just a lot calmer and in a better place with itself”*. Similarly, as Marlowe’s transition had progressed, he described feeling that he was newly ‘being seen’, in particular been seen by those around him as *“just a man”*. He described these moments as feeling like external validation, and said that being gendered correctly feels *“really euphoric”*. For Marlowe, this felt like a *“weight lifted off [his] shoulders”*, and said that it made him feel that *“all the hard times, with all the dysmorphia and all of that, it’s worth it”*.

In some cases, the alleviation of self-consciousness brought about by transition had enabled a shift to more ‘feminine’ modes of expression that might have felt uncomfortable previously. Scott spoke to this change, saying that before he had been able to reliably pass as a man, he had felt paranoid about any small elements of his appearance or behaviour that might ‘tip’ someone into reading him as a woman. As a result, he described wanting to *“disown”* any parts of himself that he perceived to be less masculine. Conversely, now that Scott felt more comfortable in his gender expression, he felt better able to *“own those parts of [him]self that [he] didn’t want to before”*. Now that he was almost always gendered as a man, he was much more comfortable with interactive signifiers that might be interpreted to be feminine. As his fear of being misgendered had dissipated and he felt *“more secure in [himself] as a person”*, he was comfortable with *“more flamboyant mannerisms”* and *“expressing all parts of [his] character”*. Similarly, in stark contrast with his previous experiences of hiding himself when out in public, Marlowe described now feeling more comfortable being *“a bit feminine”*, saying that people would probably

not pick up on it, and if they did: *“I think fuck it, I don’t think anyone cares”*.

Additionally, both Kyle and Sam explained that they had recently returned to wearing make-up now that they passed as men. Kyle described feeling excited that he looked like a drag queen in make-up rather than a woman, something that made him feel comfortable enough that he could start wearing it again without feeling dysphoric. As a self-defined queer man, Sam felt more authentically himself when he wore make-up and painted his nails, but only if he knew that he would not be gendered as a woman as a result (*“it’s just being more authentically me”*). These accounts illustrated the feelings of comfort and confidence that could develop over the course of these participants’ transitions. This comfort led to them feeling that they could express all parts of themselves, without a fear that doing so would place them under threat. For some of the transmasculine people in this research, as their transitions progressed and they felt more comfortable with the way that their bodies lined up with their gender identities, there was a sense of being able to relax in interactions and to soften the feelings of hypervigilance and self-consciousness that had previously held sway.

Finally, it is important to remember that transmasculine people’s experiences of being on testosterone are diverse. While most described experiencing a decrease in feelings of hyperawareness and vulnerability upon starting testosterone, this was not the case for all. Specifically, Charlie discussed the ways in which his dysphoria and self-consciousness had become notably more pronounced soon after starting testosterone therapy. As the prospect of physical masculinisation became more imminent, Charlie became preoccupied with a feeling that testosterone was not having the effect that he had hoped. He said:

I feel like people don’t talk about the fact that, when you start testosterone, your awareness of your appearance is more heightened, because you’re waiting for changes and aware of your face and waiting for it to change.

While Charlie could admit that he was rarely being misgendered by strangers in public, he nevertheless developed a pessimistic view of his transition, feeling that he would never be able to consistently pass as a man. He described feeling like ‘nothing was working’, saying: *“what’s the point of being on testosterone if no-one can see, like, me?”*. Charlie’s question here was poignant; during this period, even as he saw the initial effects of testosterone on his body, he still feared that those around him

would never be able to recognise the person he felt himself to be. This fear had a significant impact on his wellbeing, and he said it made him feel “*anxious and dysphoric in social situations*”. In consequence, Charlie described the early months on testosterone as a period of real unhappiness and instability.

However, despite Charlie’s past experiences of extreme self-consciousness and self-criticism, I had a sense in our interview that these feelings were starting to shift. Charlie was keen not to overstate the nascent improvement in his sense of self in public (“*I don’t know if I’d use the word confidence*”), however there was indication that his previous feelings of self-consciousness and vulnerability were beginning to ease. He described feeling “*the smallest amount of comfortability to...walk with my head up, rather than down*”, and mentioned a growing feeling of ‘calmness’ as he felt that his mind and body were starting to ‘align’:

But when your brain is starting to realise that things are kind of aligning, even in the smallest amount, there’s a sense of calmness, a sense of confidence, regardless of your mental health. I feel like we don’t talk about that actual connection with the brain and body, that was meant to happen as a child, but it’s actually happening as an adult. It’s like, ‘woah, okay, this is feeling a bit more right’.

Finally, he said, he was able to “*like small parts of [him]self*”, as opposed to previously, when he had not liked anything at all. Charlie’s experience of testosterone had not been straightforward, and he certainly found the early stages to be challenging. Nevertheless, it appeared that, even for Charlie, being on testosterone could bring a feeling of confidence and comfort, a sense of alignment with the mind and body, and an easing of feelings of vulnerability and hyperawareness in interactions.

4.3.3. Feelings of vulnerability in interactions: summary

This section has explored the feelings of vulnerability and fear that transmasculine people can feel when they are in interactions in the social world. It is evident that transmasculine people can feel vulnerable to a number of possible threats when they are interacting with others that they cannot always predict. Section 4.3.1 explored transmasculine people’s fears of harm in interactions, illustrating both the pain that

participants described feeling when they were misgendered, as well as the significant concerns that some felt around violence and harassment from others. In particular, the accounts in this section draw attention to the sense of vulnerability that can arise from a person's trans identity being known to those around them, coupled with feelings of uncertainty around how those people might react. This section went on to explore how participants' gender identities felt particularly marked in gendered spaces, leading others to relate to them in a more censorious manner than they might otherwise. These experiences engendered feelings of significant self-consciousness, and a sense of being looked at and observed.

This sense of being observed was discussed in section 4.3.2, which explored the feelings of hyperawareness of the self that participants felt when they were interacting with others. It appears that, when these transmasculine participants felt the risks of being misgendered or perceived to be trans to be very high, they could relatedly feel a sense of hypervigilance about their appearance, behaviour, and the ways that their gender identities were being perceived by others. These feelings could amount to a wearing state of self-surveillance, in which participants felt unable to relax in interactions with others. This section further discussed how these feelings of hyperawareness could shift over time, with levels of self-consciousness often being most elevated at the beginning of participants' transitions. During this time, participants' experiences of being less able to pass in the gender identity that felt most congruent for them led to feelings of fear and discomfort. However, as their transitions progressed and some experienced the masculinising effects of testosterone, it became easier for many to pass in a way that felt comfortable for them. With this ease came greater feelings of comfort and confidence and a sense of being able to exist more authentically and safely in interactions with others.

4.4. GET3: Experiences and interpretations of passing

The second GET (section 4.3) explored the feelings of vulnerability and hyperawareness that transmasculine people described feeling in interactions in relation to their transmasculine identities. These feelings were often driven by fears of being misgendered or of being harassed if they were identified as trans. In response to these fears, participants described feeling hyperaware of how their gender identity was being perceived by others and spoke about going out of their way to do gender in such a way that they felt more likely to pass as cis men. This section will explore transmasculine people's experiences of passing, looking first at the actions that they described taking in order to pass as cis men, before exploring their interpretations of passing on a conceptual level.

Passing is an intersubjective phenomenon, in which an other perceives a subject in an interaction and makes an assumption about their gender identity. For the transmasculine people interviewed for this study, passing as men rather than women was considered preferable in most interactions. For those who had been on testosterone for a significant length of time, passing as men generally required less effort due to the masculinisation of the body that can occur with testosterone therapy. For those who had been on testosterone for a shorter time, and for Benji who was not on testosterone at all, the act of passing was considered more difficult. There was a sense of these participants needing to engage in active masculinisation of certain gender signifiers in order to offset bodily features that might index womanhood to others.

Section 4.4.1 ('Doing passing') will explore participants' accounts of the careful attention that they paid to their gender signifiers in interactions, including close monitoring of their speech, clothing and body language. This section will look at the signifiers that felt particularly important to participants, as well as the creative and strategic ways in which they modified these signifiers according to each interaction. I will explore participants' challenging experiences of having their ability to control their signifiers curtailed by their environment, as well as experiences of struggling to maintain ways of being in the body that did not feel 'natural'.

While all of the participants in this study described wanting to pass as men at least some of the time, it became clear that attitudes towards passing on a conceptual level were complex and at times fraught. Section 4.4.2 ('Complex relationships with passing') will explore participants' relationships with passing as a concept. Firstly, I will explore how participants' sense of the importance of passing shifted from context to context, with particular weight placed on passing in highly masculine environments. This section will go on to examine participants' attitudes towards passing from an ideological perspective, looking at perceptions of passing as cisnormative and particularly limiting for those with non-binary identities. Finally, this section will explore ideas around passing beyond gender, including participants' experiences of passing in racial, religious, sexual and neurodiverse identities, and how these intersected with their experiences of their gender identities and transitions.

4.4.1. Doing passing

While passing requires the instinctive categorisation of a subject's gender identity by an other, it is not a passive process for the subject. Rather, the transmasculine people interviewed for this study indicated the ways in which they were active in the passing process (i.e. 'doing' passing), through a combination of self-surveillance, as explored in section 4.3.2, and conscious masculinisation of their gender signifiers. I am conceptualising this process as 'masculinisation' of signifiers, as it involves transmasculine people adapting their performances of various gender signifiers to align more closely with their sense of a stereotypically masculine performance, not because it involves the use of signifiers that necessarily constitute masculinity. This relates to Motschenbacher's (2007) discussion of gendered styles, as discussed in section 2.4.4.

In this section, I will examine the mechanics of doing passing as described by the transmasculine people in this study, looking at the specific ways that these participants described masculinising their gender signifiers in interactions and their emotional experiences of doing so. This section will first explore participants' experiences of masculinising signifiers in their speech (4.4.1.1), before exploring their masculinisation of their appearance and behaviours (4.4.1.2).

4.4.1.1. “Men kind of tend to be more like this”: masculinising speech

Throughout these interviews, the participants described a number of ways in which they masculinised aspects of their speech with a view to signifying masculine gender identities. The most prominent of these was vocal pitch, with participants describing the ways in which they would actively lower the pitch of their voice in order to create a voice that sounded more “*stereotypically, like, cis male*” (Michael). While none of the participants in this research described having received formal vocal therapy, a few had sought help elsewhere or developed their own strategies for altering their vocal sound. For instance, Kyle explained the physical techniques that he used to change the resonance and pitch of his voice; he specifically described how he would “*engage [his] larynx more*” and “*push [his voice] deeper into [his] chest*”. In doing so, Kyle hoped to come across as “*more masculine or more male*”. Moreover, Michael spoke about having spent time with an opera singer to try to understand how best to lower his voice consistently and naturally. This singer had suggested some tips for shifting his voice down, including relaxing his throat (“*one [of the tips] is, like, opening my- relaxing the throat*”) and moving his vocal resonance down to his chest (“*I’ll purposefully open up my throat and speak from ... more of a chest voice*”). In addition, Michael described strategically controlling his breath to create a voice with a particularly low pitch:

And if you breathe in so you almost, like, snore. That’s, like, the most relaxed [Michael makes a deep breathing noise]. It’s almost like that noise. So I kind of think about my throat being that relaxed and then I’ll speak, like, more from the chest. I’ll put my voice down here a little bit more [Michael speaks at a lower pitch to demonstrate].

For Michael, the lowering of his pitch felt particularly important when talking to strangers on the phone. While he found that he generally passed as a man when meeting people in person, the same was not true of his phone interactions, in which he could not rely on his facial hair and masculine appearance to help index his manhood: “*if I’m on the phone and I don’t think about my voice, then I’ll be misgendered sometimes*”. In his experience, when his voice was the only signifier that interlocutors had access to, they would be more likely to gender him as a

woman. Accordingly, it felt important to Michael to masculinise his voice on the phone in a way that he was less careful about in person.

In addition to lowering their pitch in interactions, some of the transmasculine people interviewed for this study described limiting the pitch variation of their speech to come closer to their perception of cis men's prosodic patterns. This was generally described as speaking in a way that was more "*monotonous*" (Jake), and contrasted with times when the voice was more "*up and down*" (Jake). For Michael, there was a sense that people whose voices were "*a little bit more feminine*" would "*talk up a lot*", something that he demonstrated by repeating a string of syllables at an ascending then descending pitch. By contrast, Michael tried to stay more on the monotone "*spectrum*". This sense of a difference between men and women's pitch variation was shared by Corey, who said: "*men kind of tend to be more like this* [speaking in a flat, monotonic way], *and they can be more monotone in how they speak*". However, despite this sense of the differences between men and women's speech styles, Corey was not inclined to masculinise their own speech, and instead felt happy to retain the prosodic patterns that felt comfortable for them ("*I'm not monotone, I go up and I go down*"). The contrast in Michael and Corey's priorities here highlights the patchwork nature of gender expression: while certain signifiers felt important for some, they did not feel important for others, and participants' individual significations of masculinity were highly personal.

During the interviews, some of the participants described feeling that it could be difficult to remember to masculinise the voice at all times during interactions. Indeed, Sam described how he would usually "*forget to do it halfway through the conversation*", meaning that his pitch "*goes back up*". Similarly, Kyle noted that the pitch of his voice would rise again if he did not remember to consciously alter it. Nevertheless, he was not overly concerned about this fact, and indeed he was sceptical about how much masculinising his voice could actually help him to pass ("*I don't think that has any impact*"), despite finding that lowering his pitch helped him to *feel* more comfortable and confident when interacting with others: "*if I feel more secure in my voice being deeper, and I feel more secure in the way that I'm projecting, then I feel more confident*". For Kyle, it seemed that the emotional experience of his gender expression could exist in a way that was, at times, removed

from its effect. Thus Kyle was able to experience an increase in confidence as a result of the act of masculinising his voice, even if he did not consider it effective in altering others' perception of his gender identity. Scott similarly described how masculinising his voice could have a positive emotional impact, even when it was not tied to the project of passing. Before he was able to access testosterone, Scott described using audio editing software on his game console to create recordings of his voice at a lower pitch, as well as using photo editing software to make photos of himself look more masculine. Scott did not use this voice to interact with anyone, and thus these actions did not help Scott to pass to any specific others, however he said that they felt "*affirming*" and "*more like what things should be*". For Scott, there was a sense that his wider gender expression at that time was not congruent for him, but that experiencing a masculinised version of his gender signifiers could bring him some relief, however fleetingly.

Beyond phonetic masculinisation, the transmasculine people in this study also described making different lexical choices with a view to signifying a certain *kind* of masculinity (or stance) to others. These lexical shifts were most often described as being made in interactions with other men, involving the use of seemingly 'masculine' terms of address ("*laddish terms*" (Sam)), such as 'bro', 'mate' and 'man'. There appeared to be a sense that, in using terms that transmasculine people had heard used by the men around them, they would be able to communicate a sense of sameness and in-group membership with the men with whom they were interacting. Jake explicitly described the use of such terms as imitation, having noticed that men had started using them with him more frequently once he had begun to pass more consistently. For Jake, this did not feel like a fully natural use of language for him ("*I wouldn't naturally do that normally I suppose*") but something that he described consciously implementing in order to come across as more 'manly' in interactions. Kyle similarly described making different lexical choices in interactions with men, describing this shift as "*do[ing] the 'mate' thing*", a strategy that he used to avoid revealing to cis men that he was trans. For Kyle, using language such as this used to feel like a conscious performance of masculine signifiers but over time had come to feel like a natural part of his linguistic repertoire:

It's almost like it's not a performance, it's like actually how I am at this point [but] I think I would argue that in the beginning it was a performance, for sure.

Indeed, Kyle did not only engage in lexical masculinisation when speaking English, but similarly described altering the lexical choices he made when speaking Japanese. Kyle lived abroad in Japan for a year when he was studying, during which time he experimented with various different gender expressions and styles. When in Japan, Kyle took advantage of the linguistic features of Japanese to signify his gender identity in various different ways. He described using more masculine language, despite the fact that he felt that he was being read as a woman at the time (*"I did not pass in my opinion"*). He said:

The good thing about Japanese is that they don't tend to use pronouns, so I could get away with- like sort of more masculine language, and people wouldn't really question, they would just think I was a foreigner. Um, so that was all good for me.

With this extract, it seemed that Kyle was engaging in something of a trade-off in the way that he chose to speak in Japanese. Being perceived to be a 'foreigner' meant that Kyle's use of seemingly gender incongruent language could be perceived as a mistake, rather than an intentional feature of his gender expression. In this way he avoided any uncomfortable questions about his gender while still being able to express his identity in a way that felt congruent for him.

Finally, some of the participants described how they would, at times, be judicious with the content of their speech in order to implicitly signify cis manhood to those with whom they interacted. Marlowe, who generally preferred to be stealth at work and when meeting new people, described a few instances in which he had strategically obscured his trans identity from others using jokes and evasion. For instance, when he was with men who were making jokes about sex and their genitals (*"just talking about their dicks, cause they like to do that quite a lot, I don't know why"*), Marlowe described laughing along in such a way as to imply that he had had the same experience as the men that he was with. In doing so, he hoped to hide the fact that his situation was different from other men, saying: *"I don't want them to clock on that, like [pauses] I'm different"*. Moreover, Marlowe said that, when he was queueing in a nightclub bathroom with other men, if they motioned to him that there was a urinal

free, he would tell them that he was “*pee shy*”, or laugh along with jokes that he was going to take drugs, as a way of explaining why he was using a cubicle instead of a urinal. Marlowe described each of these exchanges in a light-hearted manner, but it was my sense that they had caused him anxiety at times. He described needing to pay careful attention to his speech (“*I need to watch myself with what I say*”) out of fear around what might happen if he were to be identified as trans. While Marlowe generally passed as a man in interactions with others, in certain contexts, it felt important to him to go above and beyond to signify cis manhood to those around him in order to remain safe.

A similar cautiousness with speech content was described by Z, who discussed how they would selectively conceal details about themselves in certain situations in order to feel more comfortable. In particular, they described their experiences at their local barbers. The barbers was an environment in which Z did not feel fully safe, and in which they liked to pass not only as a cis man, but as a man who was not queer or effeminate in any way: “*anything that would question my masculinity or what I’m doing there*”. Z described the almost frantic way that they would monitor their speech when at the barbers, thinking: “*oh my god, what do men talk about? ... what’s an appropriate response to ‘how are you?’*”. Similarly they wondered: “*what do I say about my job? ... How do men talk? How much is too much?*”. In accounting for these concerns, Z returned to a metaphoric motif that they mentioned a number of times throughout their interview, that of being on a stage without a script: “*it feels like there’s a performance happening and I’m on stage and no-one gave me a script*”. With this metaphor, it was my interpretation that the stage was Z’s interactions and behaviour, and the script, were it to exist, would be a comprehensive set of guidelines on how to behave like a cis man. Without it, however, Z was left to improvise their behavioural gender expression, hoping that their efforts would be sufficient to signify cis manhood to their interlocutors. Like Marlowe, Z was reluctant to reveal the full truth of their experience out of fear that it could out them as trans. Indeed, they went so far as to use their middle name when they booked into the barbers as it was more culturally masculine and less androgynous than their first name. Similarly, Z worried about the details of their life that might ‘give them away,’ for instance the inclusive mosque that they attended or the trans youth work that they did. Z vividly described their thought process to me, speaking breathlessly as they rattled through each of

these examples, imagining a conversation they might have with their barber. In this hypothetical conversation, they explained that they would be “*making the script up*” and improvising their answers as they went along:

Oh I go to this mosque.

[That] mosque is nearby, why don't I go to [that] mosque?

Oh I work too much.

What do I do for work?

Oh I work for a trans youth organisation, let's just say I'm a youth worker instead.

Why is my youth work online? Why is my youth work all over the place and not in the place where I live?

Because everything went online.

Who are the people I work with?

Okay let's say they've got mental health conditions, they're isolated, they're homeless, let's just say that.

Which is true, but the important factor is that they're trans.

In this imagined interaction, Z's nervousness felt prominent to me. In choosing what to say, their priority was “*to fit in and not [invite] any questions*”. When I asked Z what they thought might happen if the barber did read them as queer or trans, they described their concern that “*they would be homophobic, they would be transphobic to me*”, a fear that was heightened by the sense that the barber was “*in a position of power*” because he was a cis man and because Z was receiving a service from him. Through strategically obscuring their trans identities, both Z and Marlowe sought to implicitly signify a certain kind of manhood in the hope that it would reduce their risk of harm. In this way, the content of their speech, for instance Marlowe's response to jokes about sex and Z's description of their workplace, could be interpreted as gender signifiers that they both sought to masculinise in order to fit in.

4.4.1.2. “*I hate the way that my body tends to do certain actions*”: masculinising appearance and behaviours

It was not just speech signifiers that the participants described masculinising in their attempts to pass as men. Section 4.3.2 explored the ways in which participants described feeling hyperaware of their appearance when they were concerned about

being perceived to be trans. In that section, we read Kyle's description of the careful attention that he paid to the elements of his appearance that could signify his gender identity to those around him. He described keeping his hair short, using make-up to contour his jawline, and wearing clothing with a traditionally masculine cut. Experiences of using clothing to index manhood were common among the participants in this study. For instance, Corey described choosing to always wear men's clothes, saying that it felt like a way of *"expressing that [they] don't want to be seen as a female at all"*, while Benji emphasised the felt importance of his clothing, saying that he would sometimes *"spend like 15 minutes every morning"* figuring out what he would wear for the day. Jake similarly spoke to these ideas, asserting his belief that men tended to wear more muted colours than women, rather than the *"brightly coloured clothes"* that Jake would ordinarily feel drawn to. Accordingly, Jake described choosing to wear clothing with *"dull colours"*, in order to draw *"a little bit less attention"* to himself. In the interview, Jake expressed frustration with the fact that he felt the need to change the way that he dressed (*"I'm annoyed at myself for not letting me wear the things I want to, if that makes sense"*), a sentiment that was shared by Benji (*"I don't always want to dress like super-duper cis man you know"*). Nevertheless, there was a sense that, while doing passing through clothing in this way could feel limiting for some transmasculine people, it could also be a crucial element in helping them to feel safer and more comfortable when out in public.

In addition to these strategic choices of clothing, participants also described the ways that they altered their body language to index manhood in interactions. For instance, Sam described standing with his shoulders back and his hands in his pockets in order to create a more *"masculine stance"*. Similarly, Kyle described favouring body language that was more 'square', linked to his idea that men tended to be more *"open"* in their stance, as mentioned in section 4.2.1.2. He demonstrated an 'open' stance by holding his hands apart from one another in front of his body and spreading his fingers more widely. Across these accounts there was repeated mention of participants feeling that they had to 'teach' themselves the kind of body language that would be more likely to index manhood (*"I've actually had to teach myself to do this"* (Kyle)). For instance, in describing his attempts to sit in a more perceptibly masculine way on public transport, Jake said that he *"did sort of teach [himself] to take up a little bit more space and like relax a bit more"*, while Benji

described trying to “*train*” himself to walk in a more masculine way, with “*more swagger*”. With these descriptions, it appeared that such masculinisation did not necessarily come naturally to all participants (“*you do it differently and it doesn’t feel natural, like it’s not, maybe who you are*” (Benji)) and it could require a significant amount of conscious control to maintain this consistently. This could be difficult, and Benji described how masculinising his gait worked “*for the next like 15 seconds until I start thinking about other things and my walk goes back to normal*”. While Benji found this frustrating, it nevertheless remained important to him to try, as he was unhappy with the way that he felt his body naturally moved (“*I hate the way that my body tends to do certain actions*”).

