

Trans on Telly:

Popular Documentary
and the Production of
Transgender Knowledge

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I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own and where the contributions of others are included they are clearly acknowledged

Signed:

Abstract

This thesis considers TV documentaries that feature transgender subjects and which have been broadcast in the UK between 1979 and 2010. Despite the growing popularity of such documentaries, very little critical attention has been given to them. This thesis offers an original investigation of these mainstream cultural items within the multi- and inter-disciplinarity of Transgender Studies. The thesis also contributes to other disciplines, particularly Popular Culture, Visual Culture and TV Studies.

My thesis investigates specifically how the visual narratives and the knowledge produced by them contribute to the ways in which trans subjects form themselves between knowledge products. Such TV documentaries form a notably ‘popular’ route to obtaining trans knowledge – *what it means to be trans* or *what trans is*. I also consider how they utilise the visual as part of their performance as well as foreground the productivity or achievement of such knowledge and make explicit its ‘uses’. In this thesis I ask: *What happens when we see trans? What trans do we see? And what does seeing trans do?* I consider the relationship between ‘serious’, scientific documentary making and notions of respectability, legitimacy and normativity. I show how such a relationship has been compromised through the emergence of the infotainment documentary.

I frame my thinking autoethnographically in order to gauge the receivership of trans knowledge by trans viewers. I offer my own textual and historical analysis of the knowledge products and have also carried out TV screenings of the documentaries, in order to draw on recorded discussions with small groups of trans viewers for my research. I consider how popular documentaries that feature trans subjects play their part in producing a trans public that circulates discourse, forms sociability and effects change and pursues productive exchanges out of, from and through trans knowledge.

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1

Introduction – Visualising Trans Knowledge

1.1 Oh No! I've Only Just Realised I've Gone and Got the 'Wrong Body'

The Decision was a series of documentaries featuring various themes around medical and ethical dilemmas. Televised in 1996 for Channel 4, one of the programmes featured was *The Wrong Body* (Oliver Morse, UK, 1996, Channel 4). The film follows a group of female to male (FTM) transsexuals living in England and undergoing or investigating gender reassignment. I, like many people across the nation, sat down to watch.¹ I did this without any forethought or planning; it just happened to be on.² It was the first documentary featuring trans men (as opposed to trans women or gender queer people) to be broadcast on terrestrial television.³ At this point in my life – I was 21 years old – I had no idea that I was (or would become) FTM myself. I found the documentary compelling as the idea of female-bodied people undergoing gender reassignment and living as men was new to me. In particular it was the story and personality of 13-year-old Fred, who featured in *The Wrong Body*, that impressed me and resonated with me most. Although I had been mostly boyish growing up, I did not have the kind of conviction of *being a boy* that Fred seemed to display in this documentary. He presented as strong-minded and extremely certain of his gender – perhaps this was necessary in order to convince his family and doctors.



Figure 1.1 Fred and his sister in *The Wrong Body* (Oliver Morse, UK, 1996, Channel 4)

Just moments into the documentary we see Fred's sister giving him a haircut using barber clippers (see Figure 1.1). The sister shrieks with excitement, seemingly because the haircut is so short (and therefore extremely boyish). She calls him 'a nutter' and the voiceover begins:

Many children have temporary fantasies about belonging to the opposite sex but one in 17,000 from first consciousness are certain that nature has played a cruel trick. They are trapped in the wrong body.

Everyday yet pertinent acts, such as cutting hair, are performances of gender that contribute to visual narratives of subject production. Watching the scene I remembered my own complex and emotional lived experience when it came to getting a haircut.⁴ As a child I always wanted it cut shorter and yet I knew that this would lead to a variety of negative interactions with other children and adults who would signal to me that *looking like* a boy whilst *being* a girl was not the done thing. In contrast to these everyday performances, the voiceover (with its authoritative tone) introduces to its viewers (including me) the phenomenon of 'transsexualism', the 'diagnosis' of 'Gender Identity Disorder' and 'wrong body' discourse. From this point onward, the voiceover continued to distinguish the 'temporary fantasy' from the real, 'true' and 'genuine' transsexual. The question I asked whilst watching this documentary was which one was I?

The Wrong Body became one amongst a host of other products (performances, films, articles, photographs, scholarly writings and medical literature) that formed my knowledge and offered me reference points as I navigated and negotiated my own being trans.⁵ At that time I was living as a lesbian and studying art in East London. Feminism, Lesbian and Gay Studies and Postcolonial Studies were becoming rich and exciting ways for me to explore the questions I had about gender, identity and selfhood. It would not be until eight years later that I would find myself discussing my own gender identity with doctors at Gender Identity Clinics and journeying towards living as a man. I began studying for a postgraduate degree in Visual Cultures and I became interested in theories of performativity, Queer Theory and 'new Gender Politics'.⁶ Whilst I was engaging with these academic fields and discourses at the turn of the twenty-first century a growing number of

documentaries featuring trans people was appearing on television and being watched by millions across the UK.

The scholarly writings and practices that were enabling me to form ideas and make sense of my own subjectivity on the whole spoke critically of ‘wrong body’ discourse. Nonetheless the TV documentaries – along with (auto)biographies, newspaper and magazine articles and other items of popular cultural – continued to churn out the trope of *being trapped in the wrong body*. In her article ‘The Role of Medicine in the (Trans)Formation of “Wrong” Bodies’, Nikki Sullivan considers how the rhetoric of being in or having the *wrong body* has ‘worked’ for transsexual sensibilities and subjectivities (Sullivan 2008, 105). Indeed she quotes Prosser (1998a) and Wilton (2000) to explain that the ‘wrong’ body has ‘become the crux of an authenticating transsexual rhetoric’ (Prosser 1998a, 68) whose ‘narrativization... posits a distinction between mind and body, and presupposes a self which, while “invisible and unquantifiable is claimed as the authentic core of be-ing” (Wilton 2000, 241)’ (Sullivan 2008, 107).

In the TV documentary *The Wrong Body*, and particularly through Fred’s story, distinctions between sex and gender are presented as more historically contingent mind/body splits, where sex is an aspect of the body and gender is in the mind (Butler 1991, 1993). Fred’s mind (and therefore gender) presents itself as secure, authentic and fixed in order to differentiate itself from a ‘fantastical whim in childhood’. Sullivan states, and quotes Jordan (2004):

As the work of writers such as Sandy Stone has made clear, such a distinction has led to the demand for transsexuals to prove that their gender ‘outweighs’ their sex. Those seeking surgery have been required to express the ‘wrong body in the right way’, that is, to articulate a ‘wrong body in a right mind’ (Jordan 2004, 339). (Sullivan 2008, 110)

Moreover, showing that Fred has the wrong body is brought about through the filmmaker’s presentation of Fred’s gendered behaviour, interests and acts. That is, the documentary works to *show us* Fred’s mind. We see Fred shooting cans with a rifle, playing basketball, drumming and attending to his animals, as well as negotiating school uniform policy, vehemently insisting that he wears trousers and

not a skirt. Such gender performances are rather simply put and these tropes, no matter how stereotypical, work to produce authentic essential subjectivities.

Furthermore, through the interweaving and textual framing of various authoritative voices and the stories of the trans subjects and their families, *The Wrong Body* constructs knowledge that is necessarily steeped in a scientific medical discourse. However, presentation of the details of such scientific findings within the documentary is not deemed palatable to the mainstream viewer. Abstract explanations of diseases, conditions and illnesses do not make for good television. As José Van Dijck asserts, 'Paramount to the success of these programs is their human interest angle' (Van Dijck 2002, 549).

In the documentary, Fred's youthfulness adds to this human angle as it presents Gender Identity Disorder as a medical condition with which one is born, implying that transsexuals are innocent victims of their biological make-up. Sue Foley, Fred's mother, offers a powerful testimony:

I was tucking her [Fred] in one night and I tried to get her to talk about it but she really couldn't. It caused her enormous distress but I needed to know and she was crying and she said 'But mum I don't want to live....'. Now when you have a seven or eight-year-old saying that whether it's your child or not you are shaken to the core.

She continues:

The connotation or the interpretation that you initially put on it, is that it's to do with sex and you think how can this involve a child? And the learning curve is that it has nothing to do with sexuality, or sex, it's actually gender, which is the brain.

Through this health documentary the viewer comes to an understanding of what it means to be trans by witnessing the 'lay' knowledge that Foley has previously acquired (presumably from specialists within the medical profession).⁷ The viewer's own understanding comes from the relaying of such medical knowledge ('gender which is the brain'), performed here through the subjectivities of 'Mother' and 'ordinary person' and held within the emotive scenario of a trans person's brush with death (and a child's at that), as he expresses a desire not to live.

It is then the lived experience of going through the medical processes that entices the viewer. Moreover, these lived experiences are not presented as critical of the medical knowledge that is laid out in this documentary and others. On the contrary, they endorse it. The trans subjects featured are not asked for, or at least do not speak of, their own reflections of their 'condition'. There is no reflection upon why the trans people believe they are trans. The trans subject simply describes to the viewer how they feel as they are called on to perform their gendered selves within their everyday lives. The patient or trans subject is cast as an ordinary person who embodies the diagnosis and medical knowledge, absorbs and relays it through personal testimony and locatable (perhaps stereotypical) gendered acts. At the same time, such documentaries, which re-inscribe being trans as a medical matter, legitimise medical institutes' and practitioners' intervention in and surveillance of the trans body (indeed all bodies) and simultaneously justify the resources attributed to it.

TV documentaries that feature trans people often capture the process of psychiatric assessment, diagnosis and medical intervention. It is the psychiatrists and psychologists within Gender Identity Clinics and Gender Identity Development Services that are tasked with assessing and diagnosing Gender Identity Disorder, or what is now called Gender Dysphoria. In a scene at the Portman Clinic, Fred, his mother and his stepfather sit with consultant child and adolescent psychiatrist Dr. Domenico di Ceglie and another psychiatrist from the clinic.⁸ In a discussion about how one perceives oneself, Di Ceglie uses an analogy of an English boy growing up in France who decides to call himself French. The suggestion is that despite all the French acts the boy may carry out, he will always *be* English. In response, Fred says: 'It's not the same because he wants to be, but isn't. But I am.' This strong and confident retort marks a distinction between a *desire to be* and *being* itself. The latter sees gender (his own gender identity and gender more broadly) as prior, fixed and already there – 'I am' – and thus negates a *desire to be*. It negates a model of becoming.

Fred's firmness of *being* comes from a persistent querying throughout his life around his gender identity as different to his assigned sex. In order *to really be a boy* he must perform a self that is authentically male and, moreover, his psychiatrists and psychologists must believe this authenticity. From this, Fred's opportunities open up to the various available procedures, such as hormone therapy and surgical

intervention, as well as to the legitimacy in his self-identified gender. The documentary captures and frames the transsexual subjects as they are validated, having gone through the various procedures and rituals carried out by the medical practice of Gender Identity Clinics. These ways in which televisual documentaries frame such scenes of legitimacy will become central to my thesis.

Such documentaries themselves work as a legitimizing process as they call on similar criteria – namely adherence to an essentialised, fixed and permanent identity that is authentically either ‘male’ or ‘female’. In order to do this they often draw on a performance of stereotypical codes of gendered behaviour. In *The Wrong Body*, for instance, Fred shows resolve, conviction and determination concerning his own maleness through interviews with him and his parents, as well as when appearing in front of the psychiatric team. Fred tells stories that demonstrate that he has *always felt this way* and he looks to convince the psychiatrists (and the viewers at home) that he wishes to live permanently in his self-identified gender role.⁹ As the viewers witness such performances they also collectively legitimise and make legible for themselves what it means *to be trans*.

Documentaries that are distributed to a mainstream audience via UK TV channels no doubt set out to achieve particular mainstream ends. Trans subjectivities and their visual narratives within mainstream documentaries reinforce hetero-gender norms and have, on the whole, assimilationist overtones. However, documentaries that feature trans people are also watched by trans people themselves and consequently the impact of such visual narratives also has a bearing on how trans viewers come to know themselves. I have located my own subject formation, in the first instance at least, in critical opposition to the knowledge presented in the documentary *The Wrong Body* (through its performances of fixed, essentialised, gendered selfhood) as regards *what it means to be trans*. In fact it is with this criticality, achieved through viewing such TV documentaries, that I form my sense of being trans. In addition, alongside these TV documentaries, I continue to look for and consume contrasting knowledge products that together produce my own trans knowledge.

The term ‘trans knowledge’ will become integral to this project. I use it to mean what being trans is and what it means to be trans, but also knowledge pertaining to the conditions of being trans. Trans knowledge is gained through a host of knowledge products – films, TV programmes, books, magazines and newspaper

articles, scholarly works, government and medical documents – that a subject may encounter. Whilst such cultural items serve many purposes, in this thesis I posit them as ‘knowledge products’ because what can be known through and from these items is fundamental to my thinking. To consider the plethora of knowledge products that feature trans subjects or that posit what it means to be trans requires them to be considered as multiple, contradictory and complex. In contrast to those televisual documentaries that feature trans people, I turn now to trans knowledge generated amongst ‘queer’ alternatives that also frame and reframe my own thinking and subject production.