The felt importance of masculinising different gender signifiers was perhaps best indicated by participants’ experiences of having these freedoms taken away. Such instances were described by participants who were required to dress or behave in certain ways in the workplace. Benji described having a set uniform that he had to wear at work and, while he was able to wear the men’s uniform, it was not cut in a way that felt comfortable for him. In particular, Benji described feeling that his uniform accentuated what he perceived to be his “*perfect, child-bearing hips*” and he felt that he did not “*fit into the kind of person that this [uniform] is meant to be for*”. As a result of this fact, Benji described feeling “*very self-conscious when [he’s] at work*” and he said that his uniform made him feel “*very, like, not a man*”. Indeed, Benji described even his body language being under scrutiny at work, noting that he was encouraged not to put his hands in his pockets, something that he described as “*the one manly move that is my go-to thing*”. Wearing his work uniform had a negative impact on Benji’s self-confidence, and he felt that it caused him to be misgendered more frequently: “*so I get called, like, ‘ma’am’ and ‘miss’ a lot*”. Being misgendered at work was painful for Benji, and he said that: “*it just sometimes feels like, no matter what I do, people are going to see me, like, the wrong way. Like, they’re going to misunderstand me.*” Benji was not the only person who described having his self-expression controlled in the workplace, and Michael had also felt his gender expression to be restricted during his time in the military. The most troubling aspect of this for Michael was the requirement that he remain cleanly shaven; this meant that he was not able to grow any facial hair, revealing what he felt to be his “*baby face*”. Given Michael’s experiences of painful, and seemingly concerted,

misgendering in the workplace, these restrictions were difficult. He described there being little he could do in the military to express his gender identity differently, other than keeping his hair very short. As he said: *“that was about all I knew how to ... do in the military”*. The experiences described here emphasise how important it could feel for these transmasculine people to be able to signify their gender identities in the ways that felt most appropriate for them. For both Benji and Michael, these workplace restrictions felt limiting and they associated these restrictions with upsetting instances of not passing and being misgendered. Doing passing seemed to often be experienced as a cornerstone of participants’ strategies in staying safe in interactions, and to have this ability taken away could be, at times, challenging.

4.4.2. Complex relationships with passing

All of the participants interviewed for this research described actively doing passing in at least some interactions with others. While passing was viewed positively in certain instances, these descriptions were often caveated by complex and ambivalent relationships with passing on a more conceptual level. This section 4.4.2 will explore these complexities, looking at how interactional contexts impacted participants’ feelings around passing (4.4.2.1), exploring criticisms of passing as cisnormative and harmful (4.4.2.2), and examining participants’ experiences of passing in identities beyond gender (4.4.2.3).

4.4.2.1. *“You get the vibe pretty quickly that this is not an LGBT friendly space”*: passing in context

Across the course of the study interviews, it became clear that the notion of passing held a number of different meanings and resonances for the transmasculine people in the study. While all had experiences of doing passing, the reasons for doing so varied. As explored in section 4.3.2.3, some of the transmasculine people described passing as a man to feel highly affirming. Michael described feeling like his *“true self”* when he passed, while Benji described the feeling of passing as follows:

Yeah, it feels amazing. It feels so good ... I’m like literally on a high for the rest of the day, sort of thing. So ... it really is gender euphoria in a nutshell.

Even for Corey, who did not identify as a man, passing as a man could feel positive, perhaps due to a sense that manhood felt closer to their identity than womanhood. When I asked if passing as a man was important to them, Corey responded: “90% of the time, yeah”.

However, beyond such descriptions of affirmation, the idea of doing passing also appeared closely linked with a desire to be safe in certain social situations. As explored in section 4.3.1, the transmasculine participants interviewed for this research reported feelings of fear around being identified as trans in a society that can be dangerous and disaffirming for trans people. Accordingly, passing as a cis man could be experienced as a self-preserving strategy, serving to mitigate the perceived danger of abuse or harassment as a result of being read as trans. Z spoke to this idea, noting that passing “*offers safety*” and saying that, for them, “*passing is a functional thing*”. For Z, doing passing held a specific purpose, namely as “*a means of getting through a situation ... surviving ... just getting by*”. Even though Z did not identify as a binary man, they acknowledged that they passed “*for the most part either as a straight cis man or as a gay cis man*”, and that they could use this to their advantage, despite the fact that “*neither are true*”. For Z, there were certain contexts in which the perceived safety of passing as a man could far outweigh the potential affirmation that might come from being affirmed in their non-binary identity. Section 4.4.1.1 explored the barbers as being such a context for Z, where passing as a man felt particularly important for them due to a sense that their barbers was “*really heavy on the masculinity*” and “*very heteronormative*”. Accordingly, in this context, Z described putting more effort into doing passing in order to take advantage of the accompanying feelings of safety.

Beyond Z, it became apparent that the transmasculine people in this study felt the most need to actively do passing in interactions with, or environments populated by, men. It seemed that it was with cis men that transmasculine people felt most in danger of abuse or harassment. Scott described these as “*very masculine cis male environments*” and offered the pub as an example of a place where he had recently felt particularly concerned about being read as trans. He had gone to watch a football match and found that homophobic slurs were being used to denigrate players who were not performing well, as Scott said: “*you get the vibe pretty quickly*

that this is not an LGBT friendly space". Accordingly, Scott felt more of a need to pass as a cis man and to hide his trans identity than he might do in another context. Corey also spoke to feeling threatened in pubs, in part due to their sense that pubs are often especially populated by straight men. They said:

[I worry about] ... someone saying something to me. That's happened so often like, I've had, like, a lot of stuff in pubs. Like people just sort of starting on me and stuff like that. And physical violence, it's like they just want to attack you or something, or say shit to you, stare at you, you just don't want to be there. So I don't really particularly like going in pubs. Straight pubs.

As a result of this, the pub stood out as a context in which passing could make a particularly significant difference to Corey's feelings of safety in their gender identity: *"there'll be a safety to it, so like going to a straight pub, a fucking pub and not being worried, that will be amazing"*.

A few participants also mentioned the gym as an environment in which doing passing felt particularly important. Marlowe described being careful not to show any campness or femininity in his interactions at the gym and noted that he felt the need to act *"more masculine"* because of *"all these big hench bodybuilders"*. In the male changing rooms at his gym, Sam described speaking to people as little as possible and making particular use of supposedly masculine terms of address, such as 'bro' and 'mate.' Likewise, Corey noted that they expressed their gender differently when around men at the gym, saying that they became *"grunty"* when around those *"blokey blokes"*. Like Sam, Corey described the masculine terms of address that they would use in the gym, saying things like *"y'alright mate"* with a disinterested and monotonic intonation, despite this not feeling like a natural part of their repertoire. For Corey, the aim in doing passing in this way was clear; Corey had experienced a significant amount of queerphobic abuse when they were younger, particularly from men, leaving them especially sensitive to the risk of experiencing abuse in public. They remained nervous around men, and their reluctance to talk to men in the gym (*"don't really want a conversation with them anyway"*) was based in a fear that they *"just don't know where it would go"* and a concern that they might *"get more shit"* if they did not pass.

The consideration of safety in different interactional contexts was also key for Charlie, who described going out of his way to primarily spend time with people who made him feel safe, in particular *“a very diverse queer PoC [people of colour] kind of community”*. When with such people, Charlie described feeling more comfortable and less likely to experience harassment as a result of his identity. For Charlie, surrounding himself with queer people helped him to feel less of a need to perform a certain kind of masculinity and, instead, feel able to say: *“it’s okay, this is just me”*. Beyond just Charlie, there was a sense across these interviews that people did not need to be so consciously aware of doing passing in interactions where they knew that their identity would be respected by those around them. This was described as particularly being the case at home or around loved ones. Indeed, Kyle mentioned that when he was at home with his family, he sometimes forgot that he was trans. He said:

It’s so normalised in my household now that it’s just like not a big deal, I guess ... I often forget that I’m trans, because in my house then I’m just Kyle.

Jake described a similar feeling, saying: *“with my husband I feel, like, totally at ease and I never even think about being trans”*, something that he likewise felt with his close friends. In these environments, it seemed that the burden of doing passing was reduced, which Jake described saying: *“they see me as I am, so I don’t need to put that effort in”*. This marked a direct contrast from his experience of being in public spaces, where he did feel the need to actively do passing, given his fear of being misgendered (*“I do make an effort to like try and present as masculine as possible, cause I know that’ll get me gendered correctly more”*). Jake’s comfort with his husband and friends seemingly came, in part, from the knowledge that he did not need to consciously masculinise his gender signifiers in order to have his gender identity respected and affirmed by those around him. Regarding this experience he said: *“they never misgender [me], they get it right 100% of the time. And they treat me how they treat any other man”*. In these moments, Jake felt reassured in the knowledge that his husband and friends’ experience of him as a man was not contingent on him consciously putting in the effort to pass, and he could behave in the ways that felt most comfortable for him.

4.4.2.2. *“It’s that other side of passing that has to be acknowledged”*: passing as cisnormative

During the interviews, some participants described their reservations about their own desires to pass, fearing that they were ‘giving in’ to the desire for gender normativity. For one or two of the participants, these concerns formed their primary associations with the idea of passing. For instance, when asked what passing meant to them, Z’s immediate response was to say:

I’m sure you’re going to do the whole like critique of what passing is ... why it’s harmful, why it’s not very- not very useful. Erm, why it’s a bit bullshit.

Z was a youth worker, and they described the conversations that they routinely had with young trans people, in which they attempted to challenge stereotypical understandings of transition and gender. For instance, they described asking people:

What are the things that you’re using to pass as a man or as a woman? Are they very, like, stereotypical? Are they actually, you know, unhelpful?

And:

Are we just perpetuating [the idea that] men look like this and women look like that?

For Z, being aware of (and discussing with others) the potential harm of passing felt important, and these critiques held a prominent place in their wider understanding of passing as a concept. Kyle also spoke to these tensions saying that, when he tried to pass, he felt he was *“conforming to, like, the cisheteronormative ideology, like the idea of what a masculine person should be”*. He explained that doing passing could make him feel that he had *“gone back to toxic masculinity”* and all the *“tenets that [he] associate[d] with that”*. In discussing these ideas, Kyle described a trend he had seen online in which transmasculine individuals rated each other’s perceived masculinity and the extent to which they each passed as cis men. Under the guise of giving each other ‘passing tips,’ it was Kyle’s sense that these people would police each other’s appearances, making ‘toxic’ comments, and telling people presenting alternative masculinities that they must change their gender expression in order to pass. Kyle expressed significant frustration with forums such as these, describing them as his *“most hated”* places on the internet. For Kyle, they represented a form of

internalised transphobia, in which the quest to pass became emblematic of an internalisation of unnecessarily rigid social rules around gender and expression:

It's that other side of passing that has to be acknowledged...through internalised transphobia or other models growing up, they enforce social rules on themselves which don't exist.

Relating to these tensions around passing, some of the transmasculine people interviewed for this study described feelings of guilt about their own desires to pass as cis men. Jake described the desire to pass as *"a bit of a cisnormative way of thinking"* and described finding it *"frustrating"* and being *"annoy[ed]"* with himself that he was *"going for that"*. As Jake noted: *"you don't have to pass to be who you are"*. However, despite these feelings of guilt, Jake's relationship with passing remained *"complicated"*. While he described feeling that he did not *need* to pass in order to be a man, he nevertheless found it deeply painful when he was misgendered, and he found actively doing passing to be the most effective way of avoiding this pain in public. As Jake said: *"ideally it's the world that needs to change, but because the world isn't changing, I'm still putting the effort in to fitting into that [cisnormative way of thinking]"*. Kyle's complicated relationship with passing seemed to draw from the significant discomfort that he described feeling when he felt considered to be unusual looking in public. He spoke of feeling self-conscious when people looked at him and he described not wanting to arouse people's attention *"for being trans"* when he was not yet fully comfortable with his body and gender expression (*"I'm just not, like, fully happy with myself"*). Accordingly, while he felt that he did not want to *"eras[e] [his] transgender status"*, masculinising his gender signifiers and doing passing as a cis man felt like the safest way to avoid unwelcome attention and to feel comfortable in public.

The cisnormative aspects of passing were further explored by Z and Corey relating to their identities as transmasculine non-binary people. Neither Z nor Corey felt that passing as binary men was a fully congruent reflection of their gender identities. Z described feeling that they had only infrequently been able to pass in the way that felt most congruent for them, saying: *"I feel like there's only been a few windows in my life where I've been read correctly, pass correctly, in line with who I am"*. As someone who had been on testosterone for many years, Z described feeling that

they did not have a “choice” as to how they passed, finding themselves to most frequently be read as a cis man. When asked to explain the moments in which they had felt able to pass in a congruent way, Z described the period of time before they were taking testosterone, during which they wore make-up more frequently. With this depiction, Z appeared to be speaking to a time in which their gender expression was less aligned with binary norms of man- and woman-hood, and during which their gender identity may well have been perceived to be more ambiguous or androgynous. Now that their body appeared more stereotypically masculine, however, Z described no longer feeling that the way they passed was a reflection of the gender identity that felt right for them.

Corey also spoke to significant feelings of discomfort in passing as a man. For Corey, this discomfort related to the associations that they held with men and manhood. These associations included “*football and violence and toxic masculinity*”, all of which felt like a far cry from Corey’s interpretation of their own gender identity. For Corey, these associations had a significant bearing on their identification as a non-binary person, and they worried that when they passed as a man, they too were being associated with violence and toxic masculinity. Corey, who was in their mid-40s at the time of our interview, felt it difficult to consider identifying as a man due to the length of time that they had lived as a woman. Their life living as a woman remained important to them, and they said: “*I say non-binary, because I can’t erase four decades of female socialisation*”. Moreover, Corey feared that, in passing as a man, they would be considered to have benefitted from a level of societal privilege that they did not feel that they had actually had access to: “*if they’re always reading me as a straight white heterosexual male, they’re going to just always think I’m this privileged- that I just haven’t had (sic)*”. While Corey was clear that they were conscious of the privilege that they had as a white person, they were wary of being read as if they had the privilege of a cis straight man (“*I really am not coming with any privilege I promise you, apart from the colour of my skin*”). They felt that passing as a man would mean that people were not able to see who they really were: “*and now people just think I am, you know, this person that I’m not*”. While Corey did not elaborate further on their discomfort with the idea of being seen to be privileged as a man, I was left wondering whether the high levels of queerphobic abuse, and indeed family ostracism, that Corey had experienced in their youth, had contributed to their

particularly keen aversion to being considered to have benefitted from a life of (heterosexual) male privilege.

Corey's discomfort in being read as a straight cis man was further driven by a fear of no longer being 'visible' to other members of marginalised communities in the way that they had been previously. As a visibly gender non-conforming person, Corey described feeling a certain level of camaraderie with people from other marginalised groups, something that they called a *"minority understanding"*. They mentioned that they would often greet other marginalised people that they came into contact with, particularly when the other person was a woman, due to a sense that *"we both stick out, we're both minorities"*. The longer that they were on testosterone and the more that they consistently passed as a man, they feared that their experience as a marginalised person would *"become less visible"* and others would no longer feel that camaraderie with them. This idea was distressing to Corey, and they said: *"it makes me judder at the thought that I'll lose that"*. Further to their concerns about being perceived to be a highly privileged person, they similarly felt unhappy about the idea that people would not know that they *"understand what it's like to stick out and to be different and to be judged and all that"*. With this in mind, they hoped that some people would continue to be able to see them as trans (*"but people I know properly, I want them to still know that I'm trans"*).

Corey was not alone in feeling concerned about not being visibly queer or trans to those around them. Sam described his attitude to passing, saying that he was *"very lucky that [he does] pass"*, but saying *"there's a little, like, intricacy of it"*. Sam's preference was to *"pass 100% to cis people"*, stating explicitly that he did not want cis people to *"think that I'm anything other than a man"*. However, it remained important to him to be *"recognised as ... part of the community"*, and he consequently hoped that trans people would be able to tell that he was trans. The nuance here was difficult for Sam to navigate and he described finding it to be *"conflicting"*. On the one hand, he wanted to be recognised for the man that he was, while on the other, there was a sense that this might obscure aspects of his identity and experience that felt important. In this way, while passing could certainly have positive effects for both Corey and Sam, there were accompanying consequences that could feel jarring and hard to manage.

4.4.2.3. *“Passing in the way that makes me feel nice”*: passing beyond gender

In section 4.3.1.2 above, I explored Z’s experiences of passing as a Muslim, specifically looking at the twin feelings of affirmation and vulnerability that they felt in these instances. While it made them feel affirmed and ‘seen’ to pass as a Muslim, they were conscious of the related danger that they faced in certain areas of London. Beyond their Muslim identity, Z also explored the feelings they had around passing as Pakistani, something which could similarly feel affirming for them. They described a recent experience where a barber had recognised that Z was of Pakistani heritage by the way that Z had groomed their moustache. Smiling, Z described this encounter as *“really affirming”*, saying it was *“passing in the way that makes [them] feel nice”*. Reminiscent of others’ experiences of passing in a gender identity that felt congruent, Z’s descriptions here seemed to speak to similar feelings of affirmation and recognition that could come from passing in an identity that felt congruent, whether gender-related or otherwise.

However, just as passing in gender identities that did not feel authentic could feel disaffirming and alienating, the same was true of passing in incongruent identities beyond gender. Z described experiencing such feelings when they passed as a cis gay man. Z found themselves passing as gay frequently, indeed so much so that people used to approach one of their ex-girlfriends to say: *“oh, by the way, did you know your boyfriend is gay?”*. For Z, the discomfort in being read as a cis gay man was twofold. Firstly, they did not identify as a man, let alone a cis man, so such an interpretation amounted to an invalidating instance of misgendering. Secondly, not only were they not a person solely attracted to men, but they also felt discomfort due to the associations that they held with cis gay culture. For Z, being in spaces populated by cis gay men made them feel out of place and hypersexualised. They described an instance in the past where they had been approached by a cis gay man who had interacted with them in an explicitly sexual manner, making them feel extreme discomfort and leading to them thinking: *“oh my god, erm, no, that’s not me”*. Similarly to Corey’s reservations around identifying as a man due to their associations with manhood, Z made clear how incongruent their perception of cis gay culture felt for them and their identity, saying:

Now I'm passing not just as a man, but as a gay man, and now I'm being placed into this culture which isn't mine, has never been mine, I have no relationship to it ... I don't really have a desire for it.

Z was proud of their trans identity and the various experiences that they had had as a trans person. Accordingly, they wanted this identity to be recognised, particularly in queer spaces: *"I don't want people to think I'm just another gay man- gay cis man"*.

Z was not the only participant to speak about their experiences of passing as a gay man. Other participants in this study spoke of the feelings of danger and vulnerability that they experienced when passing as gay. For instance, Marlowe described the homophobic harassment that he had experienced from some customers at work, saying: *"they can see that I'm gay and they're, like, taking the piss"*. The customers used homophobic slurs for Marlowe, leading him to alert his manager to the fact that he felt unsafe. Concerns around being read as gay were described as being particularly pronounced when participants were out in public with male partners. When discussing the possibility of encountering phobic harassment, Kyle specifically noted that he felt that people were more likely to harass him for being gay when out with his husband than for being trans (*"I'm gay so they're more likely to focus on that than the trans thing"*). For Kyle, who generally passed as a cis man, the fear of being perceived to be trans felt less immediate: *"I'm not like scared anymore because like there is some fear I guess in being clockable"*. However, this fear had been replaced by a concern around how people would react to his gay identity when they saw him with his husband.

Scott similarly discussed the experience of passing as gay in public. He and his partner had got together before Scott transitioned many years ago, meaning that they had experienced a shift from their relationship being perceived as straight to being perceived as gay by those around them. Scott described how strange this shift had felt: *"despite the fact that nothing has changed, really, like, in terms of the relationship, the way that society sees us obviously changed a lot"*. While their relationship was previously unremarkable to strangers in the street, it now felt like a relationship that *"people kind of stare at you for, and you could potentially be in danger, you know, depending on where you are"*. To my mind, Scott's example here raised a number of points. Firstly, as with Marlowe and Kyle, we can see that

passing as a cis man did not necessarily bring with it a freedom from the fear of phobic violence. The same was true for Z passing as a Muslim man, Charlie passing as a Black man, and others beside. While manhood is generally a privileged position in a patriarchal society, the realities of thorny intersectional identities belie a simple and unilateral model for how passing as a man is experienced by diverse kinds of people. Secondly, while homophobic attitudes towards gay relationships are, of course, unfounded in all instances, Scott's experiences of the *same* relationship being formerly socially acceptable and latterly transgressive seemed to me to emphasise the fundamental arbitrariness of social norms relating to gender and relationships. Scott described this shift as making him feel "*sad*" and "*angry*", however he felt powerless to respond to the situation. Defeatedly, he said: "*that's the way that the world is, and it's just- yeah*".

Beyond the potential dangers of passing as gay, Sam described his experiences being a single parent to his child while passing as a cis queer, or gay, man. Sam was the birthing parent of his child, and he gave birth to them right at the beginning of his transition. Now that his child was a little older, Sam had been on testosterone for long enough that he was generally read as a cis man. According to Sam, his personal style and gender expression meant that he tended to find himself being read as a man who was queer or gay. Accordingly, he felt that strangers frequently assumed him to be the adoptive parent of his child, rather than a biological parent ("*they assume that you've adopted them*"). While cis queer and gay men can of course have biological children themselves, Sam's experience suggests that this is generally not assumed to be the case. As Sam notes: "*I'm kind of ... less masculine than what somebody would assume a child-bearing man would be*". While Sam has no issue with the idea of adopting a child in principle ("*I'm happy to adopt children as well*"), he nonetheless found it "*difficult*" when the reality of his relationship with his child was not recognised by others, describing it as "*frustrating*" and "*invalidating*". As he said: "*it feels like...like I'm not really being seen or acknowledged as [my child's] biological parent*". Sam's experience of this disaffirmation was exacerbated by the frequency with which strangers seemed to ask him about his child's parenthood. Sam described a recent trip to a museum, where one of the staff members had asked him whether he had adopted his child, as well as describing conversations that he had had at his previous workplace where his colleagues had asked where he

had “got” his child. It appeared that strangers needed little prompting to ask Sam about his child’s parenthood; as Sam noted, *“people think that it’s so okay to just casually ask how I got [my child], like literally people that I’ve met for two seconds”*. However, despite these questions, Sam did not *“feel comfortable disclosing being a birthing parent to strangers”*, as this would necessitate him coming out not only as trans but as a trans man who had given birth. Sam’s sense was that the marginalised position of trans people in society meant that others might not react well to his disclosures. He attributed some of this situation to the media, noting that the media used *“scare tactics”* to suggest that there is something dangerous or transgressive about the idea of trans people being parents and giving birth (*“the majority of society isn’t ready for transmasculine birthing parents”*). As a result of this, Sam did not feel safe enough to be open about his identity as a transmasculine birthing parent, even though not doing so contributed to his feelings of disaffirmation and invisibility: *“I don’t think that I’d ever just casually be like, ‘yeah, birthed him myself!’ to a stranger”*. With this example, it is possible to see the multilayered nature of Sam’s experiences of passing as a man. While passing as a cis man was preferable to Sam in almost all instances, and indeed passing as a queer man felt congruent for him, it nonetheless carried with it complexity and emotional resonance around his parenthood that could be challenging for him to navigate.

Furthermore, Kyle spoke about his experiences with passing in the context of his identity as an autistic person. Kyle used the term ‘trying’ to describe the actions that he would take when he wanted to *“appear a certain way”* in public, noting that these actions were related to ensuring *“social appropriateness”*. For Kyle, the notion of ‘trying’ encompassed both trying to pass as a cis man and trying to ‘mask’ his autism. He said: *“it’s almost like a form of masking as well as a gender presentation”*. The National Autistic Society (n.d.) define ‘masking’ as “a strategy used by some autistic people, consciously or unconsciously, to appear non-autistic in order to blend in and be more accepted in society.” Reminiscent of participants’ descriptions of hyperawareness in section 4.3.2, the National Autistic Society go on to note that masking can be accompanied by feelings of “hyper-vigilance” and attempts to tightly control and adjust how a person expresses themselves. Kyle noted that he would often feel the need to ‘try’ from the perspective of his gender identity in the same contexts that he felt the need to ‘try’ to mask his autism. Indeed, it seemed that the

two ways of 'trying' were not clearly delineated for him, and he said: *"if I'm masking, then I'm masking everything. I still feel like the masking, as in the autism sense, is still masculine, like I'm still exhibiting masculine energy"*. In this way, 'trying' for Kyle could include both masking behaviours and passing behaviours, with both involving *"appearing as I want to be seen in society"*. While the contexts in which Kyle did passing were often the same as the ones in which he did masking, the inverse was also true, and he described feeling less of a need to 'try' both around people in the LGBTQ community and other neurodivergent people. In speaking to this point, he described that he *"tend[s] to drop the mask a bit"* when he is *"talking to people in the LGBTQ community"* and further described how he used more comfortable ways of speaking when he was around neurodivergent people. In this way, it was apparent that Kyle's attitudes towards both doing passing and doing masking shifted in accordance with his interactional context, with both feeling more important in certain (similar) situations and less important in others.

4.4.3. Experiences and interpretations of passing: summary

This section has explored transmasculine participants' experiences of passing, looking at experiences of actively doing passing, as well as participants' feelings about passing on a conceptual level. Section 4.4.1 looked at transmasculine participants' descriptions of masculinising their gender signifiers in order to be more likely to index manhood. Relevant signifiers were located in a range of semiotic modes, including their speech, such as the pitch of their voice, the words that they used and the content of their talk, as well as those relating to their appearance and behaviours, such as clothing and body language. Participants' descriptions illustrated how masculinising their gender signifiers could help them to feel comfortable and confident in interactions, while being restricted from doing so could lead to feelings of discomfort and instances of being misgendered. This section explored how difficult it could feel for participants to consistently perform signifiers in ways that did not feel like a part of their natural semiotic repertoire and also touched upon participants' perceptions that they had had to actively 'teach' themselves ways of being 'masculine' and behaving in interactions that did not feel natural to them.

Section 4.4.2 explored the complex relationships that some transmasculine participants described having with passing on a conceptual level. For some, the positive emotional impacts of passing were its main associations, with passing leading to feelings of significant affirmation and recognition. For others, the relationship with passing was more functional, with passing seen as a means of avoiding harassment or discrimination in environments where being identified as trans could be dangerous. In particular, participants described the felt need to actively do passing in particularly masculine environments, such as in pubs and gyms. This section also explored participants' ideological attitudes towards passing, in particular looking at participants' perceptions of passing as a cisnormative and binary phenomenon. Participants described feelings of guilt about their desires to pass, worrying that they were buying into cisnormative ideals of gender, while at the same time admitting that passing was important to them. This section examined the experiences of non-binary participants, for whom passing as men did not feel like a congruent reflection of their gender identity, as well as those who were concerned about becoming invisible to other queer and trans people as a result of passing as cis. Finally, this section explored experiences of passing in identities beyond gender, such as Z's experiences of passing as a Muslim and person of Pakistani heritage, and various participants' experiences of passing as gay men. This section explored the feelings of vulnerability that some had in passing as gay men, as well as feelings of frustration around their relationships being perceived to be transgressive or unusual. This section explored Sam's experiences as a birthing parent who frequently passed as a cis queer man, looking at his feelings of disaffirmation and invisibility stemming from not being recognised as his child's biological parent. Finally, this section discussed Kyle's experiences with passing given the intersection of his trans and autistic identities, and how he managed each from interaction to interaction.

5. CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion

In the Findings chapter 4, I laid out the three Group Experiential Themes generated from the data collected for this research. In discussing these themes, I explored transmasculine people's experiences of masculinity in interactions, their feelings of vulnerability and fear, and their experiences and interpretations of passing. In this Discussion chapter 5, I will present my three key insights from this research study, drawing both on participant data and the existing literature in this area. These three insights do not map directly onto the three GETs in the Findings chapter, rather they represent my interpretations of how this study's findings as a whole echo and build upon existing research and theory, organised into a tripartite structure.

The insights are as follows: firstly, that the transmasculine people who participated in this study should be understood to be reflective subjects, consciously taking advantage of pre-existing gender norms to achieve intersubjective recognition and safety in interactions. Secondly, that transmasculine people's freedom to achieve their interactional aims is defined by their sociocultural context and constrained by their interpersonal environment. And thirdly, that transmasculine people's felt experiences of gender identities that *precede* interactions complicate straightforward notions of gender identity as something that is constructed *within* interactions. In this chapter I will set forth these insights and illustrate how each is drawn from the study data and pre-existing literature in the area.

5.1. Reflectively seeking recognition and safety

Drawing from the participant accounts gathered for this study as well as pre-existing literature in this area, I posit that these transmasculine participants were primarily motivated by two overarching objectives in their negotiation of gender identity in interactions with others: the search for intersubjective recognition and the desire to be safe.

5.1.1. Interactional objectives

The quest for intersubjective recognition comes from a strongly felt need to be seen and acknowledged in the identity position that feels most congruent with transmasculine people's individual sense of self. In this way, many hoped to pass in the gender identity that felt to be the closest representation of how they interpreted themselves. The notion of intersubjective recognition was discussed by Rubin (2003, p181), who described it as "the mutual process whereby we acknowledge others and are acknowledged as authentic selves". Rubin argued that, while a person's own recognition of their felt identity is significant and necessary, such *intra*-subjective recognition is insufficient, and we remain in search for external recognition as well: "[a] self needs others to recognise its authenticity" (Rubin, 2003, p15). It is clear from the accounts in this study that transmasculine people can struggle to access intersubjective recognition in the same way as cis people, whether due to identifying in a less well-known identity position (e.g. non-binary) or due to not appearing to have the material sex characteristics traditionally associated with a particular gender identity. Specifically, they may identify as men but have bodies that would normatively be identified as 'female'. Rubin (2003, p181) referred to this latter situation as an "expressive failure", where the body as it is expressed may fail to index the identity as it is felt. As the Findings section 4.3.2.3 explored, participants in the present study described how important and affirmative it felt to have their gender identities recognised and respected by others (*"[i]t just feels really euphoric"* (Marlowe). For some, this was experienced as a sense of being 'seen', for instance: *"[when I'm gendered correctly] I'm being perceived as who I am, which is a very nice feeling: to be seen"* (Sam), or in the inverse: *"I think it's just knowing that the world doesn't see you for who you are, it just feels a bit rubbish"* and *"it hurts, it's horrible"* (Jake). Interpreting these examples through the lens of intersubjective recognition, the desire to be 'seen' seems to speak to a desire to be recognised in the gender identity that feels most congruent with the experience of the self. As Rubin proposed, while these participants were able to recognise their own identities for themselves, this self-recognition was experienced as insufficient, and there was a felt need for others to recognise their identities as well.

Along with this quest for intersubjective recognition, the participants were also highly conscious of their safety in interactions, particularly in interactions with strangers. A number of participants described previous experiences of physical or verbal

aggression in interactions relating to their trans and queer identities, and there was a strong desire to avoid such instances in the future. A sense of fear and vulnerability in interactions was described variously by all ten participants, largely relating to the potential for violence. Relevant examples in the data were numerous. Michael spoke to this fear saying, *“I feel scared a lot”*, while Sam emphasised his feelings of powerlessness in the face of physical aggression: *“if one of them clocked my top surgery scars and they decided to hurt me...there’s literally nothing that I could do”*. Z positioned their fear as being located in the threat from men specifically, saying that: *“violence feels like a very immediate risk, because I know how quickly men jump to that”*, while Charlie drew attention to the increased risk that he feels in the intersection of his Black, queer and trans identities: *“being a Black man in this world, let alone a queer Black man, let alone a trans Black man in this world can be scary, and it’s not easy”*. Charlie’s statements here and throughout recall other research findings that have discussed how Black transmasculine people experienced their transitions differently from their white peers, especially relating to how they felt disproportionately stereotyped as aggressive or threatening (e.g. Jourian & McCloud, 2020; Rogers, 2019). In addition, like other Black trans men in the literature, Charlie also experienced a barrier in connecting with the wider transmasculine community (*“colour is a big thing and people don’t realise that it still does affect us”*) due to a lack of understanding of the intersectional marginalisation facing Black trans people by white trans peers (Jourian & McCloud, 2020; White et al., 2020).

The risks of existing in the social world for trans people have been well documented, and Walters and colleagues (2020, p4585) posited that trans people “may be the most vulnerable of all victims of hate crime”, both due to the disproportionate levels of violence that trans people are subjected to, as well as “the emotional and behavioural impacts caused by such incidents”. Crucially, reflecting the prominent feelings of hypervigilance described by participants in this research (e.g. *“I am so aware of how I’m perceived. All day, everyday”* (Corey), Walters et al. (2020, p4590) also note how “demonstrations of anti-trans hate are likely to give rise to perceptions of threat (both realistically and symbolically) among trans people”. The perceived risk of threat was considerable for the transmasculine people interviewed for this study, and the desire to reduce this risk appeared to be a key factor in informing how they negotiated gender identity in interactions.

5.1.2. Using gender signifiers reflectively in interactions

The transmasculine people in this study described the semiotic strategies they used in order to meet their interactional objectives: i.e. to achieve intersubjective recognition and to mitigate threats of violence. Through doing so, these participants displayed reflective self-awareness around their gender work in interactions, as well as indicating their keen sensitivity to the different ways in which their gender identities may be indexed using multimodal signifiers. Describing their use of linguistic signifiers specifically, they spoke of their strategic use of lower vocal pitch, monotonous prosody, lexical items that they associated with masculinity, and the close monitoring of the content of their speech. With these accounts, the participant data complements Jørgensen's (2016) findings that illuminated the different ways in which Danish trans people described using vocal strategies to constitute their gender identities. In Jørgensen's study, participants similarly positioned vocal signifiers as important factors in gender construction, with one participant describing the voice as an "extra performative tool" (Jørgensen, 2016, p38). Like Jørgensen's transmasculine interviewees, participants in the present study described the creative ways that they altered their voices in order to make a speech sound that was more perceptibly masculine. For instance, Kyle described "*push[ing] [his voice] deeper into [his] chest*", while Michael explained how sessions with an opera singer had helped him to learn how to 'relax' his throat and to speak "*more from the chest*". Michael's account of how he pitched his voice was further reminiscent of the analysis in the work of Pasricha and colleagues (2008). Pasricha et al. noted that male-to-female transsexuals described putting more effort into performing feminine signifiers when they were speaking on the phone given that their interlocutors would not have access to visual signifiers that might otherwise index their femininity. Similarly, Michael described becoming "*hyper-aware*" on the phone and trying to "*speak with a deeper voice*" in order to avoid being misgendered. This example is significant in that it indicates Michael's reflective evaluation of the multimodal bricolage of his gender signifiers as he enters into an interaction. With a view to indexing his gender in the way that feels most congruent for him, he is paying close attention to which signifiers are perceptibly accessible to his interlocutors, and altering his gender work accordingly.

In addition to linguistic signifiers, participants in the present study also described their strategic masculinisation of signifiers from other semiotic modes, such as their clothing and body language. For instance, Corey described wearing clothing associated with men as a way of “*expressing that [they] don’t want to be seen as a female at all*”, while Sam spoke of sometimes standing in such a way as to create a more “*masculine*” bodily stance. Participants’ descriptions reflect prior research that found that behavioural and presentational displays of masculinity can be perceived to be just as important as medical interventions (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2021). For instance, Jones and Lim (2021) explored how clothing can be used to signify masculinity and demonstrated the role of dress for trans men seeking to “create congruence between their internal sense of gender and their external presentation” (p2). Similarly, Teti and colleagues (2020) described the impact that clothing can have on transmasculine people’s wellbeing. They described one participant who reported changing his outfit up to four times a day due to a fear that he would be misgendered if he did not get the details right, an account that was reminiscent of the “*15 minutes every morning*” that Benji described spending in working out what to wear. With participants’ accounts here, as well as the corroborating data from other research, we gain insight into the level of conscious control that transmasculine people may implement when doing their gender in interactions. Crucially, the evidence suggests that transmasculine people are choosing how to index their masculine identities based on their prior understanding of which signifiers, both linguistic and otherwise, are most salient in each interactional context.

Taken together, I interpret the participants’ accounts here to be a substantiation of Motschenbacher’s (2007) claim that genderlects, or gendered styles, remain salient in the analysis of gender identity performances insofar as people consider them to be expressive of gender identities. Motschenbacher (2007, p270) argued that, as a result of the performative connections that have been established between certain styles and identities, these styles have become resources that can be “exploited strategically” in the indexing of these identities. This is a constructionist approach, in which performative signifiers are not considered to be necessary features in *expressing* an identity category, but are understood to be salient in *constituting* those identities in interactions. It is clear from the accounts in this study that certain

signifiers *do* feel salient in the presentation of masculinity, and I would argue that transmasculine people are themselves exploiting this perceptual link in their use of diverse semiotic signifiers (or a particular 'style') that they perceive to index manhood. While none of the transmasculine people that I interviewed spoke of masculine interactional signifiers being necessary features in *being* men, there appeared to be a recognition that such signifiers were, at times, necessary features in being *perceived to be* men. Accordingly, this perceived ideological link between style and identity is a crucial factor in determining whether or not transmasculine people will receive the intersubjective recognition or safety that can feel so important to them in interactions.

To conceptualise transmasculine people as self-reflective subjects in their gender construction in interactions is to move away from a situation in which, as Stone suggested, trans people are considered "too illogical or irresponsible to achieve true subjectivity" (Stone, 2006, p229-230). Through considering transmasculine people's own accounts of their gender work in interactions, we are able to see the complex and strategic deployment of gender signifiers that they are knowingly engaging in to meet their interactional objectives. These objectives may differ in importance and focus from interaction to interaction and, of course, all speakers work to achieve countless other interactional objectives that are not related to their gender identities. Nevertheless, I would argue that transmasculine people are aware of what they are 'doing' in interactions, and furthermore that what they are doing, amongst much else, is consciously coordinating their gender work in such a way as to be more likely to receive intersubjective recognition and safety.

5.2. Understanding transmasculine people's situated agency in interactive identity work

To acknowledge that transmasculine people have agency and freedom in how they construct their gender identities in interactions is not, however, to consider this agency to be total and unchecked, and their freedom cannot be understood in a vacuum. This study has shown that, while transmasculine people do make choices around how they do their gender identities in interactions, these choices are limited by their environments, both on a macro sociocultural level, and a more local

interpersonal level. From a sociocultural perspective, it is the discursive environment in which transmasculine people are situated that sets the very terms of the strategies that they may use to achieve intersubjective recognition. In turn, these sociocultural constraints are made experientially manifest to gendered subjects through interpersonal gender policing. Thus, from an interpersonal perspective, transmasculine people's freedom to do their gender as they will is limited by their perceived safety and the potential for violence in any given context. While transmasculine people are able to exercise agency in their gender work in interactions, the manner in which they may do so is determined to a considerable extent by their environment.

5.2.1. Discursive constraints on gendered freedoms

Butler (2001) used the notion of 'intelligibility' to explain that an individual's identity position can only be recognised in a sociocultural environment in which that identity is already considered to exist. Furthermore, the signification of an identity can only be considered intelligible in a societal context that holds a pre-emptive normative association between the signifiers and the identity in question. In short, for a person to be recognised as X by doing Y, a society must already believe that X exists and that an instance of X can be identified by the doing of Y. Butler (2001, p621) indicated the existential significance of this idea, saying:

When we ask what the conditions of intelligibility are by which the human emerges...we are asking about the conditions of intelligibility composed of norms, of practices, that have become presuppositional without which we cannot think the human at all...And it is not just that there are laws that govern our intelligibility, but ways of knowing, modes of truth, that forcibly define intelligibility.

Through reference to the 'forcible' definition of intelligibility here, Butler's words hint at the notion of situated and constrained freedoms. The forcible imposition of intelligibility, or lack thereof, determines the extent to which any person, including transmasculine people, may have the freedom to define themselves by their own terms. The 'ways of knowing' that allow a person to 'think [themselves] human' are defined by the norms of their environment, and a person can only understand their

identity, much less seek recognition of that identity, through the ‘modes of truth’ that govern intelligibility in their context.

To use a concrete example, while a transmasculine person may have the freedom to choose whether or not to consciously lower the pitch of their voice in seeking to create a speech sound that is more perceptibly ‘male’, they are relying on certain pre-existing societal norms in order that that action is intelligible. To signify manhood through the lowering of the voice, it must already be a normative expectation that the category of ‘man’ exists, and that the category of ‘male’ is associated with a lower vocal pitch. Thus, while the transmasculine participants in this study may certainly be exercising some level of freedom in choosing whether or not to change their vocal pitch, they do not have the freedom to change the fact that pitch and gender are already normatively linked. They can only work within these norms insofar as these norms create possibilities for them to creatively index their own identities; thus their agency is incontrovertibly situated in the possibilities that already exist for them.

In analysing de Beauvoir’s assertion that ‘one is not born but rather becomes a woman’, Butler (1986, p36) seemed similarly to interpret this statement through the lens of situated agency, saying:

It is not a matter of acquiescing to a fixed ontological status, in which case one could be born a woman, but, rather, an active process of appropriating, interpreting, and reinterpreting received cultural possibilities.

It is that active process of appropriation and reinterpretation that enabled these transmasculine participants to agentively negotiate their own gender identities, even in the context where this agency is constrained by ‘received cultural possibilities’. The situated nature of freedom was central to de Beauvoir’s existentialism and, by extension, her approach to gender:

[M]an (sic) does not create the world. He succeeds in disclosing it only through the resistance which the world opposes to him. The will is defined only by raising obstacles, and by the contingency of facticity certain obstacles let themselves be conquered, and others do not. (de Beauvoir, 2018, p28)

As discussed in section 2.3.1.4, facticity refers to the elements of a person’s situation that place limits on their freedoms (Aho, 2023). Thus, with de

Beauvoir's framing here, we can understand the discursive limitations posed by a person's sociocultural context to be a factic element of the world into which they emerge. While a transmasculine person may be able to 'conquer' certain societal limitations in the construction of their identity (for example, the sex essentialist position that would designate them as women by virtue of their birth), there are other obstacles that cannot be 'conquered' (for example, the societal order in which gender exists and is signified). Thus, these transmasculine participants do have a certain level of freedom in the doing of their gender, but they are constrained by the cultural possibilities available to them: a [trans] *"man does not create the world"* (de Beauvoir, 2018, p28).

5.2.2. Interpersonal constraints on gendered freedoms

The experiential accounts gathered for this research demonstrate that the sociocultural norms determining gender intelligibility become experientially manifest to gendered subjects through policing behaviours from other people in interactions. Participants described such experiences, where they found their intersubjective recognition as men or masculine people to be explicitly contingent upon their doing their gender in a normative fashion. This was the case for Z, who described how their family's attitude to their transition made them feel that they needed to present a masculinity that was closely aligned with traditional norms of masculinity. Z depicted their family's attitude by saying:

You're a man now, why are you painting your nails? You're a man now, why are you wearing that shirt? Why are you dressed like this? You're a man now, this is what your hair should be like.

With this extract, Z demonstrated the restrictive norms that they felt required to abide by in order to receive intersubjective recognition because, to the mind of their family, *"any deviation from [those norms] is not okay"*. It appeared that there was something of an implicit bargain in operation here, in which Z's family would extend intersubjective recognition to Z as a transmasculine person only in the event that Z agreed to their terms of normative masculinity. Z hinted at this arrangement thus, characterising their family saying: *"[y]ou should be doing the man things, because if you're not doing the man things, then we have questions"*. Here, Z suggested that there might be repercussions from their family (*"then we have questions"*) if they did

not do their masculinity in an acceptably intelligible fashion. The demand for normativity in exchange for recognition was similarly experienced by Scott when he was seeking approval for gender affirming care from a gender clinic. Scott described feeling a pressure to *“lean into more masculine things”* in the hope of ‘proving’ to the practitioners at the gender clinic that he was an appropriate candidate to receive care. In doing so, Scott was aware that he was deploying normative masculinity in a way that felt incongruent for him, but nevertheless felt it necessary to do so in order to receive the intersubjective recognition that would grant him access to appropriate medical care. As he stated:

[A] lot of that was trying to convince the gender clinic, really. Um, because...you know when they're trying to ask you questions about why you think that you're male, or whatever, you end up coming up with a lot of kind of stereotypical stuff because...you know you need anything to...explain how you know [that you are trans]. (Scott)

Scott's example is reminiscent of the findings in Konnelly (2021), which explored how non-binary people performed binary gender identities in interactions with doctors in order to increase their likelihood of receiving gender affirming care. The difference here, however, is that Scott *did* identify with a binary identity (he described his gender as 'male'), but nevertheless felt pressure to *do* his male-ness in a certain (normative) fashion in order that it be recognised by his doctors. In Scott's experience, it would not have been enough to simply *be* a trans male person to receive intersubjective recognition and the related access to care, but also to *do being* a trans male person in the way considered most intelligible by the practitioners with whom he was interacting. For both Z and Scott here, while they may technically have had the freedom to do their gender identities in interactions as felt most congruent for them, there would be material repercussions for their doing so in a non-normative fashion. Thus, their agency was fundamentally constrained by the fact that they were only able to achieve recognition in their gender identities if they did these identities as felt most intelligible to their interlocutors. It was thus the case for these participants that if they did not abide by the normative terms set out for them by others, they could be subjected to punitive measures, for instance, misgendering, rejection from the family, or restriction of access to medical care.

The prospect of punitive measures was suggested by Butler when they described gender to be a “regulatory fiction” through which performances of gender could be subject to social sanction and control (Butler, 1988, p528). They described the punitive potential of gender by stating that “[p]erforming one’s gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect” (p528), punishments that must surely include, although Butler did not state this explicitly, misrecognition and misgendering. A particularly explicit example of gender’s punitive power was experienced by Z in the wake of their father’s death. As discussed in section 4.2.2.3, while crying at a family event for their father, Z found themselves approached by an older male family member who motioned for them to stop crying saying: “*stop that, don’t do that*”. While Z’s mother and sister were permitted, implicitly by social norms and explicitly by other family members, to continue crying, this was no longer acceptable for Z. Instead, Z’s perceived masculinity was contingent upon their abiding by received cultural norms. While a cis man would perhaps have received the same reprimand from the family member in this instance, that cis man would likely have had their *masculinity* impugned if they failed to abide by normative constraints, not their *manhood* itself. For Z, the punishment could prove to be greater: the withholding of the very recognition of their identity.

The accounts of the transmasculine people in this research showed the ways in which the freedom to make choices about their gender work in interactions was especially limited by the threat of interpersonal violence. Through their descriptions, we have seen the ways in which interactions can place a significant emotional toll on trans people who risk both emotional and physical violence. In some cases, this can lead to withdrawal from and avoidance of interactions in the hope of reducing potential risks. This was the case for Corey, who described taking active steps to decrease the amount of time they spent with other people in order to limit their exposure to threat: “*at least when I’m on my own, I switch off and I don’t have to think about it*”, and Michael, who described staying in his car for as long as possible to avoid having to go into an abusive workplace. In doing so, they sought to reduce the risk of being in a physically unsafe situation, as well as the emotional toll of living in bodies and identities that were unintelligible to others: “*sometimes you want a fucking quiet day, and you don’t want to be seen as an alien in the world*” (Corey). As these participants’ accounts have shown, transmasculine people may take active steps to

pass as cis men when they consider their environment to be unsafe, engaging in normative practices and expressions that may not feel natural to them: *“I wouldn’t naturally do that normally I suppose”* (Jake). Here again, while they are able to exercise some level of freedom in their choice of how to respond to a challenging gendered environment, this freedom does not extend to changing the conditions in which they live (their facticity) where to *not* engage in the practice of passing may lead to violence or other punishment.