1.2 Queer Alternatives

Lesbian and gay film festivals around the world offer ‘alternative’ platforms for a more queer discourse of gender. ‘Queer’ in a broad sense is articulated as a political movement. Queer works to deconstruct or undo ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ and homosexual prohibition and calls for the implementing of an ‘opening up’ (Sedgwick 1994; Butler 1990, 1993). It has come to embrace hippy, punk, anarchist, anti-capitalist, anti-social ‘rebel’ identities that oppose the regulations of the Law, calling for a working together to overthrow ‘mainstream’ thinking and articulate ‘alternative’ lifestyles. Importantly for me, queer projects revisit and revise the categories of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ as fixed, essentialised single identities. As Sedgwick so infamously tells us:

‘queer’ can refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, or anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically. (Sedgwick 1994, 8)

Here visibility – the *making visible* as well as the discourses generated around *what it means to be visible* – has been crucial in challenging and exposing a technology of gender normativity. Marking the political work of ‘alternative’ identities, performing bodies and subjectivities is brought about *through* the visual. Biddy Martin states:

Queer theory and politics necessarily celebrate transgression in the form of visible difference from norms that are then exposed to be norms, not natures or inevitabilities. (Martin 1996, 74)

From these discourses the trans figure has emerged as a queer emblem which, through its very visualising of difference, exposes the various constructs of gender, demonstrates an opposition to the dominant forces of strict gender codes and practices, and reveals gender construction through the work of the law (Butler 1991, 1993; Prosser 1998a). Alternative platforms, such as lesbian and gay film festivals, queer arts festivals and other community and grass-roots projects, screen films that engage in trans narratives and, arguably, produce a more queer discourse. Such formats and representations, away from mainstream platforms, have brought us documentaries such as *Enough Man*, *A Circus in New York*, *Gender Trouble* and *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria* among many others.¹⁰ These have been screened to an audience who, like me, live as trans subjects, becoming ourselves in or through such knowledge products. Like the TV documentaries, they form important reference points and visual narratives, as they produce trans knowledge and so, in part, contribute to forming trans subjectivities.

In 2006, as I embarked on my thesis and set out my project, *Enough Man* was screened at the 20th BFI London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival and, together with some fellow members of FTM London – a community group for trans men in London, England – I went along to watch it.¹¹ The film offers a portrait of several trans men and their lovers living in different areas of the United States, each engaging in queer and radical sexualities and lifestyles. The audience witnesses the characters discussing and performing their poly-amorous, SM fantasies and desires. At the end of the screening, as I began to leave the dark cinema space of NFT1 and the continuing audible whoops and cheers began to die down, I struggled to acknowledge my own perplexed sense of alienation. As I witnessed the stark images and queer performances on screen, I located myself differently and in contrast to those performances (and the public that seemed to have received them so positively), I was shocked. Also I was shocked that I was shocked. In the bar afterwards, a friend of mine asked, ‘What’s so wrong with monogamy?’ and I reminded myself of the somewhat more conservative and even clichéd depictions of trans men which so

frequently appear in UK television documentaries: that is, playing pool, drinking beer and holding hands with their girlfriends. I wondered were these representations somehow more *me*? Or rather that these television documentaries that feature trans people contributed to and reflected my own subject formation in a way I had previously not recognised or acknowledged. This moment presented a particular dichotomy around the heteronorm and queer circuits, which formed in me certain tensions. For instance I asked myself: *To which camp did I belong? Was I queer or heteronormative? Was I more queer than heteronormative or more heteronormative than queer? Did I have to choose? Is it possible to position oneself positively as being between?*

This sense of splitting offers the notion that my own production of selfhood is generated *between* those knowledge products and discourses that speak and picture such a myriad of understandings around what it means to be trans. From this I consider that if such betweenness is evoked in me, might it also be evoked in other trans people for whom such knowledge products constitute a series of conflicting concepts and arguments that posit trans differently and distinctly? These knowledge products become satellites that, through competing terms, gravitate towards a forming person (a subject), ‘speaking’ to it and bearing a relevance that allows it to make sense of itself, to become legible to itself and others, as well as to legitimate itself to itself and others. Furthermore, might trans knowledge in itself be a particular way of considering the relationship between knowledge and subjects as they mutually form and reform one another in a cyclical and reciprocal relation? Could my sense of being between knowledge products map more broadly onto the articulation of the field of Transgender Studies itself, and describe a particular trans epistemology? As I locate my trans self within and in response to both queer and heteronormative knowledge frameworks, might Transgender Studies themselves be similarly positioned as interdisciplinary and ‘between’?

1.3 A Trans Epistemology

We find the epistemologies of white medical practice, the rage of radical feminist theories and the chaos of lived gendered experience meeting on the battlefield of the transsexual body. (Stone 1991, 294)

At the beginning of the foreword of the *Transgender Studies Reader* published in 2006, Stephen Whittle makes clear the extent to which transsexual and transgender subjects have become such a focus for discourse across an array of knowledge fields and disciplines throughout the 1990s (Stryker and Whittle 2006). In the introduction to the same reader, Susan Stryker marks a distinction where, prior to the 1990s, trans people were the object of study (transgender phenomena), but that, given the surge in attention from an emerging rise in the numbers of trans people themselves taking up the positions of writer, researcher and academic, this marked for her ‘a new wave of transgender scholarship’ (Stryker and Whittle 2006, 1). Importantly such trans scholars offered their own and other transgender lives, identities and culture as central to the focus of their investigations and critical thinking. Prior to 1990s much discourse attributed to a ‘trans epistemology’ centred around a taxonomy of sex and gender through the fields of psychology and medicalization of transsexualism. Whittle states:

In the 1990s, a new scholarship, informed by community activism, started from the premise that to be trans was not to have a mental or medical disorder. This fundamental shift was built upon with academia, and enabled trans men and women to reclaim the reality of their bodies, to create with them what they would, and to leave the linguistic determination of those bodies open to exploration and invention. To this extent, trans studies is a true linking of feminism and queer theory. (Whittle 2006, xii)

Historian, Joanne Meyerowitz, tells us that such concepts and realities of ‘changing sex’, are historically connected to the rise in medical knowledge as well as developments in surgical innovation (Meyerowitz 2002). This connection is still crucial in establishing meanings around trans lives today. In addition to the fields of medicine, however, Meyerowitz tells us that establishing trans knowledge means also to look at what came out of the women’s movement, the gay and lesbian social movements as well as the queer and feminist academic thinking on these politics and identities. Interestingly for me in this thesis, much of Meyerowitz’s writing works to historicize the emerging discourses on sex, gender and being trans through the national press, mass media as well as ‘pseudo-scientific’ niche journals and magazines.

It is necessary then to chart this historical trajectory of trans epistemology, across these various arenas and platforms. I do this also to stipulate the ways in which the various knowledge fields – and the various publics those knowledge fields produce – carry out their trans epistemology differently. In addition, I wish to point out the various values attributed through the knowledge fields, which establish certain statuses and powers in accordance with their discipline and practices. Here I will set the scene for contemplating the productivity of different types of trans knowledge and how such differences contribute to forming different trans subjects as well as showing how through the very ‘being between’ different knowledge discourse also is enmeshed in the production of trans selfhood.

1.4 Sexology

It is important to reflect back upon the beginnings of such medical discourse and the emergence of psychoanalytical practice within understandings of – and social dealings with – gender variance. In *Sexology Uncensored*, Jay Prosser tells us that, despite it not being until the 1940s that transsexuality was ‘formally diagnosed’, the period from the late nineteenth century and the emergence of the discipline of Sexology is crucial for our understandings of trans knowledge (Bland and Doan 1998). Indeed gender variance has been most significantly documented through psychoanalytic texts and specifically through case studies written by psychiatrists and sexologists (Krafft-Ebing 1886; Havelock Ellis 1936; Foucault 1976). In Vienna medical psychiatry and the classifications of psycho-pathological sexual identities were first established in Von Krafft-Ebing’s seminal *The Psychopathia Sexualis* in 1886. Krafft-Ebbing focused on the ‘invert’ and homosexuality was noted as ‘contrary inverted sexual feelings’. In Germany Magnus Hirschfeld founded the Scientific Humanitarian Committee in 1897, and wrote *Geschlechtskunde (Sexual Knowledge)*, 5 vols, 1926–30). In addition he established the Institute of Sexology which was famously burnt down by the Nazis in 1933. Havelock Ellis’s later book *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1936) considered ‘congenital inverts’ and this medical work, along with others, began the shifts in thinking that homosexuality is ‘a sickness rather than a crime’ (Hird 2002, 579).¹² In his book *Science, Politics and Clinical Intervention*, Ekins writes:

The early sexological tradition is notable for its emphasis upon systematic description of clinical pictures (nosography) and their classification (nosology), accompanied by etiological theorizing. In short, though the ‘disease’ status of sexual variations may be variously questioned by the early sexologists, the early sexologist tradition does follow the ‘medical model’ insofar as its collection of biographical and psychological data is followed by classification, diagnosis and etiological theorizing. (Ekins 2005b, 311)

These ‘scientific’ observations of ‘inverts’ were carried out through a scrutiny of looking and measuring. Sexologists would measure body parts, including skulls, and in addition were known for carrying out autopsies on the dead in order *to know* something of this phenomenon through examining the materiality of the body (MacKenzie 1994, 35). The history of transsexualism shows a complex entanglement between medical psychiatry and the emerging classifications of psycho-pathological sexual identities since the end of the nineteenth century. Such an emerging medical episteme, Foucault tells us, is ‘based on the rediscovery of the absolute values of the visible’ (Foucault 1973, xii). In addition discourses of causation or aetiology of Krafft-Ebbing’s ‘inverts’ at the time were crucial projects, and differentiations were made between ‘congenital’ and ‘inherited’ causes (therefore fixed and having no element of choice) and that of ‘acquired’ causes (alluding to some choice being present). These distinctions were stipulated in most significant definitions of the terms and descriptions of medical treatment (MacKenzie 1994, 37). At the time the congenital causes were understood as incurable (and therefore prevention was a key focus), whilst the acquired causes offered a better chance of ‘recovery’ through using ‘hypnotic suggestions and prescriptions for heterosexual marriage’ (MacKenzie 1994, 37) as well as hydrotherapy and repeating mantras.¹³

It was General Practitioner of Medicine Caudwell who first issued the term ‘transsexual’ in reference to a FTM patient he had in 1949, who was seeking hormones and surgical treatment (Prosser 1998b, 9; Stryker and Whittle 2006, 40). However, it was Harry Benjamin who popularised the term in 1953 in an article published in the *International Journal of Sexology* by distinguishing the ‘transsexual’ from the ‘transvestite’ (Benjamin 1953). In addition Harry Benjamin’s *Transsexual Phenomenon* (1966) offered a more sympathetic approach to those who wished to undergo a ‘sex change’, and shifting understandings of trans from being ‘psycho-

pathological' to being a 'medical condition' or 'syndrome' played a crucial part in this. This distinction was in part achieved when, in 1967, Benjamin hypothesised that being trans was brought about endocrinologically (Ekins 2005b). From this he posited that psychotherapy could not cure transsexualism or the desire to live in or be a different gender to that assigned at birth. In his early article 'Transsexualism and Transvestism as Psycho-Somatic and Somato-Psychic Syndromes' published in 1954 he states:

Freud himself – I believe – would have disagreed with such a one-sided approach. During one of my visits to Vienna about 30 years ago I discussed the psyche-soma relationship with Freud and he agreed fully that a disharmony of the emotions may well be due to a disharmony of our endocrines. All therapy, in cases of transsexualism – to the best of my knowledge – has proved useless as far as any cure is concerned. I know of no case where even intensive and prolonged psychoanalysis has any success. (Stryker and Whittle 2006: 49)

In terms of treatment Benjamin's work marked the shift away from pure psychoanalysis and psychotherapy but towards a multi-disciplinary medical approach with psychoanalysis working in conjunction with hormone administration as well as 'sex change' surgery. Working in Germany within the field of endocrinology, Benjamin worked with Austrian endocrinologist Eugen Steinach, who first isolated sex hormones and its effect. A foot in both 'camps', Benjamin also worked with sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld before moving to the United States before World War I, where he became a citizen and worked alongside Alfred Kinsey from 1949 onwards in San Francisco (Stryker and Whittle 2006, 45). Kinsey's idea of natural variation led to his famous cataloguing and counting homosexual acts, as well as autoerotic and other sexual experiences outside (and inside) of the marital home. Kinsey's use of science and scientific methodologies gave valour to the subject of sex as a viable object of study in the sciences.

By drawing on endocrinology and biological discourses, a particular respectability came with being a transsexual that marks a shift from 'psychosis' to 'medical condition'. But this shift was not an instant one, nor indeed have medical practitioners and institutes universally taken it up. Instead I argue that this shift is still ongoing and the debates run through the documentaries that I study. In the United States and the United Kingdom continuing through the 1960s and 1970s

aetiologies of being trans continued to be stipulated through a psychoanalytic lens, made most prominently by Robert Stoller (1968, 1975). Stoller claimed that ‘transsexualism is the product of “unconscious” rearing of the child in the opposite sex’ (Hird 2002a, 579). Stoller’s framing is problematic, in that it offers very crude pictures of family dynamics and child upbringing, including allocating ‘blame’ towards parents of trans people. Indeed Stoller understood that the parents themselves deviated from normative gender roles within the conventional family unit. Hird summarises for us:

These included ‘effeminate’ fathers, domineering mothers, birth order, divorce [...]; IQ [...]; temporal lobe disorder [...]; parental age [...]; introversion, depression and non-adjustment to work [...]; a precursor of Transvestitism and homosexuality [...]; and narcissism, profound dependency conflicts, immature, potentially explosive, demanding, manipulative, controlling, coercive and paranoid personalities [...]. (Hird 2002a, 580; Hird’s citations omitted)

Stoller drew on the work John Money carried out at John Hopkins University in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It was here where a distinction between biological sex and social gender role was in some senses more firmly established, but in others demonstrated an inextricability. Despite drawing from psychoanalytic doctrines with regards to causation of being trans, Stoller did issue a notion that there are ‘biological substrates’ to behaviour and in particularly sexual behaviour and emerging gender identities. Stoller drew on Freud’s study of infants who stipulated that there is ‘evidence of a biological undercurrent upon which floated the postnatal, learned behaviour’ (Stoller in Stryker and Whittle 2006, 57).