5.2.3. Understanding performances of normativity in the context of constrained freedoms

Understanding the constraints placed upon transmasculine people’s gendered choices in interactions is necessary given the ways in which allegations of normativity have been used to accuse trans people of “reinforcing patriarchal, misogynistic ideals” (Konnelly, 2021, p79). As discussed in section 2.6.2 above, trans exclusionary feminists have long argued that trans people’s transitions represent a form of surrender to constructed norms of gender. It is their sense that trans people transition solely with a view to “assimilat[ing] into gender normalcy” (Serano, 2016, p149), and that the ‘problem’ of transsexuality could be cured if trans people did not ‘give in’ to social norms. It is for this reason that Raymond (1994, p180) argued for “consciousness-raising” counselling for trans people, which would ask whether transsexual people “encourage a sexist society whose continued existence depends upon the perpetuation of these roles and stereotypes” (p182). Raymond (1994, p183) suggests that through such practice, trans people may be able to “transcend cultural definitions of both masculinity and femininity” and thus no longer find it “necessary to resort to sex-conversion surgery”. Raymond’s argument here is grounded in the assumption that trans people’s trans identities are driven by a feeling of alignment with normative behaviours and ideologies associated with the ‘opposite sex’. This assumption remains prominent in anti-trans activism, and can be identified, for instance, in the campaign materials of groups such as the LGB Alliance, who published a graphic in 2019 stating: “Some people believe that girls who like football need puberty blockers, and a double mastectomy. We believe they need football boots” (LGB Alliance [@AllianceLGB], 2019). Through this lens, performances by trans people that align with normative constructions of gender are treated not as

strategic re-appropriations of pre-existing cultural potentials, but as sinister concessions in the face of gender normativity. In this way, trans people receive judgement for engaging in gender normativity, while also, as explored above, risking the removal of intersubjective recognition if they choose not to do so. As Drabinski (2014, p305) has noted, to take the position of trans-exclusionary theorists in this way is to hold trans people disproportionately responsible for maintaining gender normativity “as if cisgender people are innocent of gender”. Drabinski states that:

This displacement lets gender normative [cis] people off the hook rather than demanding attention to the myriad ways that gender structures subjectivity and makes us all complicit in systems of gender. (Drabinski, 2014)

Indeed Drabinski’s point here was somewhat echoed by Jake in this research, when he said: “[t]here’s no way a cis person would be asked to explain what it feels like to be a man”. Conversely, however, he described having been impacted by the accusations of trans exclusionary feminists, who had claimed that trans identities are “just following gender stereotypes” and who had demanded to know “what does it actually mean to be a man”.

Contrary to claims of the necessary link between trans identities and gender normativity, there was limited indication that the transmasculine people in this study felt any particular alignment with hegemonic understandings of manhood or masculinity. In fact, all described the felt importance of moving away from stereotypical or harmful ideals of masculinity. For instance, Jake described not wanting to be like the “*dodgy men*” that had been in his life and stated his fear of “*making people uncomfortable*”. Meanwhile Z spoke about their desire to find a masculinity that did not feel “*propped up*” by male privilege. Kyle and Sam both described their feelings of congruence with traditionally ‘feminine’ gender signifiers, such as through using make-up, while Corey spoke of wishing to retain the style of speaking that they considered to be more ‘feminine’ than that of men. Charlie spoke of his feelings of disconnection from traditional ideals of masculinity, noting that there should be greater space for men’s emotional experiences:

I feel like I’m never going to be what manhood is expected to be...manhood sounds so strange to me...I feel like it’s different for everyone, but I feel like in society we should just learn to be kinder to each

other. Especially men. All types of men should just be vulnerable, because then you can actually feel your emotions and be a person, rather than just trying to be strong all the time.

While being a man was the identity that felt most congruent for Charlie, he did not feel drawn to normative ideologies around what that manhood ‘should’ look like emotionally or behaviourally. Such feelings of discomfort with traditional masculinities amongst transmasculine people have been covered widely in the literature. Various sources have described transmasculine people’s feelings of uneasiness in being expected to engage in practices aligned with hegemonic masculinities (e.g. Abelson, 2016; Stein, 2018). Similarly, Rubin (2003) described how the transsexual men he interviewed tried to move away from versions of masculinity that promoted dominance and aggression, while Jourian (2017) described how transmasculine participants of colour critically examined the masculinities of those around them and sought not to replicate those aspects that they considered to be harmful.

Additionally, participant accounts in this study reflected wider literature that has discussed how transmasculine people may feel comfortable moving towards more feminine modes of expression as their transitions progress. For instance, Green’s (2020) description of how late-transition trans men are less likely to deliberately exhibit behaviours that signify masculinity was reflected in the accounts of Scott, Kyle, Sam and others, all of whom discussed feeling a greater level of comfort with femininity as their transitions progressed: *“I just feel more comfortable expressing all parts of my character I guess, now that I’m more comfortable in myself”* (Scott). For some, this change reflected a reduced engagement with gender as an idea, with less mental energy spent on how their identity was being signified on an ongoing basis. This too is reflected in the literature, and there are resonances between examples such as Pardo’s (2019, p127) participant who said “I don’t think about how I express my gender identity anymore. I just go about my business like anyone else”, and Kyle’s statement that he’s *“just a dude on testosterone, and [he’s] happy”*. In this way, the accounts in this research reflect much prior research that has found that transitioning can bring greater comfort and ease to transmasculine people in the social world, as well as facilitating a move away from traditional norms around masculinity and manhood.

The accounts in this research did not suggest any particular ideological draw to hegemonic masculinity amongst the transmasculine people interviewed, but participants did describe some examples of engaging in performances of normative masculinity, especially in interactions that felt particularly unsafe. While participant accounts in this research did not seem to corroborate Rubin's (2003, p165) suggestion that the draw to threatening masculinities is "especially true of FTMs", there were indeed examples of participants finding solace in normative masculinities when they felt it necessary, as similarly described by Vegter (2013) and Abelson (2014). These included Z's concealment of their trans identity at the barbers, Kyle's use of a perceptibly masculine gait while at the pub, and Jake's avoidance of brightly coloured clothing. Nevertheless, the present study shows that transmasculine performances of normativity must be understood through the lens of constrained freedoms, in the face of the unpredictable promise of intersubjective recognition and the threat of violence or harassment. Transmasculine people's agency to do their gender identity in the ways that feel most congruent for them, some of which might include moving away from gender normativity, is constrained by the punitive environment of the contemporary gender order. While transmasculine participants did report engaging in demonstrations of freedom and creativity in reinterpreting received cultural norms, their freedom to do so was necessarily situated and constrained. As these participants' experiences have shown, it is not possible for transmasculine people to step outside of the societal gender order to create gender anew, it is possible only to work within this facticity to choose whatever way of doing gender feels most congruent and livable to each.

5.3. The disruptive nature of feelings of a gendered self

In social constructionist accounts of gender, gender and identity are positioned as phenomena that are constructed within and emergent from interactions. For instance, Bucholtz and Hall (2022, p19) argue for a view of identity that is "intersubjectively rather than individually produced and interactionally emergent rather than assigned in an *a priori* fashion". Similarly, Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1999, p190) assert that it is what people *do* in interactions that is most significant as regards their gender and "which constructs language and gender (and much more)". With these descriptions, interactions are characterised as the loci of gender's emergence, brought about by

what people *do*, rather than who they *are*. Such a conceptualisation of gender is not always congruent with the lived experiences and self-interpretations of the transmasculine people in this study. Indeed, I would argue that, to consider gender to be something that is *solely* emergent in interactions would be to disregard the myriad inscrutable ways in which gender, as an identity, as a way of being in the body and in the world, have become tangled up in the intricate mosaics of people's understandings of their selves.

5.3.1. Feelings of a gendered self

The descriptions of the transmasculine people in this research illuminated the complex and individual ways in which notions of gender as it is lived and expressed were tied up in their very *sense of who they were*. For instance, when Jake described his experience of being around loved ones who did not question his gender identity, he said *"they see me as I am, so I don't need to put that effort in"*. Similarly but conversely, in describing the impact of being misgendered, Scott asked *"why can't they see that I am what I say I am?!"*. For both Jake and Scott, the notion of being seen for 'who they were' meant being seen as men. Meanwhile, Z sought recognition in their sense of self outside the binary. Referring to times when they had been read in a more gender ambiguous manner, they said *"I feel like there's only been a few windows in my life where I've been read correctly, pass correctly, in line with who I am"*. Each of these examples suggested a desire for intersubjective recognition, for a fundamental aspect of these participants' selves to be recognised by an other in interaction.

Through understanding transmasculine people's projects in interactions to be related to intersubjective recognition, there is an inherent proposition that there exists something within the subject to be recognised: that there is a part of the self with a gender identity that wishes to be seen. The question of whether there does or does not exist a core 'self' is a notoriously thorny area of debate. Theorists in psychology, philosophy and beyond have long sought to reconcile people's feelings of having a self or personal identity with the numerous questions that subsequently arise about what this means (Olson, 2024). One such question revolves around the relationship between the self and the social world, and some have suggested that the idea of a

'self' that is innate and pre-social overlooks the influence of the social world on how we understand and identify ourselves (e.g. Harré, 1991; Martin & Sugarman, 1996). Such critique of the innate 'self' is a position particularly associated with poststructuralist theorists such as Foucault, whose approach to binary sex differences and structures of societal power were explored in section 2.6.1 above. As discussed, poststructuralist critique of the subject is a position that has been influential on the theory of Butler (e.g. Butler, 2001b) and thus, through Butler's analysis of the discursive limitations of gender intelligibility, its influences can similarly be seen on the analysis and interpretation in the present study. Nevertheless, there is a tension between such critique of the subject and the notion of intersubjective recognition. If the subject itself is a constructed and social phenomenon, how can it be 'recognised' by others, much less with a gender identity as a constituent part? And if gender identities do not exist prior to their establishment as socially regulatory structures, why do some subjects experience the rejection of their own gender identity as an existential threat?

The data in the present study do not provide an answer to these questions. However, they do provide clear examples of the *felt* importance of the self, the self-identified gender identity, and the felt necessity of having these structures recognised in interactions by others. Like Rubin (2003), I would argue that the fact that some transmasculine people experience themselves to have a gender identity that exists prior to its performance in interactions is meaningful and deserves recognition. My reasoning for this is twofold. Firstly, I agree with Stone (2006) that trans people have historically been (and continue to be) treated as unreliable narrators of their own identities. Through the gatekeeping that is central to trans people's access to gender affirming medical care, as well as through the 'debates' around trans people's identities in academic, political and media discourses, trans people's gender identities continue to be treated as dubious and disputable. Rubin (2003, p12) wrote:

Perhaps because transsexuals are already considered suspicious subjects, I insist on taking their experiential reports of a core identity seriously. Since transsexuals have been regarded as monstrous, crazy or less than human, it is doubly important to make their experiences matter.

Like Rubin, in an act of reversal, I choose to take trans people, however they should narrate their identities, at their word.

Secondly, and again in agreement with Rubin (2003, p175), I would argue that “all identities have two faces: they are both socially constructed and absolutely real”. While the emergence of an identity position, such as transmasculine or transsexual or transgender, is dependent upon its sociohistorical context, that identity can still feel and be experienced as a true and existentially important aspect of who a person is. The very fact that questions of the self and the subject are so extremely generative in diverse intellectual fields is reflective of how fundamental the sense of self can feel to the human experience. While the specific linguistic, technological and embodied manifestations of an identity position may be dependent on its temporal and social context, its potential consequence for an individual is undeniable. The contingency of gender identities does not stop the realisation of those identities from being experienced, by some, as a matter of life and death. To understand that the parameters of an identity are socially constructed does not equate to being able to transcend the centrality of that identity to a person’s sense of self:

A sense of self is not a will ‘o wisp that can be denied, abandoned, or refuted simply because we become aware of its socially constructed nature. As a construct of cultural forces, the deep self is firmly rooted.
(Rubin, 2003, p182)

In this study, the crucial felt importance of transmasculinity as an aspect of the self was made evident through participants’ descriptions of their emotional experiences of being misgendered. Participants described the feeling of being misgendered as being like a physical wounding, including descriptions of it feeling like “*water torture*” (Jake), like being “*stab[bed]*” (Marlowe) and “*like a slap in the face*” (Scott). Such a visceral response to being denied intersubjective recognition in the gender identity that feels most congruent is indicative of quite how deeply woven this sense of a gendered self can be. The embodied way in which participants described feeling the pain of misrecognition echoed Prosser’s (1998) arguments around the fundamentally visceral nature of transsexual identities. In ‘Second Skins’, Prosser (1998) argued that transsexual narratives of the self and body are often characterised by a strongly held desire to escape from a skin or body that is alien to a person’s sense of gender identity:

Transsexual subjects frequently articulate their bodily alienation as a discomfort with their skin or bodily encasing: being trapped in the wrong body is figured as being in the wrong, or an extra, or a second skin, and transsexuality is expressed as the desire to shed or step out of this skin.

(Prosser, 1998, p68)

Prosser went on to offer examples of transsexual narratives that characterised their identities in this way, including those of Jan Morris and Leslie Feinberg, as well as an anonymous male-to-female transsexual person who described her body as feeling like a 'diver's suit' which "didn't feel like me inside" (Prosser, 1998, p68). Central to this interpretation is the idea that there is a gendered self that exists separately from the material body, in order that the body or skin may be in a state of incongruence with that self. Prosser (1998, p43) argued that this incongruence is central to the "logic of transsexuality" and considered this position to be in opposition to the poststructuralism proffered by Butler (1990) in 'Gender Trouble', that proposed the social significance of material sex characteristics to be as constructed as (and preceded by) the cultural construction of gender.

The ways in which the transmasculine participants in this study described their sense of gender differed in some respects from the examples given by Prosser. For one, participants did not characterise their felt sense of discomfort in their bodies as being related to being 'trapped in the wrong body' or in a second skin. Instead they used language that invoked ideas of (in)authenticity, with limited reference to the body as something that was fundamentally 'wrong'. This disparity could be representative of a putative discursive trend amongst trans people to move away from materiality in describing the self (Hord, 2018) and toward vaguer notions of authenticity (Zimman, 2019). As Stein (2018, p90) put it:

The belief that one begins transition as one sex and ends up as an entirely different sex has fallen out of favour. Today we are more likely to think of transitioning as confirming a gender that is constant and unchanging.

Nevertheless, despite inconsistencies in how it is described, I would argue that Prosser's examples and those of the transmasculine people in the present study can be interpreted together as evidence of the significant felt importance of a gendered self, one that is central to how some people interpret their identities, and structures how they experience the world. Crucially, for the transmasculine people in this study,

it does not seem to be the case that this gendered self is *experienced* as something that is repeatedly constructed anew in interactions, but instead is felt to prevail as a fundamental part of the inner self.

5.3.2. Bridging the gap with constructionism

My intention here is not to argue that identity positions are not constructed, reified and maintained through interpersonal interactions, but rather to emphasise that they do not seem, at least in the examples provided in this research, to be *experienced* as being created through interactions. Gender identities are often *experienced* as personal rather than social and I believe that we cannot know, or at least currently do not know, where, if anywhere, the border between the personal and social sits. With this interpretation, I am led by Martin & Sugarman's (1996) proposed bridge between social constructionism and a cognitive approach to psychology in which they argue that, while much of our existence as humans is undeniably social and interactional, we still experience ourselves as individual subjects. Martin & Sugarman argued that the ideas that we develop about ourselves are developed in the social world and influenced by our responses to others and their responses to us. They acknowledge that we primarily form conceptions about our personhood that are already socially intelligible, and that our interpretations of our experiences are drawn from the sociocultural discursive environments in which we live:

The ways in which we learn to construct and interpret our experiences as human agents have their origins in our status as social entities, as persons in interactions with others. (Martin & Sugarman, 1996)

Nevertheless, they note that "[i]t is difficult to imagine any form of psychological theorising that ignores the ineluctable phenomenal sense of agency and individualism in human experience" (Martin & Sugarman, 1996, p298). Importantly, they note that the point at which individuals end and the social world begins is so complex and unpredictable to be beyond the epistemic reach of individuals and psychologists alike. In the context of this ambiguity, they propose a theory of the self that supports both the undeniable influence of the social, while acknowledging the feeling of a self.

Following from this theorisation, I would argue that constructionist accounts of gender as it is done in interactions should acknowledge and work with the complex and multiple levels on which gender is *experienced as* being done. On the one hand, this study has described the ways in which transmasculine people do experience themselves as *doing gender* (although they might not use those terms) by consciously exploiting pre-existing gender ideologies and gender styles to meet their interactional aims. This includes the strategic use of signifiers that index manhood with a view to being affirmed in their gender identities and protecting themselves from threat. On the other hand, this study has produced further evidence of the fact that gender identities can be experienced as fundamental aspects of the self, a question of *being* rather than *doing*, whose recognition is felt to be of existential importance.

Accordingly, I would argue, research that positions gender identities, particularly trans gender identities, as being *done* in interactions should take into account how it may be *experienced* by transmasculine people and others. To position gender identity as being solely emergent in interactions could be interpreted as overlooking the manifold ways in which a person may feel that their gender identity has become a deep-seated aspect of their sense of self, experienced as ontological rather than constructed. I do not think that refocussing one's understanding of gender and interaction in this way requires any great revision to a pre-existing social constructionist framework. Rather, it demands recognising anew the enormous complexity of gender as it is felt, done and lived in the world. With this research study, I have sought to bring some clarity to the question of how gender is experienced by transmasculine people in interactions in the world with others. It is my argument that gender is experienced as both lived and done, and that this duality is a meaningful aspect of transmasculine experience of which gender scholars and sociocultural researchers should be aware.

5.4. Discussion: summary

This chapter has explored three key insights developed using this study's findings (the GETs) in conjunction with the pre-existing literature on this topic. These insights do not follow the structure of the GETs, but rather take a removed perspective to understand the relevance of the study findings to (trans) gender theory.

Section 5.1. argues that transmasculine participants are motivated in the negotiation of their gender in interactions by two main objectives: the quest for intersubjective recognition and the desire to be safe. The notion of intersubjective recognition is drawn from Rubin's (2003) work, and his claim that trans people benefit from both internal and external recognition of their gender identities. Participant accounts in this study emphasised the importance of that recognition, as well as demonstrating their significant sensitivity to the threat of violence or harassment in interactions. In this section I argued that transmasculine participants used semiotic strategies reflectively in interactions with a view to meeting these objectives, and demonstrated the critical eye that participants applied to the way that their gender identities were being signified and perceived by others. Section 5.1. further demonstrated how participants' accounts in this study serve as a substantiation of Motschenbacher's (2007) claim that gendered linguistic styles remain salient in the construction of gender identities, with participants' strategic deployment of 'masculine' signifiers showing the felt salience of these styles in the construction of masculine identities in interactions. In sum, I argue that these participants should be understood to be reflective and strategic subjects in the negotiation of their gender identities in interactions, with their key objectives being the quest for intersubjective recognition and the desire to remain safe.

Section 5.2. provides a reflection on the situatedness of transmasculine people's agency in their interactive identity work. Here I argue that participants' freedom to do their gender as they will is situated and constrained by their sociocultural and interpersonal environment, with the interpersonal constraints in particular having formed a meaningful part of these transmasculine participants' experiences of being in the world with others. In discussing the sociocultural constraints on a person's ability to negotiate their gender freely, this section uses Butler's (2001) notion of intelligibility to demonstrate how any gendered subject is restricted by pre-existing normative discourses around gender in their quest to do gender identity in a way that may be considered legible to an other. These sociocultural constraints were most tangibly experienced by participants in the form of interpersonal policing, with participants describing pressure to do their masculinity in specific ways in order to have their identities recognised or respected by others. Section 5.2. argues that an

understanding of the pressures that are placed upon transmasculine people to do their identities intelligibly is essential in a context where trans people's gender constructions have been positioned by some as reinforcing patriarchal ideals of gender (Konnolly, 2021). With this argument, I draw upon Drabinski (2014) in critiquing the tendency to hold trans people uniquely 'guilty' of gender, instead arguing that these participants' gendered behaviours form part of their cautious quest for intersubjective recognition and safety in a social environment where these are yet to be guaranteed.

Section 5.3. builds upon participant accounts that position their gender identities as a central part of their selves, with a number of participants having described a sense that being recognised in their gender identity amounts to a sense of being *seen* for *who they are* on an internal level. Here I argue that constructionist theories that position gender identity as being solely emergent in interactions are not congruent with the lived experiences and self-interpretations of the transmasculine participants in this study. Section 5.3. demonstrates how participants' accounts echo those of other trans theorists, such as Prosser (1998), who have argued in support of accepting trans people's identities as a constituent part of the self. In this section I do not myself propose an approach that understands gender identities to be ontological, but rather argue that social constructionist accounts of (trans) gender identities should be mindful of the phenomenological experiences of gendered subjects, such as those who participated in this study, and the various and complex ways in which gender identity is experienced, both in interactions and more widely. I draw upon the arguments of Martin and Sugarman (1996) in reiterating that identities are both social and personal, and that the experience of an identity should be integrated into theorisation about that identity. It is my argument that transmasculine people experience themselves as both doing and being masculine, and that acknowledging and understanding this duality should be central to theorisation about transmasculine identity.

6. CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion

6.1. Revisiting the research question

The aim of this research study has been to answer the question:

- RQ: What are transmasculine people's lived experiences of negotiating gender identity in interactions?

There were also two subsidiary research aims, which were:

- To understand how transmasculine people interpret their experiences of masculinity in interactions;
- To explore transmasculine people's relationships with passing in interactions.

To answer this question and meet these aims, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to analyse interview data from ten transmasculine people living in the UK. From this interview data, three Group Experiential Themes were developed:

1. Re-interpreting masculinity in interactions;
2. Feelings of vulnerability in interactions;
3. Experiences and interpretations of passing.

The first of these themes ('Re-interpreting masculinity in interactions'), explored how participants engaged with the idea of masculinity in interactions, looking at the ways that they deconstructed traditional hegemonic ideals of masculinity and found their own paths to masculine identities. This theme explored participants' interpretations of their gender identities, for instance through their descriptions of feeling congruence in transmasculinity, as well as their descriptions of feeling a masculine 'energy' or 'vibe'. This section discussed how masculinity was described as something amorphous and highly varied, and showed how the transmasculine people in these interviews tended towards progressive understandings of masculinity, with little indication that hegemonic ideals of masculinity were considered necessary factors in being a man. This theme further explored participants' descriptions of subverting expectations for men in interactions by being thoughtful about how their masculinities would be perceived by others, and through a refusal to abide by traditional expectations that they be quick to violence or suppress their emotions. This section provided a response to the research question through its examination of how these

transmasculine people interpreted gender identities and masculinity in interactions, and spoke particularly to the first subsidiary research aim on masculinity in interactions.

The second theme ('Feelings of vulnerability in interactions'), discussed the feelings of fear and vulnerability that transmasculine participants described experiencing when interacting with others in the social world. This section explored how the very act of entering into interactions could place participants at risk of harm, where they experienced the threat of misgendering and transphobic violence or harassment from others. Participant accounts showed how the threat of harm could lead to feelings of self-consciousness and vigilance in interactions, experienced as a kind of hyperawareness of the self and others. Most described their feelings of hyperawareness as being particularly extreme during the early stages of their transitions, when they may not have yet been able to access gender affirming care. This theme discussed the subsequent feelings of increased comfort and confidence in interactions that some participants described feeling as their transitions progressed. This was generally in response to having been able to access appropriate medical care that helped to bring comfort with their bodies and expression. This section elucidated the research question in providing in-depth descriptions of transmasculine participants' emotional experiences of interacting with others. Through exploring participants' feelings of vulnerability and fear, the data here depicted how salient (and concerning) gender identity could feel for transmasculine participants when navigating their interactions in the social world.

The third theme ('Experiences and interpretations of passing'), discussed how participants described doing passing, as well as the complex relationships that they had with passing as a concept. This section explored the signifiers that felt particularly important to participants when seeking to pass as men in interactions, and how these signifiers formed part of their wider gender expression. Important linguistic signifiers included participants' vocal pitch, prosody, lexical items and speech content, in addition to other presentational and behavioural signifiers, such as gait and clothing. This section further explored participants' interpretations of passing as a concept, for instance how they described doing passing differently from context to context with a particular focus placed on explicitly or implicitly gendered

spaces, often experienced as sites of greater risk. In this section I explored participants' ambivalent relationships with passing, relating to concerns about the cisnormativity of passing, as well as non-binary participants' sense that passing as a man, while at times safe and affirming, was not a true reflection of their identities. Finally this section discussed the ways in which participants experienced passing in identities beyond gender. The data suggested that, like passing in a gender identity, passing in other congruent identities could be experienced as affirming and euphoric, while being misrecognised could feel like an aspect of the self was being overlooked or ignored. This section responded to the research question with its discussion of how participants described strategically altering their performance of signifiers when negotiating identities in various interactional contexts. It also helped to illuminate the second subsidiary research aim exploring participants' relationships with passing in interactions.

Beyond these themes, I proposed three key insights from this study. In developing these insights, I drew on participant accounts and related literature in this area to discuss how the study's findings relate to and build upon existing research and theory. The insights are as follows:

1. The transmasculine people who participated in this study should be understood to be reflective subjects, consciously taking advantage of pre-existing gender norms to achieve intersubjective recognition and safety in interactions;
2. Transmasculine people's freedom to achieve their interactional aims is defined by their sociocultural context and constrained by their interpersonal environment;
3. Transmasculine people's felt experiences of gender identities that *precede* interactions complicate straightforward notions of gender identity as something that is constructed *within* interactions.

The first of these insights is based in the argument that transmasculine participants reflectively drew on pre-existing gender ideologies to construct their genders in such a way as to achieve two main interactional aims: intersubjective recognition and safety. The notion of intersubjective recognition is drawn from Rubin's (2003) work and reflects participants' attempts to signify their genders in such a way as to be recognised in the identities that felt most congruent for them. In speaking to

participants' quest for safety, I drew on their descriptions of feeling vulnerability and fear in the social world, and their sense that entering into interactions with others placed them in a position of risk. Based on this data, I argued that transmasculine participants used normative masculine 'styles' strategically (as theorised by Motschenbacher (2007)), with a view to reducing the threat of painful experiences in interactions. Here I argued that participants' highly detailed descriptions of their own gender work indicated the critical thought that permeated their interpretations of their interactional behaviours, and demonstrated how these participants can be considered reflective subjects, able to engage in significant interactional self-awareness as part of a phenomenological research process.

With the second insight, I argued that transmasculine people's freedoms in interactions should be understood to be delimited and constrained by their sociohistorical and interpersonal contexts. Addressing the sociohistorical delimitations, I drew on Butler's (2001) poststructuralist theory to demonstrate how the doing of a gender identity is always subject to standards of intelligibility within any societal context. Thus gendered subjects must abide by pre-existing gender norms if they wish to receive recognition in the identities that feel congruent for them. In exploring the constraints of participants' interpersonal contexts, I drew on participant accounts of being policed by others when negotiating their gender identities in interactions. Here I argued that, while participants may have wanted to do their identities in creative or non-normative fashions, their ability to do so while also receiving intersubjective recognition and respect was dependent on others' perception of what is intelligible for that particular gender identity. This demonstrates the regulatory and constraining nature of pre-existing gender ideologies, as well as the ongoing maintenance of those norms in everyday interactions. With this argument, I followed Konnelly (2021) in challenging those who have positioned trans people's performances of gender as being especially normative or 'patriarchal'. Instead I concurred with Drabinski (2014) that such arguments hold trans people to be uniquely responsible for upholding gender norms, instead of acknowledging that trans people's freedom in gender performance is at all times constrained by, what I consider to be, the precarious and contingent promise of intersubjective recognition and safety.

With the third insight, I discussed how participants' sense of having an inherent gender identity or essence is disruptive to those social constructionist approaches that treat gender as being solely emergent from interactions. I drew on participant data around the pain of being misgendered to indicate how central a person's gender identity can feel to their sense of self, and linked this with past work in Trans Studies that discussed transmasculine people's experiences of a core sense of gender, such as that of Rubin (2003) and Prosser (1998). It is my argument that this sense of a gendered self is meaningful, and that both the feeling of gender identity and the construction of gender identity are important in understanding the lives and experiences of transmasculine people. This study has shown that these transmasculine people experienced themselves as both doing and being (trans)masculine in interactions, and this interpretation represents a rich area for study and analysis going forward.

6.2. Limitations of the research

While undertaking this research, I have remained mindful of Yardley's (2008) criteria for demonstrating validity in qualitative research, as previously explored in section 3.2.4. Nevertheless, like any other piece of research, the present study is necessarily limited in certain aspects. In the following section, I will first explore how the study is constrained by its historical contingency before exploring some specific limitations relating to the study's execution and methodology.

Throughout the process of the present research study, I have felt particularly aware of its historical specificity. In focusing this inquiry on the experiences of transmasculine people, I have predicated the work on the existence of an identity category ('transmasculine') whose long term salience I cannot predict. The term 'transmasculine' is itself relatively new, and the OED cites its first known usage as being in a 1999 edition of *The Village Voice* (OED, n.d.). That is 25 years of use at time of writing, a vanishingly short period in comparison to categories such as 'man' and 'woman'. I cannot know whether 'transmasculine' will survive another 25 years of use. It may be that the conceptual category perseveres, while the language changes. Alternatively, it may be the case that the very idea of 'transmasculine' as a means of containing and making sense of a particular way of being in the world is lost. Given

the current social, political and linguistic ferment around the lives and identities of trans people, the future conceptual and linguistic landscape remains unknown. Accordingly, this research is firmly situated in its current sociocultural context. While this could be conceived to represent a limitation of this study, I would more precisely consider it to be a *delimitation*; a marking out of its conceptual and linguistic historical scope. Indeed, all research and intellectual pursuits are firmly located in their sociohistorical contexts, even those that deal with concepts that may feel timeless. It is a tenet of epistemic relativism that the very ways of knowing and methods of questioning with which we approach any topic are delimited and contingent (Baghrarian & Carter, 2022). Nevertheless, the study of transgender identities is indeed particularly new and, with this newness, comes a certain volatility in understanding and conceptualisation. I believe it is this volatility that makes studies such as these so urgent and timely while also, perhaps, laying the groundwork for their future archaism.

In evaluating this research study, I am further aware that a sample size of 10 participants is relatively small. This is not necessarily a limitation in the context of other idiographic studies, however it does limit the generalisability of the study's results. In my analysis, I can only speak to the experiences of these 10 participants and I cannot know to what extent these findings reflect the experiences of transmasculine people who were not participants in the research. Furthermore, the sample for this research was somewhat homogeneous. All ten participants spoke English as their first language, eight participants were white, and nine were on testosterone at the time of interview. In addition, all participants were under the age of 45. Again, in the context of other IPA studies, this is not unusual. Indeed Smith et al. (2022) note that a relatively homogeneous sample is generally preferable in the context of an IPA analysis. However, I have been conscious throughout the research process of how beneficial it has been to have had those participants who are from different backgrounds or whose experiences differ from others within the group. It is my sense that the presence of heterogeneity allows us not only to see how experiences differ, but also to shed some light on those experiences that converge and reflect one another even in the context of difference. For instance, if I compare Sam's experiences as a transmasculine birthing parent with Z's experiences as a transmasculine person in Islam, while the details of these experiences may differ

significantly, many of the emotional resonances hold true for both. Both sought to be recognised, to be respected, and to be safe. It is my sense that sample diversity brings richness and depth to the research, and were I to undertake this study again I would seek to ensure an even greater level of diversity within the sample, whether through setting specific demographic recruitment criteria, or through proactively reaching out to community groups and spaces representing different communities.

I am aware also that all but one of the participants for this research were recruited online using social media groups. The final participant was found through snowballing, with a referral made by a previous participant. This means that all of the participants for this research had access to the Internet and had some access to a community of transmasculine people. While this does not necessitate any particular homogeneity of experience, it does mean that none of the participants were in extreme digital poverty, leading to a lack of online presence, and none were entirely isolated from their wider community. The online recruitment focus may also have contributed to the fact that I did not have any participants in much older age brackets. As above, were I to undertake this research study again, I would seek to redress this imbalance. I would do so by implementing additional in-person recruitment strategies, most likely through reaching out to local community organisations. While I had planned to implement such strategies if need be, the online recruitment for this particular study went so quickly that I felt that this was not necessary. This is something that I would rethink in the future.

Furthermore, I am aware of some limitations that have been raised about IPA as a methodology in general. For instance, Willig (2008) commented that the reliance on experiential introspection in the interview setting may not be suitable for all participants. She noted that participants may not find it easy or possible to “communicate the rich texture of their experience to the researcher” and that they may or may not be able to “capture the subtleties and nuances of their physical and emotional experiences” using a spoken account (Willig, 2008, p67). I tentatively agree with Willig’s evaluation here, and acknowledge that a person’s ability to describe their experience is dependent on both their linguistic competency and the comfort that they feel in expressing their experiences to a relative stranger during the interview process. I was aware of these issues during the interviews for this study, in

which some participants seemed more comfortable putting their experiences into words than others. I considered it to be my responsibility as the researcher to create an interpersonal environment that was maximally comfortable for the participants to 'open up', but even so, I was constrained by the limited time that I spent with each participant. While I remain convinced that semi-structured interviews are a highly effective method for understanding participants' experiences, I have thought about whether I would approach these interviews differently in a future piece of research. One potential solution could have been to inform participants more thoroughly beforehand about the questions that I was going to ask them. In this way, they might have had time to prepare their thinking and thus not have felt that I was asking them difficult questions out of the blue. I believe that this strategy might have been helpful for some participants, while also carrying with it certain drawbacks. On the one hand, I would not want participants to have felt that they needed to prepare thoroughly before the interview, or to have felt that it was going to be a formal question-and-answer session, to which their answers could be 'wrong'. In addition, as a semi-structured interviewer, I felt that it was important to ask my questions in a way that was guided by the participants' prior responses and not to reel off a set of pro-forma questions in line with those that I (and they) had prepared. I am not sure that there is a perfect solution to this problem. As it stands, I believe that all participants were able to talk eloquently enough about their experiences and the way that they interpreted the world around them. Even those who were, perhaps, less comfortable in the interview setting were still open and willing to talk about their lives and identities, and for this I am extremely grateful to them.

Finally, from an ethical perspective, I have some concerns about the process of de-identification as a means of maintaining participant privacy. While I took care to remove any identifiable information about each participant, it is still customary to include full descriptions of participants' experiences, which are often very personal and unique. While the participants are, of course, not identifiable to strangers, I have felt concerned that a person who is already close to that participant may be able to identify their experiences from these descriptions. This feels particularly relevant in studies such as this, which are written about a relatively small community and could be read by other members of that small community. In response to this concern, I took extra care not to associate participant pseudonyms with any details that could

link them to their other identities, groups or places. However, in some cases it was such details that gave participants' narratives an experiential depth that it would have felt inappropriate to arbitrarily change or obscure (for instance Charlie's experiences as a Black man or Michael's experiences in the military). An alternative strategy could have been for all the quotes and experiences that I referenced to be presented anonymously, with no identifying link between different quotes from the same participant. While this might have made it harder for an outsider to identify the participants, I fear that this would have led to losing some of the spirit of an IPA approach, in which the analyst presents a rounded and extensive discussion of the specific participants and their experiences. I do not have a sense of what best practice would be in this area, but hope that this is a conversation that will remain alive in the field going forward.

6.3. Implications of the research

This is a novel and significant study, and the first to engage in a phenomenological analysis of transmasculine people's negotiations of gender identity in interactions. In this section, I will explore four key contributions that this research makes to existing theory and practice.

Firstly, this study's primary significance is the fact that it is the first of its kind to explore transmasculine gender negotiation in interactions from a phenomenological perspective. Indeed, I have not come across the interactional gender negotiation of any group being explored phenomenologically. This is significant in that it opens up the study of transmasculine interactions to an experiential focus, something which has not been done before. This approach allows for full respect to be given to the subjectivity of gendered subjects in interactions, acknowledging the ways in which they are negotiating existing discourses to consciously create their identities in the ways that feel most congruent for them. While there already exists much excellent research exploring how trans people construct their identities from a discursive/critical observational perspective (e.g. Corwin, 2017; Edelman & Zimman, 2014), this study demonstrates a new and complementary avenue of inquiry, something which could be replicated with other identity groups. Through taking a phenomenological approach, this study's analysis was guided by participants' own

areas of priority as regards their experiences of being in interactions with others. This led to particular attention in the analysis being placed upon participants' experiences of fear and vulnerability when in interactions with an unpredictable other, as well as the salience of context in determining how transmasculine people approached their identity work in different interactions. Notably the phenomenological approach also indicated the level of critical analysis that transmasculine participants were already applying to their own interactional identity work. This is greatly significant in demonstrating how phenomenological interviewing and other first-person introspective research methods can be used fruitfully in understanding transmasculine subjects' identity work, offering a level of access to subject motivation and emotional experience that is not available from traditional researcher-led critical analyses of identity construction.

Secondly, and relatedly, this study is significant from a theoretical perspective in that it has provided further evidence, following from Rubin (2003), that phenomenology and social constructionism are appropriate and complementary epistemological frameworks for studying trans identities. Through exploring transmasculine participants' experiences of gender, a socially constructed and culturally contingent phenomenon, this study has had to reckon both with participants' very real experiences of the effects of gender in their lives, as well as the socially dependent nature of its ideologies, policing and rules. Through doing so, this research has provided further substance to Rubin's claim that gender identities are both constructed and real, and, as the researcher, it has been necessary to hold both of these positions in concert in order to do justice to participant accounts in this research. This study's transmasculine participants have described how fundamental and central their gender identities can feel to their very sense of who they are, while simultaneously feeling frustrated and constrained by the limitations placed upon them by the sociocultural environments in which they are being and doing their gender identities. I hope that this research will encourage others not to shy away from reckoning with the thorny tensions that exist between phenomenological and constructionist frameworks. If approached thoughtfully, they can be complementary strands of inquiry, and the felt centrality of gender identity provides rich and fertile ground for exploring these ideas as they interweave and contend with one another, likely never to be fully reconciled.

Next, in its exploration of the signifiers that feel important for transmasculine people when they are doing passing in interactions, this study has delved more deeply into transmasculine people's relationships with linguistic signifiers of gender identity than other sociological studies have in the past. While other research has explored transmasculine people's feelings about their appearance, clothing choices, body and behaviours (e.g. Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2021; Pathoulas et al., 2021; Teti, Bauerband, et al., 2020; Teti, Morris, et al., 2020), there is limited research exploring how transmasculine people feel about the different linguistic strategies available to them in the construction of their identities. The closest example is Jørgensen (2016), which was a study undertaken in a Danish context. Participant narratives in the present study have revealed how vocal pitch, prosody, lexical items and speech content can feel meaningful in the signification of a masculine gender identity. These insights would be useful for speech and language therapists who may be working with trans clients during their transitions. Additionally, given the fact that at least two participants had spent time working on masculinising the pitch or resonance of their voices, these accounts seem to corroborate the claims of Azul and colleagues (2018) that transmasculine people may benefit from working with culturally competent speech and language therapists as part of their transition, an intervention that is currently predominantly accessed by transfeminine people.

Finally, the findings of this research have revealed much about transmasculine people's emotional experiences of being in the world with others. Notably, this study has shown how transmasculine people may feel significant fear and vulnerability in interactions, aware of the ever present risk of misgendering or violence. This sense of risk may have implications for their ability to live and interact in a way that feels authentic and congruent to them. For instance, some described hiding elements of their identities when in interactions with others, while others described taking care to avoid interactions as much as possible. These findings are relevant for care professionals, for instance psychotherapists, who are working with transmasculine people and interested in their emotional experiences of being in the world. Indeed, research has already shown that psychotherapy with trans people is most effective when delivered in an affirming and culturally competent manner, with an awareness of the specific challenges facing trans people in the contemporary sociopolitical

environment (Weir & Piquette, 2018). The findings of this study are significant in that they provide useful context for those practitioners who wish to more deeply understand the specific challenges facing their transmasculine clients, particularly those challenges that relate to their experiences of being in interactions with others.

6.4. Suggestion for future research

This study paves the way for future phenomenological research in this area. In particular, it would be beneficial to undertake an equivalent study exploring transfeminine people's experiences of negotiating gender in interactions. Doing so would help to clarify which aspects of transmasculine people's experiences in interactions relate to their being trans generally, and which relate to their being transmasculine specifically. It is my sense that there would be significant commonalities in certain aspects of transmasculine and transfeminine people's experiences, for instance around the desire for intersubjective recognition and to avoid instances of violence and transphobia. I imagine other aspects would differ, especially as regards transfeminine people's experiences of misogyny and transmisogyny, as well as in relation to their specifically situated negotiations of femininity in interactions. As with the transmasculine people in this study, I would expect there to be notable differences in the experiences of transfeminine people of colour compared to their white peers, especially given the particularly high levels of violence recorded against trans women of colour worldwide (Human Rights Campaign, 2023). Just as the present study has illuminated some of the ways in which masculine people are subject to gender policing and regulation on account of their perceived masculinity, this equivalent study would offer insight into the policing and regulation imposed upon (trans)feminine bodies. It could explore the question of who can be considered to be feminine, and what kinds of performances and expressions are expected by others for a person to be intersubjectively recognised as a member of the much discussed category of 'woman'.

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8. Appendices

8.1. Personal Experiential Theme (PET) tables for each participant

8.1.1. Kyle

	PET	PET sub-theme
1	A sensitive and fluid approach to gender	Kyle is highly sensitive to intersubjective gender dynamics
		He has a fluid approach to gender
2	Constructing his gender identity is just one part of a wider identity construction in the social world	Constructing his gender identity is one way in which he constructs an identity he considers to be socially appropriate
		Both constructing his gender identity and constructing his wider identity feel like a part of his experience as an autistic person
3	A consistent draw to a masculine identity, with periods of identity instability and hyperfemininity	Constructing a masculine identity has always felt more congruent for him than feminine identities, in which he feels like an imposter
		In times of emotional ill-health and uncertainty about his identity, he constructed a hyperfeminine identity
4	The more comfortable he feels in an interaction, the more freely he feels he can express his gender identity	As he becomes more comfortable in his body and identity, gender is a less prominent concern for him
		As his body becomes more perceptibly masculine, he feels more comfortable expressing himself in a feminine way that feels right for him
5	He engages in strategic semiotic constructions of masculinity, in some instances driven by fear	Part of his experience of being trans in public space is characterised by fear, in particular of being clocked
		At times he experiences extreme self-consciousness around the way he is being perceived

		In some interactions he consciously constructs a masculine presentation
		But the masculinity he constructs doesn't always feel congruent for him

Table 9: PETs and sub-themes: Kyle

8.1.2. Jake

	PET	PET sub-theme
1	Jake feels vulnerable interacting and being perceived as a trans person	Jake feels vulnerable in interactions with others
		He experiences fear in some interactions
		He attempts to manage the uncomfortable world of interaction
		He has had difficult interactional experiences around his gender, including at the hands of his family
		He finds pressures to describe his experience in the 'right' way at times to be silencing
2	Through interactions with others, Jake came to understand his experience	Interactions with other trans people made the possibility of transition legible for him
		This shift has brought him greater happiness and peace
3	Hyperawareness of intersubjective gender dynamics	Jake has a nuanced understanding of gender and masculinity
		Jake is very conscious of how his gender is perceived in interactions, driven largely by a desire to pass
		He feels anxious about how women feel around him in interaction
		Since transitioning, he constructs his sexuality in a different way

4	Jake has a complex relationship with semiotic identity construction	He engages in conscious constructions of masculinity in interactions in order to be 'seen'
		In some contexts, that conscious construction feels less necessary
		While this semiosis helps him to feel seen, some aspects of male identity constructions don't feel right for him
		He used to feel pressure to semiotically construct a female identity

Table 10: PETs and sub-themes: Jake

8.1.3. Michael

	PET	PET sub-theme
1	Michael is sensitive to intersubjective gender dynamics	His youthful experiences of gender have impacted how he relates to masculinity
		He's careful to not be a toxically masculine person, particularly around women
2	Michael has a fairly traditional understanding of masculinity and gender	[all experiential statements held under main PET heading]
3	Michael is happier since transitioning, and more comfortable in interactions	Living as a man is more comfortable for him
		Interactions specifically feel easier now and less anxiety provoking
4	Some of Michael's interactions are characterised by fear due to traumatic experiences	He began his transition in an highly controlled environment (the military)
		He has experienced extreme harassment because of his trans/queer identity
		He experiences fear as a trans person in the world, particularly around misgendering

Table 11: PETs and sub-themes: Michael

8.1.4. Scott

	PET	PET sub-theme
1	A fear of misgendering led to him being hyperaware of his gender signifiers and to consciously constructing masculinity in interactions	Fear of misgendering led to a sense of hyperawareness of his gender signifiers
		He consciously alters his use of signifiers to construct a more stereotypically masculine persona in interactions
2	He lacked confidence prior to transition and found the social world difficult	The initial years of his transition were difficult
3	Transitioning has brought him a much greater level of comfort in his identity and in society - although this comfort is not total	He is much more comfortable in his identity and in interactions since transitioning
		But some social contexts remain challenging for him
4	He has a non-prescriptive and thoughtful approach to gender	[all experiential statements held under main PET heading]

Table 12: PETs and sub-themes: Scott

8.1.5. Marlowe

	PET	PET sub-theme
1	A masculine identity has always felt congruent for him, and attempts at constructing a feminine identity have felt uncomfortable and incongruent	Masculinity has always had a feeling of rightness, making him feel like himself
		He tried to construct a feminine identity but it felt wrong for him, like he was putting on a costume
		He was better able to understand his identity when he saw it reflected in others
2	He is increasingly comfortable with his identity and presentation in interactions, but there are still	A greater comfort in himself since transitioning allows him to stand up for himself in interactions and focus less on his expression of masculinity

	moments where his trans identity feels salient to the interaction	In general, he is not highly conscious of his trans identity, but there are moments where being trans feels salient to the interaction at hand, and it lingers on his mind
3	Marlowe takes steps to feel safe in interactions in public: this includes conscious constructions of masculinity and limited disclosure of his trans identity	Marlowe changes how he expresses gender signifiers in different contexts
		Marlowe is careful about only disclosing his trans identity in contexts where he feels safe
4	Marlowe frequently finds himself in contact with toxic masculinities, making him consider how he wants to behave in relation to these masculinities	He finds himself exposed to toxic masculinities and gender dynamics that make him feel uncomfortable
		In some instances, Marlowe finds it hard to relate to other men
		Marlowe is sensitive to and troubled by how some men interact with women
		Marlowe's choices around responding to toxic male behaviour are often impacted by a fear of violence or harassment
5	For Marlowe, being misgendered in interaction feels like a physical pain; he used to go out of his way to avoid it happening, now that he passes he feels significantly better	Misgendering is a very painful experience for Marlowe
		Earlier in his transition (and sometimes now), he would go out of his way to construct an identity and appearance in interactions in such a way that he was less likely to be misgendered
		He is significantly more comfortable and confident in interactions now that he passes the majority of the time