This tension between the biological and the psychological in relation to causation was most poignantly exacerbated in the case of John Money and David Reimer in the early 1960s.¹⁴ Money’s central conceptual thread was that of ‘gender neutrality’ where babies are but blank slates and (gender) identities are imposed, cultured upon the being. When a performed circumcision damaged the penis of David Reimer at the age of two, John Money and his team reassigned the child ‘female’. As an infant, Reimer’s testicles were removed and hormones were administered. The argument here was that gender is constituted fully by nurture and life raised as a little girl would be ethical and foreseeable. However, at the age of 14 Reimer ‘rejected’ his female identity and began living as a young man. During

adulthood David Reimer, following his twin brother, committed suicide. What has since been understood from these tragic circumstances is an argument that gender identity formation is not purely one of socialisation, but is possibly innate. This prompted a set of reverse opinions about gender identity formation and, alongside the growing themes of hormones and neurological investigations, these discourses have been drawn upon in Transgender Studies and indeed other circles in order to make this case in point.

This also raises concerns around the ways in which medical practitioners intervene on the body – specifically in terms of gender identity – or indeed where a person may look to the medical world for solutions to living in a body whose gender/sex signifiers are so significantly compromised (Butler 2001, 2004b). In addition to the debates these bring to Transgender Studies, campaigners for the rights of people with intersex conditions have also drawn upon the case to challenge the medical and surgical interventions being made upon babies that were born with ‘ambiguous genitalia’ (Sterling 2000).¹⁵

Also working in the States at the same time as John Money was Harold Garfinkel, who pioneered the development of ethnomethodology. This was a method that framed people’s constructions of reality and social order phenomenologically. Garfinkel’s case study of ‘Agnes’ – a male to female transsexual – carried out in the 1960s was well documented and it was through this case study that the beginnings of understanding transsexualism as a form of intersex or having an intersex condition transpired. Robert Stoller, as well as another sexologist Richard Green, also saw ‘Agnes’ within clinical settings. Richard Green had previously earned his medical doctorate in the early 1960s at John Hopkins University School of Medicine where John Money was based, and eventually took his practice over to the UK. Green, Stoller and Garfinkel agreed that ‘Agnes’ had a ‘rare intersex condition known as testicular feminization syndrome’ and was referred for Gender Reassignment Surgery (the construction of a vagina) (Stryker and Whittle 2006, 58). Garfinkel posited that expressing one’s gender is a ‘managed achievement’ (Stryker and Whittle 2006, 58) and stipulated the gender of ‘Agnes’ as a series of actions. This established understandings of gender as ‘doing’ rather than ‘being’ (Papoulias 2006: 231). From this idea social scientists Kessler and McKenna who, like Garfinkel, were ethnomethodological, drew on these texts to establish gender as performative (Kessler and McKenna, 1978).

In the pretext to Garfinkel's essay 'Passing and the Managed Achievement of Sex Status in an "Intersexed" Person', published in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, Stryker and Whittle tell us that the added 'twist' in the story of 'Agnes' was that she did not disclose to her doctors the fact that she was self-medicating with her mother's female hormones for fear that she would not be admitted for genital surgery. This idea has been picked up more recently by Bernadette Hausman who charts the relationship trans people have had with their medical doctors and by identifying with, and drawing on, the conditions of being intersex offers opportunities to hormonal and surgical body manipulation. Whilst charting the integral relationship that transsexuality has with medicine, Hausman's book suggests that trans people are coercive and were duping professional people to get what they want.¹⁶

1.5 DSM and Standards of Care

Struggles revolving around GID [Gender Identity Disorder] form an important part of transgender political history and contemporary activism (Stryker 2008a, 16).

Published in 1975, Richard Green's book *Sexual Identity Conflict in Children and Adults* first used the expression 'Gender Identity Disorder'. This expression was taken up and inserted into the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) published by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980.¹⁷ The manual provides a common language and standard criteria for the classification of mental disorders. It states that a diagnosis of 'Gender Identity Disorder' could be given if a person presented:

- A A strong and persistent cross-gender identification (not merely a desire for any perceived cultural advantages of being the other sex). In children, the disturbance is manifested by four (or more) of the following:
- i. Repeatedly stated desire to be, or insistence that he or she is, the other sex;
 - ii. In boys, preference for cross-dressing or simulating female attire; in girls, insistence on wearing only stereotypical masculine clothing;
 - iii. Strong and persistent preferences for cross-sex roles in make believe play or persistent fantasies of being the other sex;

iv. Intense desire to participate in the stereotypical games and pastimes of the other sex;

v. Strong preference for playmates of the other sex. In adolescents and adults, the disturbance is manifested by symptoms such as a stated desire to be the other sex, or the conviction that he or she has the typical feelings and reactions of the other sex.

B Persistent discomfort with his or her sex or sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex. In children, the disturbance is manifested by any of the following: in boys, assertion that his penis or testes are disgusting or will disappear or assertion that it would be better not to have a penis, or aversion towards rough-and-tumble play and rejection of male stereotypical toys, games, and activities; in girls, rejection of urinating in a sitting position, assertion that she has or will grow a penis or assertion that she does not want to grow breasts or menstruate, or marked aversion towards normative feminine clothing. In adolescents and adults, the disturbance is manifested by symptoms such as preoccupation with getting rid of primary and secondary sex characteristics (e.g. request for hormones, surgery, or other procedures to physically alter sexual characteristics to simulate the other sex) or belief that he or she was born the wrong sex.

C The disturbance is not concurrent with a physical intersex condition.

D The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.¹⁸

Campaigners and activists from across the globe have and still are looking to challenge and remove Gender Identity Disorder from the DSM. In May 2010 France took 'transgenderism' and 'Gender Identity Disorder' out of their list of mental disorders.¹⁹ In May 2013, DSM V was published renaming 'Gender Identity Disorder' as 'Gender Dysphoria', working from the logic that transsexualism is no longer perceived as a 'disorder'. 'Gender Dysphoria' is a term that has been used interchangeably with Gender Identity Disorder over recent decades; for example, the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association was founded in 1980 in order to promote standards of care. Certainly health and medical practice continues to be a key area of political and trans activism and platforms for debate and discussion are present. The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH), formerly known as the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association (HBI-GDA), is a global professional organisation devoted to transgender health.²⁰ This body comprises contemporary sexologists and medical practitioners as well as internationally renowned trans activists and advocates.

Concerns arise from the criteria such as that stipulated in the DSM, most notably around the ‘authenticity’ of gendered selfhood. In an article ‘For a Sociology of Transsexualism’, Myra J. Hird calls for a ‘displacement of psychology with sociology’ in order to reorient theories of transsexualism and to ‘advanc[e] the need for a distinctly sociological approach to this particular identity’ (Hird 2002a, 578). Building on the work of Garfinkel, as well as Kessler and McKenna, Hird acknowledges how the field of sociology emphasises social constructivism in its pursuance of a production of knowledge around identity and that there are wider ontological explorations of gender (and other key concepts such as race and disability) that go beyond the remit of sociological practice. She states:

[B]y resisting psychology’s epistemology of diagnosing the ‘cause’ of transsexualism by means of *a priori* natural, universal human laws, sociology is better able to analyse transsexualism as a specifically social production of society. (Hird 2002a, 578)

Hird advocates an understanding of transsexualism within society rather than holding centrally the individual psyche. Drawing on Moi (1999, 75), Hird also claims a need to draw more substantially on phenomenological frameworks and theories of embodiment to stipulate gender as a set of histories and experiences. Certainly ‘transsexualism has been mostly theorised from medical and psychiatric perspectives’ (Hird 2002a, 581) and continues to be a dominant field that gives focus to transgender phenomena. Yet, Hird states that somatic arguments of causations of transsexualism as a form of intersex (Playdon 2000) are less ‘popular’ than those discourses held within psychoanalysis (Hird 2002a, 580). I argue, however, that these stipulations of causation are complexly intertwined and there has been some slipperiness between these distinctions dating right back to the early 1930s. Furthermore as I explore TV documentaries I show how biological causation (as in discourses of intersex conditions) are in fact rather current and certainly ‘popular’ across the general public rather than drawing on psychoanalytic discourses to establish aetiologies.

Moreover as Hird attempts to disrupt the dominance that the field of psychology and psychoanalysis has over trans knowledge, Papoulias suggests that more psychoanalytical work can be done around trans experiences as a way to ‘invest

our bodies with meaning’ (Papoulias 2006, 232). Whilst Papoulias consents that ‘psychoanalytic readings of transgender experiences have been roundly denounced by transgender activists as productive of pathologising discourse’ (Papoulias 2006, 232), she also tells us that the field of psychoanalysis may still have its uses, rather than move towards more sociological arenas of study. She states:

Psychoanalytic readings of transgendered subjectivity remind us of the unconscious phantasies which participate in our embodiment... [and] they propose that embodiment, whether transgender or not, is a process that no singular language (be it that of neurobiology, phenomenology, or indeed psychoanalysis itself) can fully translate. (Papoulias 2006, 232–3)

Gayle Salamon concurs in her text *Assuming a Body* (2010) that:

Trans people have been justifiably wary of psychoanalysis because of the ways it has been used to pathologize gender variance and gender-variant people. Nevertheless, psychoanalysis perhaps more than any other discourse, has provided the most thorough and detailed examination of the elaborate set of mechanisms by which a subject ‘knows’ her own body, and psychoanalysis can give us a richly productive way of describing that join between the psychic and the material – if its more homophobic and transphobic tendencies can be curbed. (Salamon 2010, 4)

Also wishing to trace a new purpose for psychoanalysis (alongside phenomenology) in contributing to trans knowledge, Salamon asserts that these fields can continue to be productive in order to think through the material and phantasmatic senses of bodily being (Salamon 2010, 2). ‘The real’ in both of these senses, Salamon tells us, ‘holds pertinence and profundity in relation to embodied lives as “the real”, a phrase that, it seems to me, can never quite shed its normativizing and disciplinary dimensions’ (Salamon 2010, 3). Moreover, phenomenology and psychoanalytic theory are ‘promising tools’ which offer rich description and detail to ‘the relation between body and feeling’; that understands ‘disjuncture... as a potentially powerful facet of embodied subjectivity rather than a mark of pathology’ (Salamon 2010, 9).

1.6 Sex/Gender as Performative

In the beginning of Stryker's introduction to the *Transgender Studies Reader* (2006) she remarks that in the early 1990s, with the emergence of Queer Theory and in the context of an emerging Transgender movement in the United States, 'some of the more academically minded members of these grassroots communities were reading a recent book by Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (Butler 1990), and an older book by Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1' (Stryker and Whittle 2006, 5). So far throughout this 'Trans Epistemology' section, I have charted the integral relationship trans knowledge has to medical discourses, whilst positing a sense of 'jostling for position' from the fields of psychiatry, psychoanalysis, endocrinology as well as phenomenology, sociology and ethnomethodology with regards to what those fields have to say about gender as well as what it means to be trans. I wish here to lay out more substantially the influence of the work of Judith Butler and, through her, the work of Foucault, as well as Freud and Lacan. I do this, not only to provide a Butlerian theoretical underpinning of gender to my concept of trans knowledge, but to forefront theories of performativity generally. This is not only with regards to the performativity of subject production, and specifically gendered subjectivities, but also to substantiate a performativity of epistemology and to demonstrate the ways in which knowledge performs itself in order to produce its own legitimacy as well as those subjects that such knowledge encounters. In short, as I have contextualised a history of sexology and the ways in which gender variance sits within a field of medical science, what I will move onto here is to consider the ways in which gender performativity is discussed by Butler and is positioned within the fields of gender and sexuality studies, feminism and queer theory.

Published in 1990, *Gender Trouble*, like other critical and feminist writings at the time, posed specific questions around the category of 'woman'.²¹ Butler states that 'the very subject of women is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms' (Butler 1999, 4). Consequently she asks, 'Do the exclusionary practices that ground feminist theory in a notion of "women" as subject paradoxically undercut feminist goals to extend its claim to "representation"?' (Butler 1999, 8) As the book wrestles with the political consequences of such exclusionary practises, Butler rests her query of what is a 'woman' on more ontological considerations around the ways in which a subject comes into production through a juridical power which legitimises itself,

becoming the law through its own regulatory hegemony (Butler 1999, 5). This is crucial if we are to think through the relationship subject formation has with a legitimising process and the mechanisms of legitimacy. In addition this raises considerations around the relationship subject formation has in relation to a deterministic ‘foreclosure’ of possibilities of being, with that of ‘agency’ and ‘transformation’, which, in opposition to such determinism, opens out possibilities of being. Again, what is noted here is a ‘being between’ – a dualistic framework for thinking and producing the self – that of determinism and agency; fate and freewill.