Table 13: PETs and sub-themes: Marlowe

8.1.6. Sam

	PET	PET sub-theme
1	The pain of being misgendered causes Sam to consciously perform masculine signifiers in order to pass	Being misgendered for Sam causes emotional pain and significant self-consciousness
		As a result, Sam engages in conscious constructions of masculinity in order to pass as a man and/or not be read as queer
		When Sam passes, for the most part he feels good
		However, his thoughts on passing are sometimes more nuanced, and he doesn't always want to be read as a cis man
2	At times, being a parent makes Sam's negotiation of his identity more complicated	The period while he was pregnant led to identity based difficulties for Sam, but it wasn't all negative
		He is frequently subjected to people's assumptions about his parenthood
		He avoids revealing he is his child's birthing parent, but this can lead to a sense that his role is not being recognised
3	He is sensitive to how interactional gender relations are different now that he is read as a man	He finds that the way people relate to him is different now that he is read as a (queer) man
		He is highly conscious of women's experiences of interacting with him, and tries to make them feel safe
4	Sam's experiences in the world are characterised by a feeling of danger	When in the world around others, Sam frequently feels that he is not safe / is at risk of being unsafe
		He takes steps to mitigate potential dangers from others

5	Constructing a masculine identity for him feels like an authentic reflection of his internal sense of self	For him, manhood/masculinity is an internal sense, and externalising that sense feels congruent for him
		Although he retains some complicated feelings around masculinity and manhood
		He used to feel constrained by pressures to perform womanhood, but now he has a more comfortable relationship with feminine signifiers

Table 14: PETs and sub-themes: Sam

8.1.7. Z

	PET	PET sub-theme
1	In some contexts, Z is hyperaware of the way they are constructing their gender in interactions	In particularly masculine contexts, Z goes out of their way to construct a masculine identity in interactions
		At the same time, they are plagued by a concern that they might not be doing it 'right'
		Prior to taking testosterone, these interactional contexts made them much more anxious
2	They have a particularly complex relationship with passing in interactions, characterised at times by ambivalence, as well as looking beyond gendered passing	In some contexts, passing as 'male' feels affirming for them
		In other contexts, they feel less attached to passing, seeing it as a functional means of remaining safe in interactions
		After their earliest experiences of transition, they realised that passing as 'male' in interactions brought them feelings of discomfort and incongruence
		It feels affirming to them to pass in identities beyond their gender

3	They have an ambivalent relationship with masculinity, feeling cautious of it, while also wanting to improve this relationship	They have a historically negative view of masculinity
		At the same time, they see masculinity as a constructed concept - differing from context to context
		As they move more into a masculine embodiment, they are looking to connect with and understand masculinity more through interactions
4	They are particularly conscious of the risk of violence in interactions, having experienced instances of aggression since transitioning	Since transitioning and being read as a man, they have encountered multiple instances of violence in interactions - some of which have been race related
		As a result, they are often concerned about the risks of violence from men
		They take steps to stay safe in interactions
5	They experience frustration at the way gendered behavioural expectations are placed upon them, having experienced multiple forms of this across their life and transition	Earlier in their transition, they were conscious of the ways that people responded differently to them and their body (hair) after they came out as trans
		They were frustrated by the expectation that they should change their name, for a more obviously 'male' name
		As someone now predominantly read as a man in the social world, they find it difficult to experience people's expectations of how they 'should' behave
		These frustrations reach to their experiences in Islam, where they feel pressured to behave in certain ways as a 'man'

6	Their understanding of their identity developed over the course of their transition as they became more versed in theories of non-binary identity and intersectional social critique	Their early transition had a binary focus, but as they learned more about gender they moved towards a non-binary identity
		They think carefully about their identity and body and how it interacts with society and systems of oppression, however this doesn't always help them to come to a place of stability in their identity or comfort in the self

Table 15: PETs and sub-themes: Z

8.1.8. Corey

	PET	PET sub-theme
1	They come from a socially conservative background in which gender norms are keenly upheld and their transition is not supported.	They remain enmeshed in the local conservative community, which brings tension for them in navigating these gendered spaces, feeling that they stick out.
		They tried to transition in their early 20s, but their parents made clear that they would not support them. After that, they did not transition for 20 years.
		During and after this experience, they associated transitioning with social collapse and abandonment by loved ones. This is a fear that they still experience today.
2	They exist in a state of hyper-awareness in the social world, brought about by a history of violence and harassment.	They have experienced significant harassment as a result of being queer, as a result they have developed a hyper-aware, protective mode of being in the world which is exhausting and limiting.

		For the most part, lockdown was a liberating experience for them as it freed them from the pressure of existing in the social world. However, it also limited Corey's ability to maintain their embodied gender signifiers in a way that felt congruent.
		In general they do not go out of their way to consciously construct masculinity, but they are cautious of appearing feminine and sometimes construct a heightened masculinity for safety around other men.
3	They experience some level of ambivalence around the prospect of passing fully as a man.	On the one hand, they are happy about passing and pleased that their body is feeling more congruent for them through masculinisation.
		However, they feel frustrated by the way that people (particularly women) respond to them when reading them as a man - and they fear losing kinship with people from other marginalised groups
		Despite these tensions, moving into a space of gendered ambiguity in interactions is becoming increasingly challenging for them
4	They have certain perceptions of gender dynamics and communication styles that impact their understandings of men and women	They have a sense that men and women communicate differently - and they feel more positively about women in interactions.
		Their understanding of masculinity focuses on presentation, and has some traditional elements

Table 16: PETs and sub-themes: Corey

8.1.9. Charlie

	PET	PET sub-theme
1	Charlie experiences precarious mental health, exacerbated by a damaging perception of how other people view him in the world	Prior to his transition, he felt that he was 'ugly' and that meant people didn't see him for who he was
		Early in his transition, he experienced extreme self-consciousness around how he was perceived by others
		Even now he is preoccupied by how people see him, and is extremely critical about his own appearance, including from a gendered perspective
		This can lead to insecurity in his identity and emotional ill-health
2	Partly informed by early experiences of bullying as well as his gender, interactions can sometimes feel uncomfortable and unsafe for Charlie	Charlie's life now is impacted by previous experiences of a lack of safety in his childhood as well as bullying at school
		Figuring out his identity and preferred gender expression was very difficult in this context
		Nowadays, Charlie struggles to feel safe in some interactions
3	Despite ongoing emotional difficulties, transitioning has brought a little more ease to Charlie's experiences of interactions and understanding of his identity	The shift in Charlie's sense of how people experience him has brought him some comfort in interactional contexts
		Despite initial difficulties, he is increasingly able to reconcile his relationship with masculinity and queerness
		Although he still struggles with certain aspects of masculinity
4	Charlie's experiences of being in the world are significantly	[all experiential statements held under main PET heading]

	impacted by his identity as a Black man, and he is highly aware of managing this experience	
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Table 17: PETs and sub-themes: Charlie

8.1.10. Benji

	PET	PET sub-theme
1	Benji likes to pass as a masculine person/man/boy, and being referred to as a woman is painful and uncomfortable for him	Being misgendered is painful to Benji, particularly when he puts effort into passing
		He engages in certain semiotic manipulations to help him pass as someone that is not a woman, and is uncomfortable when he cannot do that
		When he passes, he feels great
2	He has a complicated relationship with masculinity - not all aspects of its embodiment feel right for him	When he began his gender journey, he found solace in more stereotypical expressions of masculinity
		Over time, he has come to identify the aspects of masculinity that feel congruent for him
		Some aspects of masculinity do not feel right for him, and he has moments of imposter syndrome
3	Benji does not have an easy relationship with his gender identity and there are parts of himself that he is still trying to understand	He is very self-conscious about his gender expression, and he thinks a lot about how he is being perceived by others
		He has not yet been able to access gender-affirming care - he is not sure whether he wants to take T, but also has a sense that he is running out of time to make the decision

		Benji is sensitive to context, and feels differently about his gender in different interactional contexts
		Even beyond gender, Benji is self-conscious in interactions and feels that he is still figuring out who he is

Table 18: PETs and sub-themes: Benji

8.2. Original recruitment flyer

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED: RESEARCH ON TRANSMASCULINE EXPERIENCES OF GENDER AND COMMUNICATION

We are looking for transmasculine adults in the UK to participate in a trans-led research study about gender and communication.

This research study is exploring transmasculine people's lived experiences of being transmasculine when in interaction with other people.

In the interview we will explore how you feel about your gender identity when you are communicating with others, as well as your understanding of masculinity and feelings about 'passing'.

Taking part will involve:

- ❖ **An introductory phone call (~20 mins)**
- ❖ **A one-to-one conversational interview (~90 mins)**

All those who are interviewed will receive a £20 shopping voucher as a thank you for taking part.

- ❖ All interviews and analysis will be done by a transmasculine social researcher.
- ❖ There are a limited number of spaces available.
- ❖ All participation will be kept confidential and any contributions will be anonymised. It will not be possible to identify you from the research findings.

FOR MORE INFO, PLEASE EMAIL ROWAN ON:

[REDACTED]

CITY
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
— EST 1894 —

This study has been reviewed by and received ethics clearance through the School of Health and Psychological Sciences Research Ethics Committee, City, University of London.

This study is supervised by Dr Lia Litosseliti (L.Litosseliti@city.ac.uk) at City, University of London.

City, University of London is the data controller for the personal data collected for this research project. If you have any data protection concerns about this research project, please contact City's Information Compliance Team at dataprotection@city.ac.uk.

N.B. Heading font has been corrupted in pdf conversion.

8.3. Amended recruitment flyer

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED: RESEARCH ON TRANSMASCULINE EXPERIENCES OF GENDER AND COMMUNICATION

We are looking for transmasculine adults in the UK to participate in a trans-led research study about gender and communication.

This research study is exploring transmasculine people's lived experiences of being transmasculine when communicating with other people.

In the interview we will explore how you feel about your gender identity when you are communicating with others, as well as your feelings about masculinity and passing.

Taking part will involve:

- ❖ An introductory Zoom call (~20 mins)
- ❖ A one-to-one conversational interview in-person (~90 mins)

All those who are interviewed will receive a £20 shopping voucher as a thank you for taking part.

We would be particularly interested to hear from people who are aged 35+, people who are not on testosterone and people of colour.

- ❖ All interviews and analysis will be done by a transmasculine social researcher.
- ❖ There are a limited number of spaces available.
- ❖ All participation will be kept confidential and any contributions will be anonymised. It will not be possible to identify you from the research findings.

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N.B. Heading font has been corrupted in pdf conversion.

8.4. Participant Information Sheet

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of the study: Negotiating transgender identity in interaction: the experiences of transmasculine people.

Thank you so much for expressing interest in this research project. In this document, you will find more information about the study and what it would mean for you to participate.

Before you decide whether you would like to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please do ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. You will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep.

What is the purpose of the research?

The purpose of this research is to explore transmasculine people's experiences of interacting with other people, focusing specifically on how their gender identities feel relevant in communication. I would like to understand how transmasculine people feel about themselves, about masculinity, and about passing, all across different contexts.

This research is grounded in a belief that trans people are particularly aware of and sensitive to the nuance of gendered behaviours and presentations in the world. I believe that trans people's insights won't just help us to give voice to their experiences, but also help to understand gender as a whole, and will add richness to the existing research on gender and interaction.

This study is for my PhD at the School of Health and Psychological Sciences at City, University of London.

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited to take part in this research because you have shown interest and are a transmasculine individual aged 18 or over living in the UK. There are no other requirements for taking part in this research, however I ask that participants are sufficiently comfortable speaking English to be able to take part in a relaxed, in-depth discussion in English.

For the purposes of this research, I'm considering transmasculine people to include transgender men, as well as non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals, who

were designated as girls at birth, but who now identify in a masculine gender role. You can be at any stage in your social or physical transition, as long as the transmasculine label feels right for you.

Please let me know if you identify as transmasculine but do not feel that the definition I have provided is right for you. I understand that everyone experiences their identity differently and that definitions that work for some people may not work for others. You may still be eligible to take part in the study.

Please note also that not everyone will be able to take part and that I am only recruiting ten participants on a first come first served basis. I will also be tracking certain demographic details to make sure there is diversity in my sample. If you fit the criteria but I have already recruited all ten participants, I will ask if you are happy for me to store your details and get back in touch with you via email if another space becomes available.

What will I have to do?

Taking part in this research will involve:

- An initial telephone or Zoom call with me (around 20 minutes) where we can get to know each other a little, and I can tell you a bit more about the research. In this conversation, I will ask you a few short questions to make sure you are eligible to take part in the research. If all goes to plan, we will then schedule a time and place for the main interview.
- The main interview will be a semi-structured conversation (around 90 minutes) in which I will ask you a series of open questions about your experiences of interaction, your feelings about your gender, and your attitudes to masculinity and passing, among other things. The interview will be informal, and I hope to create a space in which you will feel comfortable talking in detail about the topics that we will be discussing.
 - We will schedule the interview to take place at a time and location that is convenient to you. This can be in your home or in a private room at City, University of London. We can also discuss other appropriate locations if neither of those options work for you.
 - I will aim to do the interview face-to-face, however if this is not possible or you are not comfortable with this, we can do the interview on Zoom instead. If you would prefer to do this, I will provide you with a Zoom Information Sheet with more details.
- You will receive a £20 love2shop voucher as a thank you payment for attending the main research interview.

How do I get involved?

Please email me (Rowan) at [REDACTED] to let me know if you would like to take part.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in this study is voluntary – you do not have to participate. If you do choose to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form, but you will be able to withdraw your consent without giving any reason and without penalty or disadvantage. Please note however that it will not be possible to withdraw your data from the study once the data analysis stage has begun. You will be informed at your interview when the data analysis period will begin.

Throughout the research process, you may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to. Doing so will not impact your ability to take part in the research.

You will receive the £20 love2shop voucher at the beginning of the interview, should you later decide that there are questions that you do not want to answer or if you wish to withdraw completely, you are welcome to keep the voucher.

Who is carrying out the research?

My name is Rowan and I am a transmasculine social researcher doing a PhD in Language & Communication Sciences at the School of Health & Psychological Sciences at City, University of London. I am interested in how people navigate their identities when they are interacting with others, and also in creating safe and respectful research spaces for transgender people to share their experiences and knowledge.

Are there any disadvantages or risks of taking part?

There are no significant risks to taking part in this research, however there will be a time commitment. I estimate that the study will require around 2 hours of your time, including the introductory call (± 20 mins) and the main interview (± 90 mins). To try to reduce the impact of this, we will arrange to do the introductory call and main interview at a time and place that is convenient to you.

In addition, while unlikely, there is some risk of you feeling upset if we touch upon any painful memories or emotions in the interview. I will not be asking about anything that I expect to be distressing, however I am conscious that certain elements of the trans experience can be challenging and I will be sensitive to that throughout the research process. Should you feel any difficult emotions during the interview, we can take a break or stop at any point. There will be an option to reschedule the interview or withdraw from the study completely. At the end of the interview, I will provide an

information sheet detailing relevant support services and organisations that you can access should you feel in need of professional support. You do not need to answer any questions that you do not want to.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

I hope that you may benefit from having the time and space in a trans-led, non-judgmental and empathic setting to talk through some of your life experiences. My goal in doing this research is to have the utmost respect for my participants and to work *with* them to build knowledge, rather than extracting knowledge *from* them.

In addition, you will receive a £20 love2shop voucher as a thank you for attending the main research interview.

This research will contribute to trans studies, a field of research which has improving the lives of trans people as one of its core aims.

Will anyone know that I have taken part in the study?

It is extremely unlikely that anyone will know that you have taken part in the study. Your participation will be kept confidential and all your contributions will be de-identified before inclusion in the final research thesis. It will not be possible to identify you from the research findings.

- I will change all names and personal details so that they are not identifiable. I will be the only person to have access to the data before this stage of de-identification. I will ask you to choose a pseudonym (fake name) that feels right for you, which I will attach to your contributions.
- The interview recordings will only be accessible by me.
- The interview transcripts will be accessible by my supervisors, Dr Lia Litosseliti and Dr Eamonn McKeown at City, University of London, but only after they have been de-identified.
- All audio files and transcripts will be stored with password-protection.
- The only situation in which your personal data may be shared with a third party is if I am concerned that you or someone else is at risk of serious harm. In the extremely unlikely event that this happens, I will pass my concerns on to the City Safeguarding team for guidance on whether any further action is required.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the research will be presented in my PhD thesis, which will be made available in the City Research Online repository, where other people may have

access to it. In addition, insight from this thesis may be used in publications in the public domain. It will not be possible to identify you from my thesis, or any subsequent publications.

What will happen to my data if I take part in this study?

City, University of London is the sponsor and the data controller of this study based in the United Kingdom. This means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

Your rights to access, change or move your information are limited, as we need to manage your information in a specific way in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personal-identifiable information possible (for further information please see <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/lawful-basis-for-processing/public-task/>).

City will use your name and contact details to contact you about the research study as necessary. The only person at City who will have access to your identifiable information will be the primary researcher, Rowan Douglas. City will keep identifiable information about you securely archived until 10 years after the final study closure date. The de-identified interview transcripts will be kept indefinitely.

The lawful basis under which your personal data will be processed is "processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest" (Article 6(1)(e)) and the condition by which your special category (sensitive) data is being processed is scientific and historical research (Article 9(2)(j)).

You can find out more about how City handles data by visiting <https://www.city.ac.uk/about/governance/legal>. If you are concerned about how we have processed your personal data, you can contact the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) <https://ico.org.uk/>.

What if I'm not happy with something that happens during the research?

If you have any problems, concerns or questions about this study, you can contact me, or ask to speak to my supervisory team. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this through City's complaints procedure. To complain about the study, you can phone 020 7040 3040 and ask to speak to the Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee. Please inform them that the name of the project is 'Negotiating transgender identity in interaction: the experiences of transmasculine people', and that the primary researcher is Rowan Douglas in the School of Health and Psychological Sciences.

You can also write to:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

City University London holds insurance policies which apply to this study, subject to the terms and conditions of the policy. If you feel you have been harmed or injured by taking part in this study you may be eligible to claim compensation. This does not affect your legal rights to seek compensation. If you are harmed due to someone's negligence, then you may have grounds for legal action.

Further information and contact details

If you have any questions about participating in this research, you should contact the primary researcher, Rowan Douglas, in the first instance at

[REDACTED] Should you wish to contact someone else about this study, you can also contact Rowan's primary supervisor, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

8.5. Consent form

CONSENT FORM

Title of study: Negotiating transgender identity in interaction: the experiences of transmasculine people.

	<i>Please initial each row to show consent</i>	
1.	<p>I agree to take part in the above City, University of London (City) research project. I have had the project explained to me and have read the Participant Information Sheet, which I may keep for my records. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions which have been answered satisfactorily.</p> <p>I understand that participation in this study will involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking part in one semi-structured interview with Rowan (around 90 minutes), either in-person or on Zoom. • Allowing the interview to be recorded for transcription purposes. • Allowing the use of verbatim, de-identified quotes from the interview to be included in the research thesis and/or publications. 	
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the research at any point until the data analysis has begun without giving a reason.	
3.	I am receiving a £20 love2shop voucher as a thank you payment for attending the main research interview. I understand that I will receive this payment even if I choose not to answer questions or choose to withdraw from the research.	
4.	<p>I understand that my participation in the research will be kept confidential and that any of my contributions or quotes will be de-identified before they are included in the research thesis and/or publications. It will not be possible to identify me from the research findings. I understand that none of my identifiable data will be published or shared with any third party.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I understand that Rowan would only break confidentiality in the extremely unlikely event of concerns that I, or anyone else, is at risk of serious harm. In such an instance, he will share these concerns with the City Safeguarding team, for guidance on whether further action is required. 	
5.	I understand that Rowan's thesis will be available on the City Research Online repository, and that insight from this thesis may be shared in the public domain.	
6.	I am aware that my information will only be held and processed in order to answer the research questions of this study.	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I understand that any hard-copy documents containing my information will be scanned and electronically stored in a secure manner, and the original copies destroyed. • I understand that my personal data will be securely archived at City until 10 years after the final study closure date. • I understand that the de-identified transcripts of my interviews will be kept indefinitely. 	
7.	I agree to City recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will only be used for the purpose(s) set out in this statement and my consent is conditional on City complying with its duties and obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).	
8.	I agree to take part in the above study.	

Participant name printed

Signature

Date

Researcher name printed

Signature

Date

8.6. Topic guide

Interview topic guide

Research question:

- **What are transmasculine people's lived experiences of negotiating gender identity in interactions?**

Subsidiary aims:

- To understand how transmasculine people interpret their experiences of masculinity in interactions.
- To explore transmasculine people's relationships with passing in interactions.

Section 1: introduction

- Preliminary discussion incl. setting out info about the interview process.

Section 2: experiential / narrative

1. To start with, could you talk me through your transition journey?
2. On our last call, you described your gender identity as XXX. Could you describe to me what it means to you to be XXX?

Possible prompts:

- i. How does it feel to be XXX?
- ii. Have those feelings changed at all over time?
- iii. Are there any ways in which being XXX feels differently when you're alone v.s. when you're with other people?

Now I'm going to come on to ask about interaction specifically. And when I say interaction, I mean any instance in which two or more people communicate with one another. In many cases, this is spoken conversation face-to-face, but it could be other kinds of interaction as well, like phone calls, video calls, texting or emailing, or even a wave across the street. Does that make sense?

3. In what ways might you become aware of your trans identity / being XXX when you're interacting with other people?

Possible prompts:

- i. How does that make you feel?
- ii. Does that awareness ever change how you behave? In what ways?
- iii. Could you talk about any ways in which your trans identity / being XXX impacts how people relate to you in interaction?

4. Do you feel differently about your trans identity / being XXX when you are in different situations?

Possible prompts:

- i. For instance, this could be in different places or when you are interacting with different people.
 - ii. E.g.:
 - a. With loved ones / friends
 - b. In formal settings / the workplace
 - c. With strangers
 - d. With men / women / other trans people
5. When relevant: you mentioned in our last call that you're on testosterone. Could you describe to me any ways that testosterone has impacted how you feel about your identity when you're interacting with people?

Possible prompts:

- i. For instance, have there been any changes to your body that change how you feel about yourself when you are with other people?
- ii. Could you talk about any ways in which testosterone has impacted how people relate to you in interaction?

Section 3: passing

- 6. What does 'passing' mean to you?

Possible prompts:

- i. Is passing important to you?
7. Could you talk to me about anything you do when you're in interaction with other people to help you pass?

Possible prompts:

- i. Are there any situations in which passing feels more important to you than others?
- ii. Are there any aspects of your speech or appearance that make it harder for you to pass when you're interacting with others?
- iii. Do you do anything to manage those?

Section 4: masculinity

- 8. What does it mean to you to be masculine?

Possible prompts:

- i. In what ways do you feel that you are masculine?
 - ii. Are there any ways in which cis masculinity and trans masculinity differ from one another?
 - iii. Could you talk to me about any ways in which your relationship with masculinity has changed over the course of your transition?
9. Could you describe any ways of speaking or behaving in interaction that you see to be particularly masculine, whether in yourself or others?

Possible prompts:

- i. Do you notice yourself doing any of these things, or avoiding any of these things when interacting with others?

Section 5: identity intersections

10. In this interview, we have mostly focused on your gender, but just as we bring it to a close, could you talk to me about any other aspects of who you are or parts of your identity that impact your experiences of interacting with other people?

Possible prompts (if something has been mentioned):

- i. What does it mean to you to be [gender] and also [answer to Q10]?

Section 6: wrap-up

11. In my thesis, I will be talking about some of the things that you have said today. When I do so, I'd like to use a different name to put to your experiences so that you can't be identified. Is there a particular name that you feel would be appropriate? If not, I can choose one myself.
12. That's the end of the questions I have for you today. Is there anything more you'd like to add before we wrap-up?
13. How did that interview make you feel / how are you feeling now?
14. Do you have any questions for me before we finish?

8.7. Main ethics application

Ethics ETH2122-0363: Mr Rowan Douglas (Medium risk)

Date Created	27 Oct 2021
Date Submitted	01 Mar 2022
Date of last resubmission	27 Sep 2022
Date forwarded to committee	01 Mar 2022
Academic Staff	Mr Rowan Douglas
Student ID	210031513
Category	Doctoral Researcher
Supervisor	Dr Lia Litosseliti
Project	Negotiating transgender identity in interactions: the experiences of transmasculine people
School	School of Health & Psychological Sciences
Department	Language & Communication Science
Current status	Approved after amendments made

Ethics application

Risks

R1) Does the project have funding? No

R2) Does the project involve human participants? Yes

R3) Will the researcher be located outside of the UK during the conduct of the research? No

R4) Will any part of the project be carried out under the auspices of an external organisation, involve collaboration between institutions, or involve data collection at an external organisation? No

R5) Does your project involve access to, or use of, terrorist or extremist material that could be classified as security sensitive? No

R6) Does the project involve the use of live animals? No

R7) Does the project involve the use of animal tissue? No

R8) Does the project involve accessing obscene materials? No

R9) Does the project involve access to confidential business data (e.g. commercially sensitive data, trade secrets, minutes of internal meetings)? No

R10) Does the project involve access to personal data (e.g. personnel or student records) not in the public domain? Yes

R11) Does the project involve deviation from standard or routine clinical practice, outside of current guidelines? No

R12) Will the project involve the potential for adverse impact on employment, social or financial standing? No

R13) Will the project involve the potential for psychological distress, anxiety, humiliation or pain greater than that of normal life for the participant? No

R15) Will the project involve research into illegal or criminal activity where there is a risk that the researcher will be placed in physical danger or in legal jeopardy? No

R16) Will the project specifically recruit individuals who may be involved in illegal or criminal activity? No

R17) Will the project involve engaging individuals who may be involved in terrorism, radicalisation, extremism or violent activity and other activity that falls within the CounterTerrorism and Security Act (2015)? No

Applicant & research team

T1) Principal Applicant

Name Mr Rowan Douglas

Provide a summary of the researcher's training and experience that is relevant to this research project.

I gained subject knowledge in my B.A. in Theoretical and Applied Linguistics, University of Cambridge, 2013-2017. I have academic training in research methods from my MRes in Speech, Language & Cognition, UCL, 2020-2021. I have extensive experience undertaking interviews with the public from my career in social research at a political and social research agency, 2017-2020. As part of my work, I interviewed participants around the country, with a focus on vulnerable participants, this included longer ethnographic interviews with young LGBTQ+ people as part of a project researching the experiences of young LGBTQ+ NEETs. In addition, at this agency I received internal training on interview techniques, as well as external training on safeguarding vulnerable participants and lone working practices.

Finally, I volunteer as part of the research team at the London LGBTQ+ Community Centre; our primary focus is on undertaking ethical and sensitive research with members of the local LGBTQ+ community.

T2) Co-Applicant(s) at City

T3) External Co-Applicant(s)

T4) Supervisor(s) Dr Lia Litosseliti; Prof Eamonn McKeown

T5) Do any of the investigators have direct personal involvement in the organisations sponsoring or funding the research that may give rise to a possible conflict of interest? No

T6) Will any of the investigators receive any personal benefits or incentives, including payment above normal salary, from undertaking the research or from

the results of the research above those normally associated with scholarly activity? No

T7) List anyone else involved in the project.

Project details

P1) Project title

Transmasculine speakers' lived experiences of constructing their gender identity in conversation.

P1.1) Short project title

P2) Provide a lay summary of the background and aims of the research, including the research questions (max 400 words).

Being transgender in the UK can be challenging, and transgender people face high rates of discrimination and stigma. Stigma is often driven by ignorance, however there is evidence to suggest that increased awareness of trans identities can lead to greater societal support for trans people. Language is one of the key ways through which people present and construct their identities. Studies show that trans people are strategic in their use of language and embodied conversational behaviours to construct their gender. My study will add to the limited but growing body of research on transmasculine people's use of language and, through contributing to wider understanding of trans identities, will help to tackle the endemic stigma faced by trans people in the UK.

Research on trans linguistics in the past has tended to address transfeminine people's use of language, with fewer studies addressing the speech of transmasculine people. The research that does exist has primarily focused on the effect of testosterone treatment on acoustic features of transmasculine people's voices, in particular vocal pitch. More recently, a small amount of literature has been published looking into the complexity of the relationship between different aspects of transmasculine speakers' identities and their speech, challenging prior research which has tended to explain transmasculine people's speech solely using their gender history and experiences of hormone treatment. This study will build on that research, by offering an in-depth qualitative look at how transmasculine people find meaning in their spoken and embodied communicative behaviours insofar as they relate to their gender.

I will use Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, with semi-structured interviews, to understand 10 transmasculine speakers' experiences of using different spoken and embodied conversational behaviours (e.g. prosody, vocal pitch, gesture) in the ongoing construction of their gender.

My research will seek to answer the following research questions:

- How important do transmasculine speakers consider their spoken and embodied conversational behaviours in the construction of their gender identity?
- What semiotic meaning do spoken and embodied conversational behaviours hold for transmasculine participants insofar as they relate to their gender identity?
- To what extent, and in what ways, do transmasculine speakers feel that context impacts their conversational gender construction?

P4) Provide a summary and brief explanation of the research design, method, and data analysis.

This is a qualitative Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) study; it will consist of an initial screening phone call followed by a longer semi-structured interview with each of my ten transmasculine participants. I will also run one pilot interview with a separate trial participant before beginning the main interviews.

The 20 minute initial screening phone call will serve to help me build rapport with my participants as well as to determine whether they are suitable for the research. In order to do this, I will check that they are over 18, that they are transmasculine, and that they are sufficiently comfortable speaking English as to be able to undertake the longer interview fully in English. In these phone calls, I will also discuss the format and purpose of the main semi-structured interview.

The pilot interview will be an opportunity for me to practise the interviewing process and to check that the interview schedule is able to elicit sufficiently rich data to address the research questions. At the end of the interview, I will ask my participant to evaluate the interview process and will discuss any improvements needed. I will ask them about the topics covered, the language used in the questions, the experience of being interviewed by me, and others. This pilot participant will be subject to the same inclusion and exclusion criteria as my main participant sample. In order to have the best understanding of any issues with my interview approach or schedule, I will try to recruit a peer who is familiar with research to undertake the pilot interview. Such a person would be well placed to provide me with constructive feedback at the end of the interview. I will not include the data from this pilot interview in my final analysis, as I may make changes to my approach as a result of this interview. I will seek approval from the SHPS Ethics Committee using an amendment application for any changes to the study design made as a result of the pilot interview.

The main study fieldwork will consist of a semi-structured interview lasting around 90 minutes with each participant. I will go guided by participants with no specific lower or upper limit set on the interview time. However, should an interview stretch to or

beyond 2 hours, I will move to end the interview, unless I believe we are still producing relevant and useful information which is on-task. This is the most common method of data collection in IPA studies, as the semi-structured nature of the interviews allows respondents maximum opportunity to explore their lived experience in detail. The discursive nature of such interviews, when facilitated by an empathic and receptive interviewer, can provide a safe and comfortable forum for participants to discuss sensitive topics, such as their gender and transition. This will allow me to create rich and nuanced data with my participants.

I will analyse my data using the IPA framework. For each interview, I will undertake the following analysis stages:

- Transcription
 - I will transcribe the interview audio-recording verbatim. I will include any prosody and non-verbal behaviour observed in the interview or heard in the recording that I feel to be relevant.
- Initial noting
 - I will go through the interview transcript line by line, seeking to understand the participant's experience from a descriptive, linguistic and conceptual perspective.
- Developing emergent themes:
 - I will search for emergent themes within the interview, looking across the descriptive, linguistic and conceptual domains.
- Identifying superordinate themes
 - I will identify patterns and commonalities across the emergent themes, developing superordinate categories for the emergent themes to fall within.
- When I have followed this process for each interview in turn, I will begin:
 - Looking for patterns across cases
- I will take the superordinate themes for each interview together and look for convergences and divergences between them. I will begin to design a new framework of themes and sub-themes, taking into account the commonalities and differences across my participants.
- This final network of themes will form the basis of my write-up.

P4.1) If relevant, please upload your research protocol.

P5) What do you consider are the ethical issues associated with conducting this research and how do you propose to address them?

In undertaking this research, I will be guided by the UKRI six principles of ethical research. I have indicated those principles below, as well as my intended actions to ensure my research meets these criteria.

1) Research should aim to maximise benefit for individuals and society, and minimise risk and harm.

There are no guaranteed benefits for specific participants from taking part in the research. However, I hope that participants will benefit from being afforded the time and space in a trans-led, nonjudgemental and empathic setting to talk through some of their life experiences. It has been shown that the formulation and telling of personal narratives in a research setting can help some people to come to a better understanding of their lives. While my research is not a therapy in any way, it may be experienced as therapeutic nonetheless.

Additionally, the results of my research may be useful for speech and language therapists working with trans individuals as part of their transition. The majority of literature concerning speech and language therapy for trans clients focuses on positivistic investigations of the transfeminine transition. Accordingly this work will build on that knowledge by offering a transmasculine focus, as well as a more experience-based qualitative approach, which is less common in the empirical literature on trans voices.

I do not anticipate that my research participants will come to any harm while taking part in my research. I have identified three key risks for participants: the time burden, the risk of emotional distress, and the risk of participant data protection being compromised. I will have procedures in place for mitigating each of these risks and prioritising harm-reduction throughout the process. The details of these procedures can be found in section H6 ('The risk of emotional distress'). Finally, this research will contribute to trans studies, a field of research which has improving the lives of trans people as one of its core aims.

2) The rights and dignity of individuals and groups should be respected

My research is designed in such a way that I do not anticipate it encroaching on the participants' rights or dignity. I am aware that my participant group may face significant societal challenges as a result of being trans, and have thus designed my project to ensure sensitivity throughout, with ongoing self-reflection, respect for participant autonomy, and adherence to the principles of informed consent and data protection. I am keen to maximise the benefit for the participant group and avoid the burden of extractive research, which prioritises increasing research knowledge above all else, without concern for the wellbeing of the participants involved.

A formal safeguarding policy has been attached separately ('A3 Research Safeguarding Policy').

3) Wherever possible, participation should be voluntary and appropriate informed.

It is essential that my participants are able to provide voluntary and informed consent to take part in my research. I will emphasise to participants that they are not obliged

to participate in my research, and that they are free to withdraw at any point. I will make clear that interviews can be stopped at any time and research consent withdrawn – in addition, I will proactively pause interviews when appropriate should I notice any participant experiencing distress. In order to ensure that participants are appropriately informed, I will make advertising materials as transparent as possible. Participants will have the opportunity to discuss the study details with me on the phone prior to participation, as well as to email me any questions they might have throughout.

4) Research should be conducted with integrity and transparency.

In order to ensure the transparency of the research process, I will make sure that participants are fully informed about the aims and purpose of my research. Additionally, I will ensure transparency in the write-up process by providing an explicit account of the steps in the key processes, including recruitment, the interview process, the approach to analysis, and my data management and retention protocols.

5) Lines of responsibility and accountability should be clearly defined.

I will be responsible for all aspects of my research project. In order to ensure accountability for my actions during the fieldwork stage, I will provide participants with my supervisor's details should they wish to escalate any questions or comments. They will also be given information about official complaint procedures at City.

6) Independence of research should be maintained and where conflicts of interest cannot be avoided they should be made explicit.

I am undertaking this research project independently as part of my PhD project at City, University of London. There are no conflicts of interest.

P6) Project start date The start date will be the date of approval.

P7) Anticipated project end date 01 Sept 2025

P8) Where will the research take place?

Due to the potentially sensitive nature of my interviews, it is important that participants feel at ease in an environment familiar to them. Accordingly, the participant and I will agree on a venue that feels most safe for them. This could be the participant's home, a private room at City, or another appropriate venue. The initial screening phone call before the interview should help participants to feel comfortable with me and reduce any concerns about meeting me or having me in their home.

While it is my preference to hold these interviews in person, if a participant is not comfortable with this, I will offer to do the interview using Zoom instead. Zoom is a University licensed videoconferencing technology and has been acknowledged as an acceptable alternative to in-person interviews in qualitative research (Olliffe et al., 2021). If a participant prefers the Zoom option, I will provide them with an information sheet on using Zoom for an interview ('A4 Zoom Information Sheet'). This includes a how-to guide as well as additional information about data security. Explanation of the additional sensitivities around data privacy on Zoom can be found in section H6 ('The risk of participant data protection being compromised').

Olliffe, J. L., Kelly, M. T., Gonzalez Montaner, G., & Yu Ko, W. F. (2021). Zoom Interviews: Benefits and Concessions. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211053522>

P10) Is this application or any part of this research project being submitted to another ethics committee, or has it previously been submitted to an ethics committee? No

Human participants: information and participation

The options for the following question are one or more of:

'Under 18'; 'Adults at risk'; 'Individuals aged 16 and over potentially without the capacity to consent'; 'None of the above'.

H1) Will persons from any of the following groups be participating in the project? None of the above

H2) How many participants will be recruited? 10

H3) Explain how the sample size has been determined.

I will recruit ten participants in order to fill a sample of ten interviews. Should any participants dropout prior to the interview, or choose to withdraw their data, I will recruit a new participant to replace them.

I have chosen a ten person sample as it reflects Smith et al.'s (2009, p.52) guidance that doctoral studies using IPA are run with between four and ten participants.

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

H4) What is the age group of the participants?

LowerUpper

18+

H5) Please specify inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria

- All participants to be adults (18+)

The age lower bound will be 18, meaning that all participants will be adults. The experiences of transgender children and adolescents are specific and complex, and I do not have the scope to address them in this study.

- All participants to be English speakers

The discursive nature of the semi-structured interviews requires participants to be comfortable having an in-depth discussion in English, as this is the only language that I would feel comfortable interviewing in.

- All participants to be transmasculine

The transmasculine community is the focus of my study. I will define a transmasculine person as anyone who was assigned a female gender role at birth but who now self-identifies as a man, or with another masculine identity, rather than as a woman. This can include non-binary and gender nonconforming individuals, and participants can be at any stage in their social or physical transition.

I will provide my definition of transmasculine in the PIS, along with the caveat that I would be willing to discuss eligibility with potential participants who identify as transmasculine, but who do not feel the definition that I have provided is congruent with their experience. It is important that my participants feel able to self-define their gender identity and experiences, without feeling that I have imposed a specific definition upon them. Participants will be asked their gender identity on the initial screening call.

Exclusion criteria

There are no exclusion criteria other than failure to meet the inclusion criteria.

H6) What are the potential risks and burdens for research participants and how will you minimise them?

I have identified three main burdens and risks of participation in my research project, as follows:

- Time burden
- The risk of emotional distress
- The risk of participant data protection being compromised

Time burden

Participation in the research will be entirely voluntary, and research requirements will be made clear at all stages of the recruitment process. Participants will be asked to engage with the research during the recruitment process, the initial screening call, and the main semi-structured interview. This will require a time commitment of around 2 hours across the various stages. To mitigate the impact of this, I will accommodate convenient times and locations for participants.

The risk of emotional distress

During this research, I will ask participants to consider in depth their experiences of living as transgender individuals. Life for trans people can be challenging, so there is a small chance that participants could experience some psychological distress in describing their experiences to me.

In order to safeguard the wellbeing of participants, the interview guide is designed in such a way as to allow for the open discussion of participant experiences in as much or as little detail as they feel comfortable with. The interview is semi-structured, and thus I will be able to be flexible in attending to the needs of the participant. In line with recommendations for qualitative interviews on sensitive topics, I will take care to show no judgement in response to participant disclosures, to give participants the space to talk at length about their experience, to reflect warmth and patience when discussing difficult issues, and to be clear that participants do not need to respond to anything that they do not want to (Campbell et al., 2009). Additionally, I will make clear that participants can stop the interview at any point without consequence.

As well as making this clear for participants, I will also pay close attention to how the interview is impacting them, and will be ready to stop the interview myself at any point if I notice the participant exhibiting signs of distress. I will proactively ask participants how they are feeling in discussing the issues at hand, in order to work with them to move to different topics if they are experiencing difficult emotions as a result of the interview. It is important that interviewers are human when participants are in need (Goodrum & Keys, 2007), so I would sympathise with participant distress, as well as allowing for some reciprocity in my approach. While this will not involve any detailed discussion of my life and experiences, I will be open and willing to discuss issues relating to the research, for instance my motivations for doing the research and why I am interested in the topic personally. At the end of the interviews, all participants will be provided with a post-interview contacts sheet listing relevant support services and organisations (attached as 'B1 PICS[1]'). Additionally, I will not arrange interviews late in the day or on Fridays, if practical, in case participants are not able to access support organisations after our meeting.

Furthermore, I will have a safeguarding protocol in place for responding to any concerns about the safety of participants or anyone else as a result of the interview process. The full details of this protocol can be found in the attached 'A3 Research Safeguarding Policy'. All post-interview contact with participants will be logged.

The risk of participant data protection being compromised

I will be including de-identified interview quotes in my final write-up. It is possible that this could lead to a reader identifying the interviewee through reading about their experience. In order to avoid this, participants' involvement with the research will be kept confidential and all their data will be deidentified and stored securely on my

password-protected laptop throughout the process. This data will be backed up on the City, University of London OneDrive cloud network. I will invite participants to choose an unidentifiable pseudonym to ascribe to their quotes in my report, and any other identifying traits will be changed or removed.

Should a participant choose to do their interview on Zoom instead of in-person, they will be informed that the Zoom meeting will be recorded using the Record Meeting function. The recordings will be saved directly to the researcher's computer, and will not be stored in Zoom Cloud storage at any point. The files, as with all other research materials, will be stored locally on the researcher's password protected laptop, and will be backed up on the City, University of London OneDrive cloud. The recordings will be de-identified, and labelled only with the participant's chosen pseudonym.

Zoom meets the privacy and security standards of the European Union's General Data Protection Act (GDPR) (<https://explore.zoom.us/en/gdpr/>). The researcher will keep his Zoom app up to date in order to benefit from any updates or improvements in Zoom data security and privacy that may be released. The Zoom meeting will be password protected, and the researcher will lock the meeting once the interview has begun, in order that no one else can access the Zoom 'room'. Participants will be advised that they may blur their background or set an alternative background image if they are uncomfortable showing the room behind them. Additionally, they will be advised that using Zoom in the browser window rather than downloading the desktop app may be safer, as the browser application receives security enhancements more quickly than the downloaded app. Finally, participants will be advised to log into Zoom using a dedicated Zoom account, rather than by linking it to their Google or Facebook account. This will minimise the risk of their personal data being shared with said 3rd party organisations (Google, Facebook).

Campbell, R., Adams, A. E., Wasco, S. M., Ahrens, C. E., & Sefl, T. (2009). Training Interviewers for Research on Sexual Violence: A Qualitative Study of Rape Survivors' Recommendations for Interview Practice. *Violence Against Women*, 15(5), 595–617. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801208331248>

Goodrum, S., & Keys, J. L. (2007). Reflections on Two Studies of Emotionally Sensitive Topics: Bereavement from Murder and Abortion. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 10(4), 249–258. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570701400976>

Furthermore, this application has been reviewed by the City Information Assurance (IA) team, and a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) Threshold Test was undertaken to establish whether a DPIA would be necessary for exploring risks to participant data. The IA team were comfortable that the application fulfils the relevant GDPR obligations and that a DPIA was not necessary.

H7) Will you specifically recruit pregnant women, women in labour, or women who have had a recent stillbirth or miscarriage (within the last 12 months)? No
H8) Will you directly recruit any staff and/or students at City? None of the above
H8.1) If you intend to contact staff/students directly for recruitment purpose, please upload a letter of approval from the respective School(s)/Department(s).
H9) How are participants to be identified, approached and recruited, and by whom?

Locating potential participants

I will recruit participants using a combination of advertising and word of mouth. I have developed a research flyer (attached, 'A6 Recruitment Flyer'), which will highlight some top level information about the research, the research inclusion criteria, a small amount of information about me, and my contact details. I will then share this flyer with community organisations (e.g. Open Barbers, London LGBTQ+ Community Centre, TMSA-UK) and ask that they share the flyer on their social media channels. I will also ask certain community organisations to put up printed versions of the flyer at their site. The flyer will invite potential participants to email me if they are interested. Once potential participants have made contact with me, I will use snowballing techniques by asking potential participants to share my flyer with others if they are comfortable doing so.

Recruitment process

Once a potential participant has emailed me to express interest in the research, I will reply with the recruitment email (attached separately) and the research pack. The research pack will include the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) and consent form.

I will explain in my recruitment email accompanying the research pack that participants are free to contact me with any questions they might have about the research. This email will also explain that I will contact them to follow up if I haven't heard from them 3 days after sending the research pack over – or on the following Monday if sent on a Wednesday or Thursday. This email will also encourage them to discuss their participation with someone else if they would like to. In this email I will also make clear that interviews will only be booked if spaces are available. Potential participants will not receive this email if the sample is already full or the recruitment stage is complete.

In the follow-up email 3 days later, or in response to the participant's further emails, I will respond to any participant questions, and invite them to an initial screening telephone call with me. This call will be an opportunity for me to ensure that the participant fits the inclusion criteria, discuss the information in the pack with them, and to build rapport.

If participants contact me after I have already filled my sample, I will send a rejection email to them (attached, 'A8 Sample full email') in which I ask if they're happy for me to store their email address such that I can get back in touch if any of my booked interviews fall through.

If participants contact me after I have finished the fieldwork stage of my research, I will send a rejection email to them (attached, 'A9 Recruitment complete email') in which I thank them, but explain that the recruitment stage of the research has now closed and I am not looking for any more participants.

H10) Please upload your participant information sheets and consent form, or if they are online (e.g. on Qualtrics) paste the link below.

H11) If appropriate, please upload a copy of the advertisement, including recruitment emails, flyers or letter.

H12) Describe the procedure that will be used when seeking and obtaining consent, including when consent will be obtained.

As noted above, when a potential participant has emailed me to express interest in taking part in the research, I will send them a research pack via email. This pack will include the PIS and the consent form. I will talk through these documents with participants during the screening phone call.

When we meet for the main interview, I will ask that they sign two hard copies of the consent form. They will be given one copy of this document. I will keep the other copy to scan and store securely on my password protected laptop. The hard copy will be securely destroyed immediately after scanning. If the main interview is taking place on Zoom, I will ask participants to review the consent form in advance and clearly state via email that they have done so and are happy to participate on the basis of the terms set out on the form. I will then review the form during the interview to further confirm that I have their consent to proceed.

Once I am satisfied that the participant's research consent is both voluntary and informed, we can proceed with the research. The time between receiving the research pack and the interview can be flexible. I expect that, should a participant be recruited and be comfortable to begin, we will begin the research within a month of them first receiving the research pack.

H13) Are there any pressures that may make it difficult for participants to refuse to take part in the project? No

H14) Is any part of the research being conducted with participants outside the UK? No

Human participants: method

The options for the following question are one or more of:

'Invasive procedures (for example medical or surgical)'; 'Intrusive procedures (for example psychological or social)'; 'Potentially harmful procedures of any kind'; 'Drugs, placebos, or other substances administered to participants'; 'None of the above'.

M1) Will any of the following methods be involved in the project: None of the above

M2) Does the project involve any deceptive research practices? No

M3) Is there a possibility for over-research of participants? No

M4) Please upload copies of any questionnaires, topic guides for interviews or focus groups, or equivalent research materials.

M5) Will participants be provided with the findings or outcomes of the project? No

M6) If the research is intended to benefit the participants, third parties or the local community, please give details.

There are no guaranteed benefits for specific participants from taking part in the research. However, I hope that participants will benefit from being afforded the time and space in a trans-led, nonjudgemental and empathic setting to talk through some of their life experiences. It has been shown that the formulation and telling of personal narratives in a research setting can help some people to come to a better understanding of their lives. While my research is not a therapy in any way, it may be experienced as therapeutic nonetheless.