Charting a genealogy of feminism, Butler takes to task the ways in which sex and gender as concepts have been split for the purposes of forwarding the biology-is-not-destiny ‘project’ that gained momentum throughout second wave feminism. Feminism from the 1960s focused on the ways in which patriarchal culture enforced inequitable gender roles. These gender roles are not innate but are socially constructed in order to meet such patriarchal ends. However, Butler shifts the thinking here by articulating that sex and the sexed body are also discursive as ‘we never experience or know ourselves as a body pure and simple, i.e. as our “sex”, because we never know our sex outside of its expression of gender’ (Butler 1986, 39 in Hird 2002a, 585). For Butler, Gender is performative and, drawing on Nietzsche, stipulates that there is no ‘I’ prior to the acts of doing, no do-er behind the doing (Butler 1999, 11).²² Butler confirms that the categories, the constructs and even the nouns of ‘male’ and ‘female’ are to be understood in terms of their performativity, their repetitive acts; a repetition necessitated out of *a desire to be* constituted as being ‘male’ or ‘female’. She states:

Gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. (Butler 1999, 63)

Butler argues that, by considering gender as an effect that takes place after sex, this works to retroactively reinstate sex firmly into (or onto) the materiality of the body, naturalising it and rendering it inaccessible to discourse (Butler 1993, 5). Butler states:

The efforts to denaturalise sexuality and gender have taken as their main enemy those normative frameworks of compulsory heterosexuality that operate throughout the naturalisations and reification of heterosexist norms. (Butler 1993, 11)

It is not then that sex comes prior to gender in terms of there already being a biological body, which is naturally sexed and which consequently becomes cultured with gender, but rather that gender is prior to sex as the performance of gender attributes an effect of an 'internal core' or 'substance' (Butler 1990, 136). The actions that take place on and through the body that are cast as gendered 'suggest, but never reveal, the organising principle of identity as a cause' (Butler 1990, 136).

The scene of subject production and establishing the sense of an internal core is never achieved outside of a regulatory framework. This is what Butler calls the Heterosexual Matrix. From this one queer 'project' has been to denaturalise the production of sexuality, gender and sex and expose those heterosexist norms. To think through the performativity of sex is arguably more difficult as it means to consider one's materiality, not as object or thing, but as a site of production of meaning that is constituted through the performance of that meaningful process. This is the key to Butler's work in *Bodies that Matter*. Here, Butler tells us:

Construction is a return to the notion of matter, not as site or surface, but as a process of materialisation that stabilises over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity and surface we call matter... matter is always materialized. (Butler 1993, 9)

Lacanian theory tells us that to be born is to come away from the original matter, the mother. From there the construction of self, life itself, is the quest to return to it. We are born lacking and desiring and the chaos of being a body away from original matter gives the sense of disunity, fragmentation and uncontrollability. The attempt to gain control is to find wholeness of the Self, and the journey towards this wholeness is in the world and through the Other. The Other gives us the imaginary whole Self, through the gaze, from the visible. Butler cites Lacan: 'The body in pieces finds its unity in the image of the Other, which is its own anticipated image' (Lacan II 54.72 in Butler 1993, 75).

Building the whole self through the image is to enter into signification and so we see here how Self and Other is dynamic as signification and matter are rooted and twisted together. Moreover, Butler draws on Freud who considers the ego as a sort of

omnipresent Other, an entity that is not only preoccupied with the image of Self by the Other, but which *is* the psychic Self. In addition, ‘the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface’ (Butler 1993, 59). Exploring this image of Self *through* the body, as it were, allows us to consider the rising tensions in *being a body* and how the feeling of estrangement between body and psyche becomes apparent not least for the trans subject. Prosser claims ‘We are an image trapped in a body’ (Prosser 1998a, 64).²³ From Butler we can learn that there is no matter prior to signification, but rather matter only materialises. In this way sex is not matter but the work of the bodily ego marking or *morphing* the flesh. In short, the self *selfs* the self through phantasmatic images of being a whole self that bear ‘a sedimented history of imaginary relations’ (1993, 74). To summarise Butler’s key concept of *Bodies that Matter*, we are to understand:

[The body is] not the blank state or passive medium upon which the psyche acts, but rather the constitutive demand that mobilizes psychic action from the start, that is that very mobilisation, and, in its transmuted and projected bodily form, remains that psyche. (Butler 1993, 67)

Whilst Butler draws on being trans in order to uncover the discursive and performative production of the material body, Prosser reads ‘transsexual narratives to consider how transition may be the very route to identity and bodily integrity’, where ‘in transsexual accounts transition does not shift the subject away from the embodiment of sexual difference but more fully into it’ (Prosser 1998a, 6). As queer theory and feminism – mainly through the work of Butler – established the beginnings of transgender studies and a shift or rise in trans activism, Prosser expresses his own troubled sense of transgender bodies being too dominantly a visual trope for queer theory – an image that exemplifies and exposes the hegemonic cultural production of gender norms through visual means. This is particularly problematic for Prosser when ‘such perspectives elide the materiality of trans bodies and the practices of embodiment which constitute trans experience in their specificity’ (Papoulias 2006, 232). In short Prosser reinstates or returns to a certain ‘seriousness’ to the trans subject where queer theory has produced trans bodies as a site in which to play or ‘fuck’ with gender. Prosser states:

Transgendered narratives as much as transsexual ones continue to attest to the valences of cultural belonging that the categories of man and woman still carry in our world: what I term ‘gendered realness’. That is, transsexual and transgendered narratives alike produce not the revelation of the fictionality of gender categories but the sobering realization of their ongoing foundational power; and why hand over gendered realness when it holds so much sway? (Prosser 1998a, 11)

Turning away from a medicalization of trans phenomenon, Prosser’s project centred around the ‘narrative work’ of the transsexual where the body which transforms demands the ‘remolding’ of a ‘particular narrative shape’ (Prosser 1998a, 4) and by offering a ‘living space’ to ‘[read] the transsexual as authorial subject’ (Prosser 1998a, 9), Prosser shows us that particular narrative constructs allow for transsexuality and bodily transitions to take place; narratives becoming, as it were, our ‘second skins’. His book ‘attends to narrative, to the ways in which transsexuals have authored their plots in dialogue with medical discourse’ (Prosser 1998a, 9) and purposely asks, ‘what are the points at which the transsexual as transgendered subject is not queer?’ (Prosser 1998a, 27). In addition, by engaging with transsexual autobiographies and studying them as a body of work, Prosser tells us: ‘There are transsexuals who seek very pointedly to be nonperformative, to be constative, quite simply, to *be*’ (Prosser 1998a, 32).

Gayle Salamon addresses Prosser’s desired emphasis on ‘the primacy of bodily materiality’ (Salamon 2010, 37). She argues that

Prosser charges that within Butler’s reading of the Freudian bodily ego... the body springs from the ego. This, Prosser insists, is exactly contrary to Freud’s point, which is that the ego springs from the body that, by virtue of its materiality, lends materiality to the ego... [Prosser] sees Butler’s reading of Freud as symptomatic of a wider dismissal of materiality in favour of discursivity and views his own project as a call for a return to the simplicity of materiality. (Salamon 2010, 38–40)

Salamon returns to Butler to consider the impossibility of any materiality outside of language as through the very positing of such is always already discursive (Salamon 2010, 40).

Yet Prosser’s call for a ‘materiality of transsexual narratives’ is not simply advocating an essentialist reading of gender but rather, through his critical study of

autobiographies, considers ways in which transsexual people write their selves through narratives that reinsert themselves as an *always being*. Such an always being though is, he tells us, retroactively instated through the technologies of the autobiography genre. I wish to depart for now from gender theory and these debates around mind/body splits that draw on psychoanalytical tools. Instead I wish to pursue this other important line of enquiry with regards to trans knowledge, specifically how knowing being trans is drawn from within the literary genre of autobiographies. Continuing to draw from the work of Prosser, I wish to stipulate this arena as another well-established form of knowledge production that indeed stands counter to the medical discourses previously set out in this Introduction.

1.7 Autobiographies

Transgender Studies, as well as trans subjectivities and collectives, place huge importance on narratives; and the autobiographical genre – whether in literary, theatre, cabaret performance in pubs and clubs, film or documentary form – enables us to tell our stories through cultural events that are integral to the productivity and purpose of Transgender Studies. Autobiographies by trans people have been burgeoning from the 1950s onwards and there are now hundreds if not thousands of published (auto)biographies about trans people. This perhaps recognises our desire to tell our life stories. Examples of trans autobiographies that form part of the canon of trans history are: Roberta Cowell's *Roberta Cowell's Story* (Cowell 1954), Christine Jorgensen's *Christine Jorgensen: A Personal Autobiography* (Jorgensen 1967), Jan Morris's *Conundrum* (Morris 1974) and Mario Martino's *Emergence: A Transsexual Autobiography* (Martino 1977).

Such autobiographies have been critiqued by feminist Sheila Jeffreys, specifically the autobiographies of trans women Roberta Cowell and Jan Morris, accusing them of reinforcing female stereotypes and wearing high femme clothing. Consequently such autobiographies by trans people have continued to be a key focus in gender discourse.

The phenomenon of the trans autobiography is discussed in a key chapter of Bernice L. Hausman's book *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology and the Idea of Gender*. Like Jeffreys, Hausman also takes a critical viewpoint, stipulating

that through their autobiographical work transsexuals ‘mask the material construction... through the technologies of medical practice’ (Hausman 1995, 141). Hausman seeks to expose the disjuncture of a transsexual *seeking to be* the other sex through medical technologies whilst also professing to *already be* the other sex through physiological aetiologies, but in doing so undermines the transsexual author, casting her or him as manipulative and conniving. Indeed as Hausman looks to blame the trans author for the contradictory multiplicity of trans knowledge, in this thesis I intend to pursue and indeed consider as positive such multiplicity due to its particular productivity.

While Hausman casts transsexual autobiographies as dubious and invalid, Jay Prosser asserts a particular value to them, as he works this intertwining of trans autobiographical acts with our encounters with the ‘clinical authorities’ (Prosser 1998a, 101). The simple repetitive plotline in autobiographies that Prosser identifies is certainly one that can be recognised in TV documentaries. That is:

The transsexual emerges as an archetypal story structured around shared tropes and fulfilling a particular narrative organization of consecutive stages: suffering and confusion; the epiphany of self-discovery; corporeal and social transformation/conversion; and finally the arrival ‘home’ – the reassignment. (Prosser 1998a, 101)

Moreover, narrative is the route to clinical diagnosis and so ‘autobiography is transsexuality’s proffered symptom’ (Prosser 1998a, 104). The criteria for Gender Identity Disorder render explicit ‘transsexuality’s classic plot’ (Prosser 1998a, 104).

Prosser’s thinking becomes interesting and useful for me here when he unpacks the performative dimension to the writing and publishing of such stories through a location of a splitting subject – the past self-object and the present self-writer (Prosser 1998a, 102). The productivity of narrative, and the general trajectory of autobiography as a genre in itself, is to ‘trace the story of the single self’ (Prosser 1998a, 102). This, Prosser asserts, is the appeal for the (trans) author, ‘healing the split’ (Prosser 1998a, 99). He states ‘in autobiography the desultoriness of experience acquires chronology, succession, progression – even causation; existence, an author’ (Prosser 1998a, 116).

Writing one’s life is to make sense of such through a retroactive performance – ‘the subjects becoming through returning, the life’s progression through revision of

the past' (Prosser 1998a, 117). Any trans knowledge produced here is complex in its formation. Its utility for the author, in part, endeavours for a 'knowing "I"' (Prosser 1998a, 117). Prosser continues: 'Autobiography produces identity (sameness, singularity); transsexual autobiography, we should not be surprised produces gender identity' (Prosser 1998a, 120). This scene is further complicated as the purposes and achievements of the publishing house (and of the readers who are being aimed at to buy the book) are diverse and multiple. Prosser states: 'Writing the narrative may indeed be a mechanism for working through the life; publishing it – putting the life in a public domain – is a different matter altogether' (Prosser 1998a, 120).

Such publications are circulated, not only to trans readers, but to a mainstream market who are fascinated by the phenomenon of being transsexual; being Other. This affects the form and style taken, as well as the marketing strategies to generate sales. Yet, precisely because these autobiographies reveal (rather than cover over as Hausman argues) transsexual subjecthood, therein lies their political potential.

Prosser points out the paradox of how such a publication makes visible transsexualism whilst the narrative itself articulates a 'somatic transition that allows the transsexual to pass and blend in as nontranssexual' (Prosser 1998a, 130). 'The autobiographical act on every count does not undercut but permits the realization of transsexual subjectivity – indeed, in a way not imagined by the medical narrative' (Prosser 1998a, 131).

Consequently, trans autobiography can offer us something that medical discourse of gender variance does not and that is their 'capacity to represent themselves' (Prosser 1998a, 131), albeit through the publishing machine that makes public the very representation. Such stories are integral to a circulation of knowledge production – what Prosser calls 'inter-transtextuality' (Prosser 1998a, 125) – as trans knowledge forms through stories, texts and culture in order that the trans person may come to know themselves as trans.

Being trans requires narrativisation, which is 'enabled by the reading of other transsexual narratives' (Prosser 1998a, 124). It is this circulation and distribution of narratives that are at the heart of my project and which assert the integral connections of trans knowledge with trans publics and trans subjecthood. I turn now to considering the ways in which such an amalgamation of discourse occupies academia.

1.8 Transgender Studies

Transgender Studies are intimately related to the emergent ‘postmodern conditions’ for the production of knowledge, and are as innovative methodologically as they are epistemologically (Stryker and Whittle 2006, 12).

In her book *Transgender History* Susan Stryker notes the ‘extensive medical and psychological literature that treats transgender phenomenon as a personal (pathological) deviation from social norms of healthy gender expressions’ (Stryker 2008a, 2). What she attempts to do in this book is to pull together a ‘collective political history of transgender social change activism in the United States’ (Stryker 2008a, 2). In this sense my thesis is also historical as it draws on the popular cultural items of TV documentaries from the late 1970s to 2010. Equally, my thesis captures the ways in which trans people can come to know themselves through cultural items and within a historical sociality and the publics that they occupy rather than through any individual focus that the psychological encounter and the medical establishment allow for.

Stryker marks this historical point where trans people were themselves getting in on the discursive action. In 1994 the Queer Studies Conference at the University of Iowa allowed for international networking of emerging trans scholars, establishing new trans archives and the writing of trans histories. At the 1995 First International Conference on Cross-Dressing, Sex and Gender, at the California State University at Northridge, Stryker pictures the scene where

an older generation of (primarily non-transgender) academic specialists who studied transgender phenomena was confronted by a significant number of academically trained specialists who also happened to be transgender themselves. (Stryker 2006, 6).

This provided a crunch point for Stryker, establishing these two ‘types’ of scholarly approaches to transgender lives and the ‘rupture between modern and postmodern epistemic contexts for understanding’ (Stryker 2006, 12).

Also reflecting on the importance of conferences and large public platforms that were taking place in the UK and across Europe, Christine Burns acknowledges

the efforts and perspectives from various professionals. At the 1993 colloquy ‘Transsexualism, Medicine and the Law’, hosted by the Free University in Amsterdam, chaired by endocrinologist Professor Louis Gooren, Burns states:

The event was packed with a mix of international lawyers, doctors, civil servants and quite a few trans people... these were people who had all thought very hard about the status of transsexual people from their own perspectives. (Burns 2013, 9%)

There is a marking point in the epistemological trajectory when trans people themselves were playing a part in establishing and re-establishing concepts of gender identity. Whittle states:

As we move into a new world, trans academics and theorists are creating new discursive practices which are repositioning the power of gender(s) and allowing more of us to have a say in what gender means, and in what its powers should be. (Whittle 2006, xiv)

Part of this new knowledge production draws on what Stryker tells us is ‘the embodied experience of the speaking subject, who claims constative knowledge of the referent topic, to be a proper – indeed essential – component of the analysis of transgender phenomena’ (Stryker and Whittle 2006, 12). She continues: ‘experiential knowledge is as legitimate as other, supposedly more “objective” forms of knowledge, and is in fact necessary for understanding the political dynamics of the situation being analyzed’ (Stryker and Whittle 2006, 12). As Transgender Studies are concerned with a body politic, biopower and the systemisation of classifying and normalising bodies, specifically in terms of sex and gender, Transgender Studies call ‘into question that *entire epistemological framework*’ of ‘two supposedly natural, stable, and incommensurable social categories (man and woman)’ (Stryker 2006, 8, my italics). Given this, it therefore necessarily must concern itself with all, including its own, formations of epistemological systems, practices and indeed philosophies. Stryker continues:

Epistemological concerns lie at the heart of transgender critique, and motivate a great deal of the transgender struggle for social justice. Transgender phenomena, in

short, point the way to a different understanding of how bodies mean, how representation works, and what counts as legitimate knowledge. These philosophical issues have material consequences for the quality of transgender lives. (Stryker 2006: 8–9)

Transgender Studies are a growing academic field, which not only examine transgender communities as ‘minority’ communities, but also engage in wider interrogations of how gender identities and subjectivities are produced (Stryker and Whittle 2006). Transgender Studies are integral to the politics, activism and scholarly writing of feminism, gay and lesbian studies, queer theory and the Intersex Movement. Importantly, Transgender Studies by their very interdisciplinary nature, wrestle with ideas and discourses held within the different fields and disciplines of sociology, history, cultural studies and other arts and humanities fields, as well as the sciences of biology, bio-chemistry, neurology, psychology and psychiatry. This multi-disciplinarity produces a rich, but often contradictory, set of knowledge frameworks and knowledge products that do not easily cohere in any monolithic or ‘general’ idea of sex, gender and what it means *to be trans*. The different knowledge fields in which trans may be located study and conceptualise trans in particular ways pertaining to the various conventions and norms of the particular field or discipline. Moreover, depending on these knowledge ‘framings’ each discipline will achieve (as indeed it sets out to) certain end points for the purposes of forwarding its own field. This results in knowing trans knowledge as multiple and diverse. For instance, as I have already pointed out, whilst in some knowledge fields trans has located itself as a postmodern subject – multiple in its narratives, fluid and socially constructed – in other knowledge fields trans posits the sexes of ‘male’ and ‘female’ as natural and supports subjectivities as fixed and stable entities within discourses of the biological (Prosser 1998a).

As my thesis considers TV documentaries that feature trans subjects, my aim is to think through how such mainstream products might situate themselves in, and contribute to, the multi-disciplinarity of Transgender Studies. I am interested in the space between popular culture and the minority collectives of trans people. I am interested in the discourse, knowledge products and ‘sociability’ generated here and, in drawing on the works of Warner (2005), I am interested in what I will call ‘trans publics’. Trans knowledge, then, is the space between definitions and knowledge

products. It is a becoming knowledge achieved through and across subjects (which are also forming and becoming through a being *between* knowledge products). Trans knowledge is Hegelian in form, flowing and becoming, and operates through a throughness. Trans knowledge is an epistemological approach that moves between (and is produced through) various fields, disciplines, arenas, platforms, publics and communities. It is a kind of ‘conversation’ between fields, disciplines, public spheres and knowledge products (Halberstam 2011, 12).²⁴ Added to this, Salamon states:

I seek to challenge the notion that the materiality of the body is something to which we have unlimited access, something of which we can have epistemological certainty, and contend that such epistemological uncertainty can have great use, both ethically and politically, in the lives of the non-normatively gendered. (Salamon 2010, 1)

This thesis is also about the ways in which certain and uncertain knowledge produces for itself feelings of certainty and uncertainty in the subject and moreover how these affects become productive through discourse. Trans knowledge forefronts how being trans often involves living with uncertainty in, through and because of the incommensurability of these knowledge paradigms. Trans knowledge is a living within and across opposing and conflicting discourses. This idea is not exclusive to trans discourse, but opens out to epistemological pursuits more broadly and can be mapped onto other subjectivities and discourses.²⁵

TV documentaries interest me because they form a very particular and notably ‘popular’ route to obtaining knowledge. I wish to foreground the productivity or achievements of popular knowledge and to make explicit the ‘uses’ of such knowledge, specifically through the mode of the visual. Shortly I will explain how the visuality of these cultural productions is central to my thinking. Next, however, I will outline the importance of my project for the purposes of knowledge production in Transgender Studies and also its particular contribution to knowledge.

1.9 Contribution to Knowledge

Despite the growing presence of documentaries featuring trans people on our TV screens in the UK and despite the fact that they are viewed by millions across the UK, very little critical attention has been given to them.²⁶ In some scholarly writing the increase in the frequency of transgender people appearing in TV documentaries (as well as in other mainstream products such as tabloids, ‘trashy’ magazines and daytime television) has been noted. In her article ‘(Trans)Forming Gender: Social Change and Transgender Citizenship’, Sally Hines writes of how ‘transgender has emerged as a subject of increasing social and cultural interest in recent years’ and she charts ‘the “cultural turn” to transgender’ and the ‘shifting attitudes towards transgender people’. She writes:

In recent years transgender has emerged as a subject of increasing social and cultural interest. Popular representations of transgender are apparent in TV drama, sitcom and reality TV, whilst the ‘trans confessional’ is a chat show staple. Tabloid journalists and magazine feature writers increasingly search for trans people for ‘real life’ stories, and television documentary and broadsheet journalism has focused upon the experiences of both female and male trans people. Transgender characters have had central roles in several mainstream films, and on-stage, cross-dressing performers such as Eddie Izzard, Lilly Savage and RuPaul draw large audiences. Whilst I do not wish to over-prioritise the political significance of such cultural representations – and indeed many barely move beyond stereotypes – cultural representations can give an indication of how minority gender and sexual identities are able to shift to some degree beyond their marginalised status. (Hines 2007a)

Likewise, photographer and academic Sara Davidmann writes,

the most widely available representations of trans people are generated through mass media, and are often found in the ‘freak show’ genre of reality and transformational television, which pathologises and sensationalises its subjects in highly problematic ways).²⁷

In addition, in “‘We Walk among You’: Trans Identity Politics Goes to the Movies’, Sharon Cowan states,

culturally trans people are currently everywhere. In the United Kingdom, as well as other jurisdictions such as North America, the transgender movement, if it can be referred to as such, has gained widespread visibility and recognition, although not always positively (Cowan 2009, 94).²⁸

These scholarly writings point out the increase in trans visibility in popular culture, and note the complexity of their problematic framing within more ‘popular’ and ‘trashy’ mainstream media items. Nonetheless their critical lens shifts away from television and popular culture to focus elsewhere. Hines considers the social implications of legislation; Davidmann considers the ethics of photographing the trans body; and Cowan looks to feature-length films *Cabaret*, *Transamerica* and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* – all of which were made in the USA.²⁹ The point – that trans is everywhere – is made by these scholars to contextualise and frame their own projects, but the matter of trans as a widely popular and mass media cultural phenomenon goes uninterrogated.

Queer academics in Cultural Studies have given some attention to television, film and mass media. In the UK and the USA these have mainly centred around the emergence of particular dramas, TV series, lesbian and gay actors, personalities and celebrities. These include the sitcom *Ellen*, the reality style show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and TV dramas such as *Queer as Folk* and *The L Word*.³⁰ Other work on television from queer scholars looks to measure its widespread appeal and to consider its consumption by lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) audiences themselves.³¹

For the purposes of equality campaigning and to consider the representational politics of LGBT people on primetime TV or mass audience viewership, organisations such as the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) (in the USA) and Stonewall (in the UK) have released reports and analyses that identify poor images or reflections of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people. In a report ‘Out on the Internet’, conducted by Jessica Gardner from GLAAD, it was found that the number of LGBT characters on television has decreased in the USA.³² A report by Stonewall, ‘Unseen on Screen: Gay people on Youth TV’, published in 2011, found

just 46 minutes out of 126 hours of output showed gay people positively and realistically. Three quarters of portrayal was confined to just four Channel 4 and ITV1 programmes: *I'm a Celebrity...*, *Hollyoaks*, *Emmerdale* and *How to Look Good Naked*. BBC1 transmitted 44 seconds of positive and realistic portrayal of gay people in more than 39 hours of output.³³

Similarly, 'Tuned Out', which was published in 2006 and looked at portrayals of lesbian and gay people on the BBC, found that 'during 168 hours of programmes, gay lives were represented positively for just six minutes' and whilst '14% of BBC airtime is devoted to entertainment, 72% of gay references occur during these programmes'.³⁴ These statistics are rather simply put. For example, it is important to question the value statements of 'positive' and 'realistic' in relation to lesbian and gay representations. Nonetheless such reports undoubtedly serve a purpose as they tell a story of inequality and can be used to lobby and pressurise government and regulatory bodies. Importantly for this project the Stonewall reports do not offer any data around representations of transgender people on television in the UK.³⁵

As regards transgender characters or appearances in the mainstream, more attention has been devoted to dramatic texts. John Philips's book *Transgender on Screen* looks at 'crossdressing, transgenderism and transsexuality in mainstream films'.³⁶ The transition from Moira to Max in American TV series *The L Word* encouraged some debate around transgender subjectivities, again in a dramatic context.³⁷

In the article 'Unheimlich Maneuvers: The Genres and Genders of Transsexual Documentary', Christie Milliken comments that documentaries mainly present the voices of trans people located in the San Francisco region. The documentaries she focuses on are *Linda/Les and Annie – The First Female to Male Transsexual Love Story* (1992), *Max* (1992), *Transsexual Menace* (1995), *Outlaw* (1994) and *You Don't Know Dick: Courageous Hearts of Transsexual Men* (1997).³⁸ Other US documentaries, most notably *Paris is Burning* (1990) and *The Brandon Teena Story* (1998), have been widely critiqued, particularly in queer theory (hooks 1992; Butler 1993; Phelan 1993; Halberstam 2005). Of these, *Paris is Burning* is the only documentary to have been broadcast on television in the UK.³⁹

The significance of celebrity has also become important in thinking about trans personas gaining presence in the mainstream.⁴⁰ Christine Jorgenson, the first transsexual to hit the headlines in the postwar USA, entered the public eye in 1952.⁴¹ Likewise ‘transsexual cabaret star and television celebrity Carlotta... has been an important figure in Australian culture since the 1960s’.

‘He Did It Her Way On TV: Representing An Australian Transsexual Celebrity Onscreen’ is a journal article by Joanna McIntyre. In it McIntyre discusses the expansive TV career of actor, performer and celebrity Carlotta whose career traces back to the early 1960s right through to the new millennium. The article looks to offer some visual analysis of the various onscreen appearances she made and to figure her centrally to transgender representation in Australia and beyond. In addition her aims are to consider how such representations contribute to sex/gender discourses.

Celebrity is important here as it is so integral to Reality TV genres and popular culture. Drawing on Marshall, who tells us: ‘the celebrity exists above the real world, in the realm of symbols that gain and lose value like commodities on the stock market’ (Marshall 2004, 6 in McIntyre 2011, 20), we can understand celebrity status as a branding machine ‘court[ing] a mass audience’ (Turner, Bonner and Marshall 2000, 267) in order to sell the Self.