Additionally, the results of my research may be useful for speech and language therapists working with trans individuals as part of their transition. The majority of literature concerning speech and language therapy for trans clients focuses on positivistic investigations of the transfeminine transition. Accordingly this work will build on that knowledge by offering a transmasculine focus, as well as a more experience-based qualitative approach, which is less common in the empirical literature on trans voices.

M7) Are you offering any incentives for participating? No

M8) Does the research involve clinical trial or clinical intervention testing that does not require Health Research Authority or MHRA approval? No

M9) Will the project involve the collection of human tissue or other biological samples that does not fall under the Human Tissue Act (2004) that does not require Health Research Authority Research Ethics Service approval? No

M10) Will the project involve potentially sensitive topics, such as participants' sexual behaviour, their legal or political behaviour, their experience of violence? Yes

M11) Will the project involve activities that may lead to 'labelling' either by the researcher (e.g.

categorisation) or by the participant (e.g. 'I'm stupid', 'I'm not normal')? No

Data

D1) Indicate which of the following you will be using to collect your data.

Interviews

Audio/digital recording interviewees or events

D2) How will the the privacy of the participants be protected? De-identified samples or data

D3) Will the research involve use of direct quotes? Yes

D5) Where/how do you intend to store your data? Password protected computer files

D6) Will personal data collected be shared with other organisations? No

D7) Will the data be accessed by people other than the named researcher, supervisors or examiners? No

D8) Is the data intended or required (e.g. by funding body) to be published for reuse or to be shared as part of longitudinal research or a different/wider research project now or in the future? No

D10) How long are you intending to keep the research data generated by the study?

All de-identified research data will be kept by the researcher indefinitely.

D11) How long will personal data be stored or accessed after the study has ended?

All non de-identified personal data will be archived at City, University of London for 10 years from the final study closure date, at which point it will be securely deleted. Non de-identified personal data will be securely deleted from the researcher's laptop after the study has ended.

D12) How are you intending to destroy the personal data after this period?

All electronic data will be securely deleted off devices and servers.

Health & safety

HS1) Are there any health and safety risks to the researchers over and above that of their normal working life? Yes

HS2) How have you addressed the health and safety concerns of the researchers and any other people impacted by this project?

I will complete a risk assessment for my fieldwork, given the lone-working concerns and the potential for home visits. In order to reduce risk, I will implement the following control measures:

For each interview, I will use a system whereby a doctoral colleague and my supervisor are informed of: the interview location, my estimated arrival time, the duration of my visit and the expected leave time.

I will notify both of these people immediately upon my leaving the interview. If they do not hear from me, they will attempt to contact me and take further action if they are unable to get in touch.

We will arrange a code word that I can use via text or phone call to alert these contacts to high risk situations and the need for further assistance.

I will use appropriate transport modes to travel to interview locations. In London or other cities, I will primarily make use of public transport. In any rural areas I will drive my own car to interviews in order to maximise my ability to leave a more remote area swiftly if necessary.

Finally, I have received training in a previous job role on personal safety while lone working and carrying out research in participants' homes.

HS3) Are there hazards associated with undertaking this project where a formal risk assessment would be required?

No

8.8. Main ethics application approval letter



Dear Rowan

[REDACTED]

Project title: Transmasculine speakers' lived experiences of constructing their gender identity in conversation.

Start date: 3 Oct 2022

End date: 1 Sep 2025

I am writing to you to confirm that the research proposal detailed above has been granted formal approval from the School of Health & Psychological Sciences Research Ethics Committee. The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation. Approval has been given for the submitted application only and the research must be conducted accordingly. You are now free to start recruitment.

The approval was given with the following conditions:

[REDACTED]

- No additional conditions.

Please ensure that you are familiar with [City's Framework for Good Practice in Research](#) and any appropriate Departmental/School guidelines, as well as applicable external relevant policies.

Please note the following:

Project amendments/extension

You will need to submit an amendment or request an extension if you wish to make any of the following changes to your research project:

- Change or add a new category of participants;
- Change or add researchers involved in the project, including PI and supervisor;
- Change to the sponsorship/collaboration;
- Add a new or change a territory for international projects;
- Change the procedures undertaken by participants, including any change relating to the safety or physical or mental integrity of research participants, or to the risk/benefit assessment for the project or collecting additional types of data from research participants;
- Change the design and/or methodology of the study, including changing or adding a new research method and/or research instrument;
- Change project documentation such as protocol, participant information sheets, consent forms, questionnaires, letters of invitation, information sheets for relatives or carers;
- Change to the insurance or indemnity arrangements for the project;
- Change the end date of the project.



Adverse events or untoward incidents

You will need to submit an Adverse Events or Untoward Incidents report in the event of any of the following:

- a) Adverse events
- b) Breaches of confidentiality
[REDACTED]
- c) Safeguarding issues relating to children or vulnerable adults
- d) Incidents that affect the personal safety of a participant or researcher

Issues a) and b) should be reported as soon as possible and no later than five days after the event. Issues c) and d) should be reported immediately. Where appropriate, the researcher should also report adverse events to other relevant institutions, such as the police or social services.

Should you have any further queries relating to this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me. On behalf of the School of Health & Psychological Sciences Research Ethics Committee, I do hope that the project meets with success.

Kind regards

[REDACTED]

School of Health & Psychological Sciences Research Ethics Committee

City, University of London

8.9. Amended ethics application

[REDACTED]: Mr Rowan Douglas (Medium risk)

Date Created	22 Feb 2023
Date Submitted	22 Feb 2023
Date forwarded to committee	22 Feb 2023
Academic Staff	Mr Rowan Douglas
Student ID	210031513
Category	Doctoral Researcher
Supervisor	Dr Lia Litosseliti
Project	Negotiating transgender identity in interactions: the experiences of transmasculine people
School	School of Health & Psychological Sciences
Department	Language & Communication Science
Current status	Approved

Ethics application

Amendments

SA1) Types of modification/s

- Change project title
- Change the procedures undertaken by participants, including any change relating to the safety or physical or mental integrity of research participants, or to the risk/benefit assessment of the project or collecting additional types of data from research participants
- Change project documentation such as protocol, information sheets, consent forms, questionnaires, recruitment materials (please upload the relevant files with highlighted changes)

SA2) Details of modification

Participants will now be offered a thank you payment at the beginning of the research interview. The details are as follows:

All participants will be offered a payment of £20 in love2shop shopping vouchers for attending the main research interview. These payments exist to thank the participants for giving their time for the research, and to ensure that it is not only the researcher who is benefiting from the research encounter (Head, 2009). A £20 payment has been chosen in line with the suggestion that research payments should be commensurate with the time given (Sullivan & Cain, 2004). £20 aligns roughly

with a payment for 2 hours at the National Living Wage of £10.42 per hour (as of April 2023) (Low Pay Commission, 2022). This reflects the expected 110 minutes required for participating in this research project. Given that this research is not recruiting specifically from those on a low-income, or with no stable income, it is not expected that this sum will be coercive or could make the cost of not participating too high to refuse (Goodman et al., 2004). In line with Head's (2009) comment that the promise of payment could make participants feel obliged to continue the research process even if they feel uncomfortable doing so, payments will be given to participants at the beginning of the research interviews, with a clear statement that they are a thank you for attendance, and that the interviewee remains free to stop the interview or withdraw from the process at any time, without any impact on their claim to the vouchers. Those participants who attend their interviews in person will receive paper vouchers worth £20 at the start of the interview. Those who are interviewed over Zoom will receive an email link to their voucher once the interview call has been started.

Low Pay Commission. (2022, November 17). Minimum wage rates for 2023. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/minimum-wage-rates-for-2023>

Goodman, L. A., Liang, B., Helms, J. E., Latta, R. E., Sparks, E., & Weintraub, S. R. (2004). Training Counseling Psychologists as Social Justice Agents: Feminist and Multicultural Principles in Action. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 32, 793–837. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000004268802>

Head, E. (2009). The ethics and implications of paying participants in qualitative research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 12(4), 335–344. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570802246724>

Sullivan, C. M., & Cain, D. (2004). Ethical and safety considerations when obtaining information from or about battered women for research purposes. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 19, 603–618. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260504263249>

SA3) Justify why the amendment is needed

The offer of thank you payments was not possible at the time of the original application due to a lack of funds - this situation has now changed.

In addition, the project title has changed slightly.

SA4) Other information

SA5) Please upload all relevant documentation with highlighted changes

Project amendments

P1) Project title

Negotiating transgender identity in interaction: the experiences of transmasculine people.

P2) Principal Applicant

Name Mr Rowan Douglas

Provide a summary of the researcher's training and experience that is relevant to this research project.

I gained subject knowledge in my B.A. in Theoretical and Applied Linguistics, University of Cambridge, 2013-2017. I have academic training in research methods from my MRes in Speech, Language & Cognition, UCL, 2020-2021. I have extensive experience undertaking interviews with the public from my career in social research at a political and social research agency, 2017-2020. As part of my work, I interviewed participants around the country, with a focus on vulnerable participants, this included longer ethnographic interviews with young LGBTQ+ people as part of a project researching the experiences of young LGBTQ+ NEETs. In addition, at this agency I received internal training on interview techniques, as well as external training on safeguarding vulnerable participants and lone working practices.

Finally, I volunteer as part of the research team at the London LGBTQ+ Community Centre; our primary focus is on undertaking ethical and sensitive research with members of the local LGBTQ+ community.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

8.10. Amended ethics application approval letter



Dear Rowan

[REDACTED]

Project title: Negotiating transgender identity in interaction: the experiences of transmasculine people.

Start date: 3 Oct 2022

End date: 1 Sep 2025

I am writing to you to confirm that the amendments to the research proposal detailed above have been granted formal approval from the School of Health & Psychological Sciences Research Ethics Committee. The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation. Approval has been given for the submitted application only and the research must be conducted accordingly. You are now free to start recruitment.

The approval was given with the following conditions:

[REDACTED]

- No additional conditions

Please ensure that you are familiar with [City's Framework for Good Practice in Research](#) and any appropriate Departmental/School guidelines, as well as applicable external relevant policies.

Please note the following:

Project amendments/extension

You will need to submit an amendment or request an extension if you wish to make any of the following changes to your research project:

- Change or add a new category of participants;
- Change or add researchers involved in the project, including PI and supervisor;
- Change to the sponsorship/collaboration;
- Add a new or change a territory for international projects;
- Change the procedures undertaken by participants, including any change relating to the safety or physical or mental integrity of research participants, or to the risk/benefit assessment for the project or collecting additional types of data from research participants;
- Change the design and/or methodology of the study, including changing or adding a new research method and/or research instrument;
- Change project documentation such as protocol, participant information sheets, consent forms, questionnaires, letters of invitation, information sheets for relatives or carers;
- Change to the insurance or indemnity arrangements for the project;
- Change the end date of the project.



Adverse events or untoward incidents

You will need to submit an Adverse Events or Untoward Incidents report in the event of any of the following:

- a) Adverse events
- b) Breaches of confidentiality
[REDACTED]
- c) Safeguarding issues relating to children or vulnerable adults
- d) Incidents that affect the personal safety of a participant or researcher

Issues a) and b) should be reported as soon as possible and no later than five days after the event. Issues c) and d) should be reported immediately. Where appropriate, the researcher should also report adverse events to other relevant institutions, such as the police or social services.

Should you have any further queries relating to this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me. On behalf of the School of Health & Psychological Sciences Research Ethics Committee, I do hope that the project meets with success.

Kind regards

[REDACTED]

School of Health & Psychological Sciences Research Ethics Committee

City, University of London

8.11. Post-interview contacts sheet

POST-INTERVIEW CONTACTS SHEET: USEFUL ORGANISATIONS & INFO

Emergency and medical support

Your GP

- If you feel physically or mentally unwell or in need of counselling services, you can book an appointment with your GP who will talk you through your options.

111 (phone) / www.111.nhs.uk (online)

- If you feel urgently physically or mentally unwell, you can call NHS 111 or access NHS 111 online, available 24/7. This service is designed to signpost individuals to local services, to help people decide if they need to go to A&E, and to give self-care advice if appropriate.

999 (phone) / www.emergencysms.net (online)

- If you are experiencing a medical or mental health emergency, you should call 999. The emergencySMS service is available for deaf, hard of hearing and speech-impaired people to access the emergency services.

NHS therapies. *Google: 'NHS Mental Health Services'*

- If you'd prefer, people in England can self-refer to NHS psychological therapies without going through their GP, although you need to be registered with a GP practice to do so. The IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) services can offer talking therapies, such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), counselling, other therapies and guided self-help.

Services for young trans people

Mermaids. *Google: 'Mermaids UK'*

- Mermaids support transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse children and young people until their 20th birthday. They also provide web chat support to full time trans students up to the age of 25. Their services include a phone helpline, web chat support, a text crisis line and signposting to local trans youth groups.

Gendered Intelligence. *Google: 'Gendered Intelligence'*

- GI is a trans-led organisation offering community services for young trans people. These include youth groups for 8-25 year olds in London and Leeds, a group for 18-30 year olds in London, swimming sessions, 1 to 1 support and mentoring, as well as residential camps and trips. They also offer online groups and activities for those who cannot meet in person, or who would feel more comfortable online.

Support group for transmasculine people

TMSA-UK. *Search for 'TMSA UK' on Twitter or Facebook.*

- TMSA-UK is a private peer support and advice group on Facebook, with over 3,500 transmasculine members. It offers carefully moderated peer support, as well as a wealth of information and up-to-date guidance on navigating medical and social transitions for transmasculine people in the UK. TMSA-UK also has a private social group on Facebook, which offers a casual safe space for members to discuss issues other than their transition.

Services and organisations for trans people specifically

Mindline Trans+. *Google: 'Mindline Trans'*

- This is an emotional and mental health support helpline, run by Mind, for anyone identifying as transgender, non-binary or genderfluid, as well as their family members, friends and carers. Currently it is available 8pm-11pm on Fridays on 0300 330 5468.

Black Trans Foundation. *Search @blacktransfoundation on Instagram*

- The BTF is a trans-led non-profit organisation which directs Black Trans people to accessible low-cost therapies and therapists who have experience working with the QTPOC community.

Support and services for trans and LGBTQ+ people

London Friend. *Google: 'London Friend'*

- LF is a service provision organisation for LGBTQ+ individuals, offering access to counselling, drug and alcohol support, and social and support groups. They also offer signposting to various LGBTQ+ support services across London and the UK.

LGBT Foundation. *Google: 'LGBT Foundation'*

- The LGBT Foundation provide advice, support and information services to the LGBT community. They offer support and advice around a wide range of issues, including domestic abuse, dementia, hate crimes, recovery, sexual health, talking therapies and more. They provide non-urgent email support on helpline@lgbt.foundation and also offer a phone helpline on 0345 3 30 30 30. The up-to-date opening hours can be found on the website.

Switchboard LGBT+ Helpline: <https://switchboard.lgbt/> / *Google: 'Switchboard LGBT+ Helpline'*

- This helpline is open between 10am and 10pm every day, on 0300 330 0630. Switchboard offers a safe space for LGBT+ individuals to speak confidentially on the phone with their volunteers. Callers can discuss anything, with volunteers particularly well placed to support with issues of sexuality, gender identity, sexual health and emotional well-being. They also

have an online chat option that is sometimes available – check the website for up-to-date opening hours.

Galop: <https://galop.org.uk/> / Google: 'Galop'

- Galop supports LGBT+ people who are victims of domestic abuse, sexual violence, hate crime, conversion 'therapies', honour-based abuse, forced marriage, and other forms of abuse. They offer an online peer support community, various helplines (including one each for domestic abuse, conversion 'therapy' and hate crime), as well as case work and support services.

Pink Therapy. Google: 'Pink Therapy Directory'

- Pink Therapy is a therapy organisation which focuses on the needs of gender and sexually diverse clients. They have compiled a directory of therapists trained in providing therapy to LGBT+ individuals, which can be used to find appropriate local therapists across the UK.

Imaan LGBTQ+. Search for 'Imaan LGBTQ+' on Twitter.

- Imaan LGBTQ+ is a charity providing support, information and meet-ups for Muslim LGBTQ+ individuals in the UK.

General mental health resources

Mind. Google: 'Mind'

- Mind is a national mental health charity with local branches across the country. Mind offer crisis resources and helplines for those in need of more information and signposting about their mental health.

The Samaritans. Google: 'The Samaritans'

- This is a suicide prevention and mental health helpline available 24/7, 365 days a year. You can call 116 123 for free at any time to access their listening service, alternatively you can email the Samaritans on jo@samaritans.org, or download the Samaritans Self-Help app for advice on coping and feeling better during a crisis.

National Suicide Prevention Helpline: <https://www.nsphuk.org/> / Google: 'National Suicide Prevention Helpline'

- This helpline is available every day of the year on 0800 689 5652, 6pm to 3.30am; you are welcome to call if you need to talk or want support. Their volunteers offer an empathic and non-judgemental space for you to talk about how you are feeling or discuss any concerns you might have about somebody close to you.

Harmless. Google: 'Harmless UK'

- This is a charity providing support for those dealing with self-harm. They provide information and resources, in-person support services in the East

Midlands, and referrals to dedicated local services outside of the East Midlands.

Shout. *Google: 'Shout UK' / <https://giveusashout.org/>*

- Shout is a free text support service available 24/7, any day of the year. You can text 85258 anytime – it is anonymous and will not appear on your phone bill. Trained volunteers on the end of phone are able to offer empathic support and techniques for dealing with crises, as well as signposting towards more long term support and therapies.

BetterHelp. *Google: 'Better Help UK' / <https://www.betterhelp.com/>*

- BetterHelp is an online counselling organisation that links users to therapists who specialise in all kinds of areas, including living as an LGBTQ+ person. This service was initially started in the US but can be accessed in the UK as well. Using BetterHelp for online therapy may be cheaper than traditional in-person private therapy, as well as offering greater flexibility.

You can also find services local to your area if you search for the following on Google:

'Terrence Higgins Trust clinics and resources for trans and non-binary people'

To find:

<https://www.tht.org.uk/sexual-health/trans-people/resources>

8.12. Safeguarding policy

RESEARCH SAFEGUARDING POLICY

Ethical considerations

This research will be undertaken with harm reduction as a central priority. Accordingly, the researcher will pay close attention to the participant's wellbeing throughout the process and will actively work to create an empathic and safe environment in which participants can discuss their experiences.

The research focus is on transmasculine individuals' experiences of negotiating their gender identities in interaction and will not explicitly explore issues which are expected to be upsetting to participants. Nevertheless, due to the systemic marginalisation of transgender people in UK society (Stonewall, 2017), it may be that discussions around identity trigger memories of past distress.

With this in mind, wellbeing procedures will be in place for responding to any participants who experience challenging emotions during the research process. In the event of any serious Safeguarding concerns being raised, I will refer my concerns to the City Safeguarding team. Prior to undertaking the research, all participants will sign a consent form indicating that they are aware that any serious Safeguarding concerns (as below) will be passed along to the City Safeguarding team.

Situations of concern

This research project is designed to be accessible and safe for participants, with steps taken to ensure that participants feel respected and comfortable throughout the process. Nevertheless, in rare occasions, participants may experience challenging emotions during the research process. Actions to be taken in the event of such situations are detailed below:

	Likely
	Unlikely
	Extremely unlikely

Situation A	No concerns are raised	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participants will receive the Post-Interview Contacts Sheets (PICS)• Researcher to email participants 24 hours after interview to thank them for their participation
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Situation B	<p>Participant shows signs of mild distress during the interview.</p> <p>This could include making reference to ongoing struggles with self-harm or substance abuse.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants will receive the PICS • Researcher to encourage participants to contact organisations on PICS if they are struggling • Researcher to email participants 24 hours after interview to thank them for their participation, to again encourage them to seek support if needed, and to get in touch with any questions or concerns.
Situation C	<p>Participant shows signs of extreme distress during the interview; or Safeguarding concerns are raised about the safety of a vulnerable adult or child</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants will receive the PICS • Researcher to encourage participants to contact organisations on PICS if they are struggling • If appropriate, researcher to inform participant that they are going to contact the City Safeguarding team about their concerns • Researcher to email participants 24 hours after interview to thank them for their participation, to again encourage them to seek support if needed, and to get in touch with any questions or concerns • Upon completion of interview, researcher to immediately email the City Safeguarding team email address to seek guidance on any steps to be taken.

8.13. Data management plan

DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN

Researcher details

Rowan Douglas, [REDACTED]

School of Health and Psychological Sciences

Study information

This is a qualitative research project that I am undertaking as part of my PhD in Language & Communication Sciences. I will be using semi-structured qualitative interviews with 10 trans men and transmasculine participants to build my understanding of participants' experiences of their genders and of constructing masculinity in conversation. My interview method is informed by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, which will also dictate the process by which I analyse my interview data.

Data collection

Screening process data collection

As part of the screening process, participants will be required to provide me with their name, email address, phone number, and gender. I will also be collecting age and racial/ethnic origin data from those who are comfortable sharing these details.

- I am collecting names, phone numbers and email addresses in order that I can address participants, call them for screening prior to participation, and email the study resources to them respectively.
- I am collecting participant genders to check them against my inclusion criterion that all participants are trans men or transmasculine individuals.
- I am asking participants for their age and racial/ethnic origin data in order to monitor diversity in my sample. Divulging this information is not a necessary condition of participation.

Primary research data collection

My methodology consists of semi-structured qualitative interviews, lasting around 90 minutes. These will be audio-recorded. I will be asking participants to reflect on their experiences of gender and conversational behavioural habits. Accordingly, these audio recordings may contain sensitive or personal information. From these audio

recordings, I will create de-identified transcripts, in which all personal information will be removed or de-identified.

Consent forms

Prior to participating in the research interview, participants will be required to sign and date consent forms.

Data storage

Data collected during the screening process

All the personal data collected during the screening process will be held in a password protected spreadsheet on my password protected laptop, and backed-up in my City, UoL OneDrive account. This spreadsheet will link participant data to the pseudonyms that they will choose to be attached to their de-identified interview transcripts. These pseudonyms will appear in my final thesis as well as any further publications.

Primary research data

The interview audio recordings will be saved on my password protected laptop, and backed-up in my City, UoL OneDrive account. They will be labelled with participant pseudonyms.

The de-identified interview transcripts will also be saved on my password protected laptop, and backed-up in my City, UoL OneDrive account. These will be labelled with participant pseudonyms and will also contain any diversity monitoring data collected during the screening process (i.e. age, racial/ethnic origin).

Participation consent forms

All consent forms will be scanned upon completion of the interviews, and hard copies will be destroyed. The soft copies will be saved on my password protected laptop, and backed-up in my City, UoL OneDrive account. These will be labelled with participant pseudonyms.

Data archiving and deletion

Data collected during the screening process

The spreadsheet linking participant pseudonyms to the data collected during the screening process will be securely deleted at the completion of my PhD degree.

Primary research data

The interview audio recordings will be securely deleted at the completion of my PhD degree.

The de-identified transcripts will be retained indefinitely. They will not contain any personally identifiable information.

Participation consent forms

All consent forms will be archived at City, UoL for 10 years from the final study closure date, at which point they will be securely deleted.

Data sharing

Only the lead researcher (Rowan Douglas) will have access to personally identifiable participant data.

Extracts from the de-identified transcripts will be included in the final thesis report which will be publicly available on the City Research Online repository. This data may also be shared in future publications. It will not be possible to identify participants from these extracts.

The only event in which personally identifiable participant data may be shared with a third party is if any concerns about the immediate safety of the participant or anyone else arise during the research process. In the extremely unlikely event of this occurring, Rowan will contact the City Safeguarding team in order to report his concerns. In extreme cases, this may necessitate sharing the participant's name and contact details with the Safeguarding team. The Safeguarding team will not take action on these concerns beyond any statutory requirement to do so.

- Participants will be informed of this possibility in the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form, the latter of which they are required to sign in order to proceed with the research.

Data ownership

All data collected during this research project is owned by City, University of London.