McIntyre tells us that because Carlotta is a transsexual ‘her celebrity status is bound up with her particular mode of gender embodiment... giv[ing] insight into the life, and life-narrative, of a real transsexual’ (McIntyre 2011, 21). As the article continues McIntyre considers the modes, styles and audiovisual approaches to the appearances. For instance in a film *The Naked Bunyip* (Murray, 2005) McIntyre describes:

In the style of cinéma vérité *The Naked Bunyip*’s interviews directly address the camera and ‘fly-on-the-wall’ cinematography is employed for segments of live action footage. Furthermore, the interviewer is seldom seen so interviewees appear to speak straight to the viewer. Together these techniques heighten the ‘naturalism’ of the film. Although the fictional narrative woven through the interviews may diminish its credence as a documentary, as a feature film it evokes an unusually high level of aesthetic authenticity (McIntyre 2011, 25)

On UK TV, we can think of other TV personalities and programmes such as Nadia Almada who won the widely popular Channel 4 reality show contest *Big Brother* in 2004. Hines remembers:

In 2004 [...] the most wide-reaching cultural representation of transgender arose from the reality television show *Big Brother 5*, whose housemate and winner was twenty-seven year old trans woman Nadia Almada. In and out of the *Big Brother* house, Nadia received extensive television and newspaper coverage, leading *Observer* columnist Barbara Ellen to comment that: ‘The triumph of a Portuguese transgender woman in the nation's greatest unofficial popularity contest threw up important questions about Britain today. Are attitudes shifting? Is there a greater tolerance and broadmindedness, at least among the nation's youth? [...]’ (Barbara Ellen, *The Observer*, 22 August 2004) (Hines 2007a).⁴²

In the same year the contestant show *There's Something About Miriam* was also aired. In the show a group of men competed to win a date with glamour beauty Miriam. The show's premise was that, whilst the viewers at home were privy to the knowledge that Miriam is a ‘preoperative transsexual’ and so has a penis, the men featured in the programme did not know. At the Popular Culture Association and American Culture Association Conference in New Orleans, USA, in April 2009, Chris Pullen gave a paper called ‘The Transgendered Body and Documentary Narratives: Resistance, Partnership and Domestic Screen Memories’.⁴³ In this paper Pullen considers TV reality shows *Big Brother* and *There's Something About Miriam*. He also draws on several films – *Transtasia: Every Boy Has a Dream*, made in the USA and broadcast on UK TV in 2009;⁴⁴ *She's a Boy I Knew*, made in Canada and distributed across film festivals, including the BFI London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival 2008. In addition Pullen draws on two UK-made documentaries: *My Dad Diane*, broadcast by the BBC in 2005 and the earliest documentary featuring a transsexual person to be broadcast on British TV, *A Change of Sex: George and Julia*.⁴⁵

In his paper Pullen focuses on ‘the aesthetic and discursive body as a site of personal reinvention, relating notions of conformity and rejection to dominant gendered ideals’. For instance he compares and contrasts *My Dad Diane* and *She's a Boy I Knew* as they both feature lesbian identities as part of a male to female (MTF) transgender journey and thus transgress and challenge categories of sexual

orientation. In focusing on those documentaries and TV shows that foreground female glamour as part of the transsexual narrative, he notes the tensions in how such narratives question ‘notions of diverse liberation’: on the one hand they can conform to ‘essentialist contexts of ideal aesthetic beauty’ and on the other, they picture ‘the utilitarian yet discursive potential of social construction’. Pullen’s argument, then, is that whilst such transsexuals may seem to be conforming to an idealized feminine beauty (specifically in the spectacle of the beauty pageant in *Tears, Tiaras and Transsexuals*), these characters ‘traverse the boundaries of sexual identity and its reinvention [...] and challenge notions of sexual and gender essence’.

While the mass media item framed in this problematic way no doubt presents challenges, for Pullen it also ‘offers educational substance’ and ‘drives [...] “equality”’.⁴⁶ That is to say for him the ends justify the means: such mainstream items are productive in offering society an educative opportunity around trans experiences and the chance to think more broadly about gender identity. Like Pullen, I am interested in productivity – what can be achieved – through and out of the popular cultural items that feature trans subjects. Pullen articulates how equality may be achieved through the aesthetic of the home movie and family snap-shots that constitute everyday aesthetics. Such ‘everyday’ and ‘real’ aesthetics as we find in these documentaries are distinctly classed as narratives depicted on TV of subjects from significantly low socio-economic backgrounds. Such ‘ordinary’ trans people as figured in TV documentaries certainly stand in contrast to those often metropolitan and culturally defined queer trans figures conventionally depicted in screenings at lesbian and gay film festivals across the globe.⁴⁷

To summarise, with the exception of Pullen, scholarly attention around trans visibility within popular discourse has focused on TV and film drama as well as celebrity culture, rather than on TV documentaries. Where there has been some focus on documentaries it has been on those distributed across queer platforms or alternatively those that have been generated in the USA. I intend to build on Pullen’s work, since in turning his attention to an array of television documentaries, some from the USA and some from the UK, he also believes that they have a productivity despite perhaps adhering to ‘idealisations’ of femininity that are essentially heteronormative.

With this context in mind, my thesis places centre stage TV documentaries that feature trans subjects and are broadcast specifically in the UK. My thesis will

investigate specifically how the visual narratives and knowledge produced might contribute to the way trans subjects form themselves between or against the documentaries for the purposes of their own *being* or *doing* trans. I wish to focus on UK TV documentaries as cultural items for the purposes of pursuing a particular sort of archive: a body of discourse and cultural items that have so far been unexplored and have not been sufficiently discussed within Transgender Studies.

Historically Transgender Studies, like queer theory, have grown out of critical thinking and LGBT non-governmental organisations in the USA. Whilst discourse formed here are important and also productive, they speak a cultural, ideological, sociopolitical and geographical specificity that stands apart from my own experience as a British person. Certainly contributions to Transgender Studies have become more international in recent years.⁴⁸ In addition, human rights agendas for transgender people are building momentum and recognising trans lives across the globe.⁴⁹ As I shift the focus to UK TV documentaries, I ask particular questions around how such knowledge is produced through these cultural objects and, importantly, what such knowledge achieves. Following this introductory chapter, I will turn to the various methods I employ to achieve these aims. Before that, however, I next wish to lay out my epistemological interests more broadly and to consider the performativity of knowledge, specifically in and through popular culture.

1.10 The Performativity of Knowledge

Who are we that we may know something? Of what does knowledge consist? What we know and *how we use* the knowledge we have, are matters of social and ideological significance (Nichols 1991, 31; my italics)

Knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed in order to be valorised in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange. Knowledge ceases to be an end in itself, it loses its 'use value'. (Lyotard 1984, 4)

Central to the genre of documentary is the complex intertwining of what could be called 'scientific' knowledge with narrative. Moreover it is crucial to

recognise the visual mode of production by which narratives play out in documentaries. Authorities often esteem scientific knowledge with its Galilean imperatives to *prove* a statement or to formulate a grand universal law. Foucault, crucially, critiqued systems that treat these forms of knowledge as self-articulated objects that sit outside of subjectivities (Foucault 1995). He tells us how disciplines and knowledge fields do not simply describe the distinctions between *what is known* (categories) and *how it comes to be known* (methodology), but are themselves technologies of power that position knowledge within elite bodies of specialist expertise (Halberstam 2011, 7; Foucault 1976, 2003; Sedgwick 1993). In this way, knowledge is performative – it only *becomes* knowledge *through* the varying performances of it. Such knowledge is most powerful when its performativity (the ways in which it has become produced and the performances that are carried out to produce it) remains unseen, making it appear as prior and unembodied (Sedgwick 1993).

In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Lyotard tells us that, in order for us to access even the most ‘proper’ scientific knowledge, it is inevitable for it to be circulated through narratives. For the purposes of science and the production of general universal laws this is problematic because ‘science’ and ‘narrative’ have always been in conflict (Lyotard 1984). It is my purpose here to think through this hybridity of science and narrative and the ways in which knowledge is produced across popular culture.

Similarly, social scientist and anthropologist Bruno Latour tells us how the natural and the sociological worlds are interwoven in the act of storytelling, where: ‘All of culture and all of nature get churned up every day’ (Latour 1993, 2). Latour outlines how knowledge about scientific concerns, such as the depletion of the ozone layer, is formed and performed through various fields of knowledge, such as politics, science or religion, and reaches us through academic and popular journal articles, news items and – importantly for me here – documentaries. The performative dimension of knowledge production is made clear when one considers what Lyotard calls ‘use-value’, which offers an idea of knowledge as a product that is ‘sold’ in order to be useful, in order to offer a set of meanings that are ‘bought into’. Such a purchase is not only to be understood as simple consumption. ‘The goal of knowledge’, Lyotard tells us, ‘is exchange.’

For the purposes of this thesis, I want to consider how knowledge is ‘sold’ through the performances of TV documentaries, and how it is useful, particularly for trans subjects. Since trans knowledge here is produced partly through a scientific remit, I ask: what might these performances achieve? In addition, as such documentaries are ‘popularised’ – as they have been over recent years – what happens to the ‘science’ project of knowledge and how does the ‘popularisation’ of the documentary genre alter the relationship that being trans has with the scientific world, and consequently to the knowledge produced?

Trans knowledge, like all knowledge, is not an item, but rather it is an ‘exchange’ (Lyotard 1984). Knowledge is not power itself, as Sedgwick explains, but power clings to knowledge like a magnet (Sedgwick 1994) and thus gives purchase to the knowledge; it produces value, status and power. Knowledge is productive – it does things, achieves things. It gets you places. Knowledge is about recognition and trans knowledge is about recognising trans subjects.

1.11 Popular Knowledge

The term ‘popular’ will further trouble this relationship between knowledge production, visual narratives and the documentary genre and I wish to consider the impact of when a knowledge product is taken up and consumed by masses of people. Various and contested notions have been put forward for what is meant by the term ‘popular’, as it must be considered to be more than simply involving lots of people. Stuart Hall suggests that the purpose of Cultural Studies – particularly in relation to popular culture – is to identify the ideology and the imaginary of ‘the people’. Hall states:

By ideology I mean the mental frameworks – the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought and the systems of representation – which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works.’ (Hall in Storey 2009, xvii)

This thesis considers the realm of the popular with this emphasis on the ‘render[ing] of intelligibility’. I am interested in the scene where one makes sense of

things for oneself and to oneself. This scene is not simply a place of telling or of being taught how things are that is passively experienced; these popular cultural items become knowledge products through their consumption – or viewership – and most importantly through the resulting intelligibility for the viewer. Hall states:

Texts and practices are not inscribed within meaning, guaranteed once and for all by the intentions of production; meaning is always the result of an act of ‘articulation’... Meaning is always a social production, a practice. (Hall in Storey 2009, xvii)

John Storey describes how ‘People *make* popular culture from the repertoire of commodities supplied by the culture industries (film, television, music, publishing, sporting etc.)’ (Storey 2009, xix; my italics). Making popular culture, rendering cultural items meaningful by offering them attention, gives significance to the items as knowledge products. Moreover, for Hall the conditions and contexts of any ‘articulation’ are crucial as such meanings are brought about in and out of the specificity of the historical moment. These conditions and contexts are responsible for the popularity of those items that become popular as they are taken up by a mass viewership and thus ignite something that is relevant, meaningful and pleasurable to those that view. In an interview, Hall claims:

It’s only what is at stake in the popular that makes it worthwhile [...] What matters is where the popular imaginary gets itself expressed and it does not always get expressed in high culture. It gets expressed in the dirty, compromised, commercialised overridden world of popular culture, which is never an uncontested space.⁵⁰

My own application of the realm of popular culture and the knowledge produced through popular cultural items, namely TV documentaries, is to chart this scene of contestation. In my thesis I consider the ways in which such meanings are formed – their ‘articulation’ – and how we can come to understand them as contestable. I also chart the ‘use-value’ of such meanings and specifically the use-value brought precisely *through* and *because of* their very contestability. Storey states:

I also believe that making popular culture ('production in use') can be empowering to subordinate and resistant to dominant understandings of the world. But this is not to say that it is always empowering and resistant.' (Storey 2009, xix; my italics)

It is in the relationship between popular culture and the 'subordinate' – between the popular documentaries that feature trans people and the trans population that view these documentaries – that I place my project.

In her/his book *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011) Halberstam describes how failure can be a route into challenging the norms of capitalism, gender and heterosexual life, and in doing this articulates a Queer project. Where I focus on popular TV documentaries, Halberstam draws on blockbuster animation – a form that scholarly practice also deems too unimportant and innocuous to devote attention to. I identify with her/his need to 'push through the divisions of life and art, practice and theory, thinking and doing, and into a more chaotic realm of knowing and unknowing' (Halberstam 2011, 2). Like me, Halberstam draws on popular culture, 'popular knowledge' and – borrowing from Stuart Hall – 'low theory' in order to 'explore alternatives and to look for a way out of the usual traps and impasses of binary formations' (Halberstam 2011, 2). 'Low theory', she/he states, '[...] makes its peace with the possibility that alternatives dwell in the murky waters of a counterintuitive, often impossibly dark and negative realm of critique and refusal'. (Halberstam 2011, 2). Low theory politically identifies with a refusal to conform to the hierarchies of knowing (Halberstam 2011).

In this thesis I draw on such 'subjugated knowledges' or 'hierarchically inferior knowledges' (Foucault 2003, 7 in Halberstam 2011, 11) to investigate a politics of knowledge itself and to establish how value is attributed to some knowledge products whilst others are deemed 'bad', 'low', 'trashy' or regarded as 'failures'. This project does not look for legitimacy by placing trans within more respectable disciplines and framings, but instead brings to the fore the trashy, commercialised, contested and dubious nature of popular documentaries where being trans is predominantly situated. This project aims to understand being trans within such 'undisciplined' and 'messy' knowledge products.

1.12 The Productive Potential of Trans Knowledge

So far I have offered a sense of the necessary multiplicity of trans knowledge, and of how often knowledge produced is held within particular fields, disciplines and framings in order to achieve particular ends. I have also outlined how trans knowledge might be characterised as being between knowledge fields and I have mapped my own set of experiences in producing and forming my subjectivity onto this notion of being between knowledge products. In making these observations I call for an opening-up of knowledge fields and disciplines to allow networks and dialogue between them, in order that they may produce new knowledge across and between established fields. Next I wish to ground trans knowledge more specifically through the model of utility, productivity and performativity.

This thesis will analyse a series of TV documentaries that feature trans people in order to mark their production of knowledge within the realm of popular culture. By drawing on the works of Foucault, Sedgwick, Hall, Halberstam, Latour and Lyotard, I wish to think through the performativity of trans knowledge – to think trans knowledge performatively, or rather to embed notions of performativity firmly into my term ‘trans knowledge’ itself. This requires that we ask not *what is trans knowledge*, but rather *what does trans knowledge do?* I wish to chart how such knowledge works to produce different ends and to achieve different goals, and to ask *how, through its own performances, is it useful to trans people?*

To cement my idea of the performative nature of trans knowledge and to demonstrate the centrality of the idea of its usefulness, I wish to offer an anecdote that exemplifies such productivities of trans knowledge and the way trans knowledge plays out across various fields and disciplines.

In September 2004 I attended the 6th International Congress on Sex and Gender Diversity: Reflecting Genders, held at the School of Law, Manchester Metropolitan University. Family lawyer, Rachael Wallbank delivered a keynote paper where she analysed the various high profile legal cases featuring transgender people – namely *Re Kevin*.⁵¹ Her objective was to evaluate and compare the nature and quality of the legal and human rights reforms, with proposed and actual anti-discrimination and other legislative reforms (such as those which provide for the reassignment of legal sex).

In order to do this Wallbank drew on scientific findings that located the

brains of transsexual people to be the opposite sex to that of their genitalia, chromosomes and hormones. The published research she drew on was ‘A Sex Difference in the Human Brain and its Relation to Transsexuality’ by J. N. Zhou, M. A. Hofman, L. J. Gooren and D. F. Swaab, written in 1995 (Zhou *et al.* 1995), which remains the chief body of research that calls for the causes of trans to be biologically determined.⁵²

As a lawyer practising in Australia, the cases that Wallbank fights typically concern discrimination of transgender people in the workplace and trans women gaining parental access. In order to achieve positive outcomes for her trans clients, Wallbank told us, she drew on these scientific findings because they position the client as someone with a predetermined medical condition and do away with the understanding of trans as pathological. In response to her keynote paper, her project to further the legitimacy and legal human rights of trans lives was acknowledged, yet delegates raised some concerns as to the various dangers of using such deterministic frameworks to describe *being*, or the condition of *being*, trans.

To contemplate the ‘causes’ of trans is of course from the offset already problematic. One could argue that to explore the ‘why?’ of non-normative behaviour contributes to the production of ‘non-normativity’ in ways that look to advocate (and invisibilise) normativity itself. Indeed, one could argue that simply to ask the question ‘what causes trans?’ implicitly posits *being trans* as ‘bad’ or ‘wrong’. In addition, this approach is vehemently monolithic – understanding the causation of gender non-normativity as biologically determined allocates grand universal laws to what it means to be trans. Doing this does not account for the individual’s experience of *being in the world* or allow a framework for making sense of their own selfhood that is in part drawn from, or ‘caused’ by, cultural, social or psychic life.

Wallbank responded to some of these issues (and I paraphrase her here): ‘In the academy you can deliberate all you want, but in the trenches I need something that wins cases and there is no other theory strong enough that would hold up in a court of law. Besides,’ she added, ‘what else is there?’

This utterance immediately sent signals to me, not only about the ways in which different theories and knowledge products get taken up and used for different ends, but also about how fraught with contradictions the various academic fields are that situate trans knowledge. Here was a scenario in which the arena of law is utilising scientific findings that produce trans subjectivities as biologically

determined (and therefore authentic and essential), in order to achieve – we might agree – positive outcomes for trans people. Meanwhile within queer academic circles, the trans subject had been framed in order to achieve the very opposite – that is to denaturalise the authenticity of gender, to challenge heteronormative gender systems and to think through alternative modes of doing and being.

In *Touching Feeling*, in relation to the ‘natural history’ of HIV and AIDS, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick challenges ‘the fixated question: Is a particular piece of knowledge true?’ (Sedgwick 2003, 124), and asks instead, *what does knowledge do?* My experience at the conference framed for me a need to identify a shift in thinking about the knowledge that abounds within Transgender Studies – to posit instead Sedgwick’s question: ‘What does knowledge do?’ and also, ‘What do particular knowledge products serve?’

In addition, as Transgender Studies is an interdisciplinary academic field, we must ask how might it consolidate these contradictory understandings of the trans subject, and how might we allow for such contradictory self-understandings to come together to form and play across trans collectives and publics? Importantly too, how might we attend to these differences without competing for the ‘top place’, for example asserting the ‘true’ cause of trans subjectivities, which will only result in the valuation of certain trans people as more ‘valid’ than others depending on the discipline or field of knowledge from which you are ‘looking’. Finding the answers to these questions, for me, starts with thinking through the usefulness of trans knowledge.

1.13 The Popular and Determined Transsexual

In order to think about the performative potential of trans knowledge it is necessary to chart something of the noted split within our collectives between transsexuals and other trans people such as those identified as gender queer, gender variant, transgender or cross-dressers (amongst many other interesting self-identified labels⁵³). The former, since it takes its bearing from within a medical framework, often rests on an essentialised authentic position of being either ‘male’ or ‘female’ (Prosser 1998a), whilst the latter have worked discursively to challenge gender norms (Bullough and Bullough 1993; Bornstein 1994, 1998; Garber 1992).

Mainstream documentaries that feature trans subjectivities nearly always concentrate on those who undergo medical intervention.⁵⁴ Typically those trans people who undergo medical intervention are linked to the identity term ‘transsexual’. Indeed transsexual is a word that often appears in the titles of TV documentaries and is certainly used by the voiceovers that drive the documentary narrative. If it is a transsexual narrative that dominates mainstream broadcast documentaries, how are they productive or counterproductive in relation to the forming of trans subjectivities, the regulation of normativity and the technologies of power, systems and institutes? In short: what *work* do visual narratives of transsexuality on popular TV documentaries do?

Indeed, the dominance of the transsexual narratives not only flows through the mainstream documentaries I consider here, but also through the equality legislation in the UK. In 1999 the Sex Discrimination Act was amended to include protection of those ‘who have undergone, intend to undergo and at some time in the past have undergone Gender Reassignment’. The Act states:

Gender Reassignment is a process which is undertaken under medical supervision for the purposes of reassigning a person’s sex by changing physiological or other characteristics of sex and includes any part of such a process. (SDA Section 2a Medical)

A Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) under the Gender Recognition Act 2004 gives full legal recognition to a person who has undergone gender reassignment. This Act allows those trans people who have been *diagnosed* as having Gender Identity Disorder (or Gender Dysphoria) by at least two psychiatrists, to be administered a new birth certificate, in which they are identified as their ‘new’ sex, and with which they are legally recognised as that sex in all aspects of life, including their entitlement to marriage or civil partnership.

In addition Gender Reassignment is listed in the Equalities Act 2010 as a protected characteristic, which means that those people who are working, studying and accessing public services are protected from discrimination and harassment if they are intending to undergo, are undergoing, or at some time in the past have undergone Gender Reassignment. For the purposes of the Equalities Act, however, removing the requirement for medical supervision has changed the definition of

Gender Reassignment. It means that you can self-identify as a person who is undergoing, has undergone or intends to undergo gender reassignment without having access to medical services in relation to your gender identity. In addition you do not have to be over 18 to be protected. This muddier but arguably more open piece of legislation has in part unfixed itself from a set of understandings and processes that are medically framed. Nonetheless the term ‘gender reassignment’ continues to resonate within a medical framework of *being* trans.

It does appear, then, that those trans people that identify with the term ‘gender reassignment’, as well as those who wish to permanently live in the ‘opposite’ gender to that which they are assigned at birth, do have more legal rights, and for this reason there is a splitting of sorts within trans collectives and political agendas. Transsexuality therefore notably creates a dominant narrative whilst other ways of being trans go unheard in mainstream culture and across the general public. It is of course no coincidence that transsexualism (in medical and legal terms) reinforces a binary approach to gender, in its identification of being of either ‘male’ or ‘female’.

For these reasons transsexualism gets a bad press in queer circles, particularly because its narrative dominates mainstream cultural items. Alternatively more kudos is attributed to trans subjects in the queer world, where they can be utilised to challenge the hetero- and gender-normative. Across trans collectives there are, then, various power struggles and political wranglings for different kinds of validation in different scenes, contexts and spheres. Whilst this split exists in *being* trans and in what it means to be trans, it is also important to add that trans people themselves may not be clearly situated or situate themselves in one camp or the other.

In ‘reality’ trans people cut across multiple scenes of legitimation and occupy multiple spaces of trans collectives. For example, whilst I have undergone ‘gender reassignment’ in conventionally understood terms, I am also committed to a queer politics and I frequent queer spaces. In addition, despite engaging in medical systems, I do not necessarily take an authentic or essentialist view of gender or subscribe to the notion that transsexualism is a medical condition with which one is born.

It could be argued – within academic discourse at least – that the on-going debates that position identities either in the constructivist (cultural) or the essential (natural) are tired, over polarised and reductionist. Yet, there still seems to be a lack

of resolution in more popular debates around gender and sexuality regarding these positions. Next, drawing on another anecdote, I wish to exemplify the ‘articulations’ and the ‘site of meaning’ of which Hall writes. Here I wish to show how trans knowledge plays out – not only across academic fields as I demonstrated in the Wallbanks example – but also across the various collectives, platforms and publics within popular culture.

In the *Hecklers Debate* on Radio 4, broadcast on 1 August 2007, radical feminist Julie Bindel, freelance journalist for the *Guardian* and founder of Justice for Women, argued that sex change operations constitute unnecessary mutilation. The other members of the panel included Press for Change founder, and Professor of Law at Manchester Metropolitan University, Dr Stephen Whittle.

This debate immediately became heavily caught up in the dichotomy of biological sex and gender roles in society as Bindel argued that we should ‘get rid of gender roles’ rather than reinscribe them through sex change surgery. She also spoke of the dangers of searching for the biological causes of sexuality (and gender identity) since finding such ‘answers’ may lead to the eradication of non-heterosexual subjectivities through the carrying out of abortions. If such *beingness* can be detected in-utero as ‘already there’ there may be a desire – for parents, the medical world and society more generally – to exterminate it. Instead Bindel makes the argument that sexuality is a choice.⁵⁵ Indeed her arguments against transsexuals who ‘parody traditional masculine and feminine styles of dress’ have provoked outrage from across trans collectives. Such a strong reaction is indicative of the controversy around the politics of social constructivism and ideas that *being trans* may be brought about through being in the world.

In November 2008 Bindel was nominated ‘Journalist of the Year’ in the Stonewall Awards. For Stonewall – a lesbian, gay and bisexual lobbying and campaigning organisation renowned for not including transgender in its remit – to include in its nominations a person deemed ‘transphobic’ proved controversial, as one might expect. Such a controversy caused huge discussion through a Facebook group, which gained 551 members and a petition which gained 433 signatures.⁵⁶ Part of this controversy, no doubt, is wrapped up in the popular understandings of social constructivism and the idea that being trans is something ‘chosen’.

In fact Bindel herself argues controversially that she ‘chose’ or ‘chooses’ to be a lesbian. The performances of this debate from Bindel, here and elsewhere,

demonstrate the ‘messiness’ of popular culture, showing the collapsing of biological essentialism and social constructivism debates into those of agency and freewill. Whilst these discourses are well rehearsed within feminist criticism, Gender and Sexuality Studies and in particular in the work of Judith Butler (1991, 1993), they play out and are taken up very differently across popular culture.⁵⁷

What Bindel foregrounds is the unhelpfulness and potential danger of determinist arguments of selfhood. At the same time a ‘pro-trans’ counter-argument draws on biological determinism in order to validate the beingness of trans as something authentic and ‘true’. In popular culture, wrong body discourse and mind/body splits continue to work to produce knowledge for trans people obtaining their legitimising goals. Judith Butler’s thinking here seems to prove less useful. To bring my introduction to a close I come to the importance of the mode of visibility within popular culture and how it plays out in and across TV documentaries to form and perform trans knowledge.

1.14 Gendered Intelligence

At this point I will mention briefly the organisation Gendered Intelligence, which is a not-for-profit Community Interest Company, established in 2008. It was co-founded by myself and Catherine McNamara after completing the Sci:identity Project (a £50,000 project funded by the Wellcome Trust in 2006–7). Our mission is to increase understandings of gender diversity by creative ways and means. Our vision is of a world where people are no longer constrained by narrow perceptions and expectations of gender, and where diverse gender expressions are visible and valued. Gendered Intelligence wants to play its part in encouraging the cultural shift needed to gain understandings of trans and gender variant lives. We work predominantly with the trans community and those who impact on trans lives; we particularly specialise in supporting young trans and non-binary people aged 11–25.

Our aims at Gendered Intelligence are to increase the quality of trans people’s life experiences, especially those of young trans people; to increase the visibility of trans people’s lives and to raise awareness of trans people’s needs, especially those of young trans people, across the UK and beyond; to contribute to the creation of community cohesion across the whole of the trans community and the wider LGBT

community throughout the UK; and to engage the wider community in understanding the diversity and complexity of gender.

I discuss Gendered Intelligence in more detail in Chapter 7, Section 7.4.

1.15 Trans in Visual Culture

While deep rooted in an understanding of the epistemological denaturalization of inherited categories and subjects... these new objects of inquiry go beyond analysis towards figuring out new and alternative languages which reflect the contemporary awareness by which we live out our lives. (Rogoff 1998, 16)

It is the questions that we ask that produce the field of inquiry and not some body of materials which determines what questions need to be posed to it. (Rogoff 2002, 16)

We are accustomed, in Western Society, to thinking about knowledge through metaphors of light – of illumination; of enlightenment; of making things visible; in effect, of shining a beacon (like a searchlight, or TV’s electron scan beam) of truth. These tropes, while applied to all sorts of ‘knowing’ (to a notion of knowledge in general), have been particularly significant in relation to knowing sexuality, especially given the appeals to visibility that have structured most recent LGBTQ movements. (Lynne Joyrich in Davis and Needham 2009, 16)

As I draw this introductory chapter to a close, I do so by consolidating some thinking about how Visual Culture as an academic field helpfully frames and positions my thinking. Visual Culture is crucial to the production and productivity of trans knowledge and I am specifically interested in how trans knowledge is produced as it utilises visual means as part of its performance. In ‘Studying Visual Culture’ Rogoff writes of ‘opening up the field of vision as an arena in which cultural meanings get constituted’ (Rogoff 2002, 24) and so bringing certain objects into view can offer different approaches to epistemological projects. In this thesis I wish to consider the mass visibility of trans knowledge within circuits of distribution that we can identify particularly as ‘popular’ and mainstream.

Visual Culture – a rather new discipline – draws an array of objects into its own field of vision, all of which may also belong to the already defined disciplines of Film Studies, TV Studies, Advertising, Fashion, Art History, Architecture and Urban

Landscapes, Mass Media and Communications, Theatre and Performing Arts among others. As an interdisciplinary field, Visual Culture has, in part, looked to flatten out the hierarchies of visual production, not least in art history discourse. According to Mirzoeff:

In European universities, this use of visual culture is substantially a critique of art history, whereas in the global South and the Southern hemisphere, it is often a means to level the intellectual playing-field between indigenous and European art practices. (Mirzoeff 2013, xxx)

Visual Culture is necessarily inter- or trans-disciplinary and cross-methodological as it describes the importance of intertextuality *between* visual objects and the knowledge that pertains to them across scenes of cultures – or publics – rather than considering them only as particular ‘types’ of objects. For this reason I place my thesis within the field of Visual Culture, rather than in any specific discipline such as TV and Media Studies or Mass Communication Studies.

The between-ness and across-ness that Visual Culture takes into account contributes fundamentally to a politics of taste, value, identity and selfhood as these scenes of visual consumption place (and displace) meanings and knowledge (Rogoff 2002). In addition, the discipline of Visual Culture is not only interested in objects that contain or have as part of their formation a relationship to *being seen* and to the visual, but is also concerned with the interrelation of objects to those subjectivities that see them (or indeed do not see them).

The public sphere is as important as the objects themselves, as is the production of meanings that are performed, circulated and distributed within the act of looking. In short the field of Visual Cultures is concerned with the production of selfhood *through a visuality* and, as I have stipulated earlier, the visual, and more specifically the visual narrative, is fundamental when it comes to knowing what it means to be trans.

In her essay ‘Studying Visual Culture’, Rogoff considers the ‘psychodynamics of spectatorship’ and the ‘power relations within culture’, the values (aesthetic and other) as well as – and most importantly for me here – Barthes’ description of inter-disciplinarity, which is ‘not as surrounding a chosen object with numerous modes of scientific inquiry, but rather as a constitution of a new object of

knowledge'. Rogoff seizes a particular opportunity to think politically and critically through the realm of the visual, proposing that we must ask: 'who is privileged within the regime of specularly?' As Rogoff makes clear it is the questions that are integral to the knowledge production rather than the objects or materialities themselves. My questions in this thesis are: what happens when we *see* trans?, what *trans* do we see? and what does *seeing* trans do?

The realm of the visual is integral to *being* trans. The photograph and the moving image are crucial media for exploring trans subjectivities and trans knowledge and contributing to the field of Transgender Studies. The stories that abound in an array of formats such as paperbacks, broadsheets and tabloid newspapers, magazines, grass-roots and community projects, all routinely feature the photographed or pictured trans subject. We can typically think of the 'before and after' shots which work to affectively draw in the reader and offer a visceral narrative of 'reality' which often foregrounds bodily adaptation and questions notions of identity and selfhood.

Certainly visual documenting through the use of photographs and video recording is a common practice of many trans people. Surgical procedures and the effects of hormones are large enough events in a trans person's life to warrant the same attention and memento-gathering as other life rituals. Similarly, experimenting with dress and personas are often captured by the camera and shared with online networks. Indeed, photographs and video diaries chart the change and the rite of passage which transitioning itself offers. This culture of image-based representations amongst the trans community appeals to those, artists and non-artists alike, who wish to go further with their stories and create thicker descriptions of their experiences. The growth of YouTube, tumblr, Facebook and a range of other social networking sites has created a global platform for trans people to share these stories and visual materials with a growing and interested audience.

Rogoff asks: 'In what political discourses can we understand looking and returning the gaze as an act of political resistance?' Likewise, here I ask: 'What political projects emerge as a result of a trans person, or a collective of trans people, viewing popular TV documentaries that feature trans people?' This produces what I will term a trans public, which considers the circularity of text, consumption, readership and knowledge production through such trans viewership and trans collectives. Consequently I ask: 'What kind of politics emerges when such viewing is

not particularly taken into consideration in the making of such films?’ That is to say, these films are not for ‘us’ and yet ‘we’ view them nonetheless.

If Rogoff asks: ‘Can we actually participate in the pleasure and identify with the images produced by culturally specific groups to which we do not belong?’, how does this question play out if we are to think that the main participants of these TV documentaries are non-trans people who make the documentaries and a non-trans audience who are licensed to watch? Where and what are the discourses between the trans subjects that are featured and the trans viewers that watch?

In Chapter 2 (‘Methodology’) – I explore the various methods put in place by this introductory chapter in order to achieve the established goals. I hope it will become clear that this thesis is organised around my own experiences as a trans person and my own engagement with an array of trans collectives and publics. Consequently, I offer a queer methodology and an autoethnographic framework to this thesis in order to capture the scene of a production of selfhood that is ‘trans’ in the face of these TV knowledge products. It seems equally necessary to employ a methodology that pays attention to these knowledge products in ways that continue to critique dominant models of knowledge production and to question the various ‘rigorous’ approaches to obtaining knowledge.

Chapter 3 historicises and contextualises the documentary genre and the rise of the popular documentary with the hybridisation of the infotainment TV product. The noted shift in factual programming and the consumption of television over the last thirty years certainly makes visible the narratives of transsexual experiences. Chapter 4 considers the gravity of the condition of being trans and how performances of the ‘serious’ transsexual produce particular notions and knowledge about what it means to be trans. A key twist to this idea that being trans is ‘serious’ comes about when popular TV documentaries themselves fail to be ‘serious’ modes of production and consequently offer an impression of an (un)bearable ‘lightness’ in being trans. Chapter 5 looks specifically at explanations of being trans for the purposes of mass viewership. I examine how scientific research is posited here and I question how the production of ‘scientific’ knowledge comes to be deemed as authoritative and ‘proper’. Chapter 6 explores ideas of value in relation to these infotainment documentaries that feature trans people. It looks at taste projects and draws on theories of ‘trash’ culture to identify valuations of such documentaries as ‘bad’. Here, I turn my attention to the ways in which ‘low’ and ‘trashy’ items are

productive for trans subjects and how this plays out across trans publics.

I conclude my thesis in Chapter 7 by consolidating the particularities and politics of making trans visible. I also take the opportunity to think through my own knowledge project – this thesis – and reflect on how sustained critical thinking has exposed me to the systems, institutions and machines of normativity, which has triggered a motivation to upset, trouble and ‘queer’ the various power structures that are tightly embedded in the realm of knowledge and *what it means to know*. I consider how popular documentaries that feature trans subjects play their part in producing a riled, outraged and vehemently politicised trans public – a trans public that produces discourse and sociability across an array of networks; that calls to arms, effects change and pursues productive exchanges out of, from and through trans knowledge.

Notes to Chapter 1

¹ The BFI database offers the following synopsis:

Part one: ‘The first of a two-part programme which examines the plight of five Britons who suffer from gender dysphoria, men who are convinced they should be female and women who feel they should be male. The five featured are female to male transsexuals who fly to Amsterdam and Utrecht as they prepare for the mental and physical upheaval of hormone treatment and surgery.’ (<http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/title/543351?view=synopsis>)

Part two: ‘The second of two programmes about female to male transsexuals following a party from Britain to the Netherlands to meet Europe’s largest and most experienced gender reassignment team. A top plastic surgeon describes to them the surgical options available and demonstrates how successful the outcome can be. Once the group is home it is time to decide how to readjust their lives.’ (<http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/title/544273?view=synopsis>)

² For discussions around the behaviours of TV consumption see Glynn 2000; Couldry et al. 2010 and Fiske 2011.

³ ‘Trans’ is a term I use to mean those people whose assigned sex at birth does not sit easily or match their sense of self. It includes transsexual or transgender people and cross-dressers, as well as gender variant and gender queer people and anyone who challenges gender norms. Historically transsexualism is a clinical word, coming from the German term ‘Transsexualismus’, which was coined by Magnus Hirschfeld in an article ‘Die Intersexuelle Konstitution’ in *Jarhbuch fuer sexuelle Zwischenstufen* (1923). ‘Transgender’ – a term stemming from the US trans community in the nineteen sixties – initially described trans people who did not undergo medical intervention, but crossdressed all of the time (Kotula 2002; Ekins and King 2004; Stryker 2006). In the late nineties Leslie Feinberg used ‘transgender’ as an umbrella term to politicise all gender-variant people and to offer a united political project against oppression (<http://www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/transgender.html>). Where transgender is used as an umbrella term, I use ‘trans’ as a more contemporary version. ‘Gender queer’ describes a person who identifies their gender as outside of, or other to, the gender binary of ‘male’ or ‘female’ and is aligned with a queer politics which looks to challenge gender- and hetero-normativity.

⁴ An interesting project, Open Barbers, is a hairdressing service for all genders and sexualities in the London area of England. They ‘offer a personalised and warm haircutting experience with a queer and trans friendly attitude... [and] seek to promote the diversity of identities in society and celebrate people’s appearance in the way they wish to be seen.’ (http://openbarbers.co.uk/?page_id=7). Also see <http://www.dapperq.com/2011/09/open-barbers-is-styling-genderqueer-london/>

⁵ For the purposes of this thesis I use ‘*being trans*’ to describe a trans subject. This does not mean that I am subscribing to a notion of ‘being’ in an essential sense, but rather that I intend to mean a being-ness of those people whose selfhood, subjectivity or identity formation is lived or experienced in relation to the term ‘trans’.

⁶ Butler writes, ‘My own thinking has been influenced by the “new Gender Politics” that has emerged in recent years, a combination of movements concerned with transgender, transsexuality, Intersex, and their complex relations to feminist and queer theory’” (Butler 2004, 4)

⁷ See Hodgetts and Chamberlain 1999.

⁸ In the documentary it is referred to as ‘The Portman Clinic, Tavistock’ but the current Gender Identity Development Service is part of the Tavistock and Portman Clinic, NHS Trust.

⁹ This performance of permanence is also required if anyone wishes to receive a Gender Recognition Certificate. The trans person must pledge to remain in his or her ‘new gender until death.’ See Gender Recognition Act 2004.

¹⁰ *Enough Man* (Luke Woodward USA 2005), *A Circus in New York* (Frederique Pressman France 2002), *Gender Trouble* (Roz Mortimer UK 2002) and *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton’s Cafeteria* (Victor Silverman and Susan Stryker USA 2006). See the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival archive: <http://www.bfi.org.uk/archive-collections>

¹¹ See: www.FTMLondon.org.uk

¹² Hird also writes about the accustomed sexism and patriarchal framings of such investigations on these people as effeminacy and female identities on male bodiedness was construed as a 'failure', whilst any expressions of masculinity or male identities on female bodiedness were considered by von Kraftt-Ebing as proficient individuals (Hird 2002).

¹³ See Jay Prosser 1998b.

¹⁴ A documentary made as part of the Horizon Series in the UK called the *The Boy Who was Turned Into a Girl* (2002 Editor: Andrew Cohen BBC2 UK) focused on this story. Despite this narrative contributing significantly to transgender discourse the documentary does not form part of my object of study as Reimer did not self-identify as transgender.

¹⁵ Also see: <http://www.isna.org/faq/reimer>.

¹⁶ I draw more substantially on this book later on in this Introduction where I look at Autobiographies.

¹⁷ At the same time homosexuality was declassified as a psychological disorder and taken out of the DSM III. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's, 'How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay,' in *Tendencies* 1993

¹⁸ In addition, in the UK the classification of transsexualism in the International Classification of Diseases (currently version 10) is also used as a diagnostic tool by mental health practitioners (psychiatrists and psychologists) See: <http://www.wlmht.nhs.uk/gi/gender-identity-clinic/>

¹⁹ See: <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1968767,00.html> and http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/TS/News/FR/Transsexuality_will_no_longer_be_classified_mental_illness_in_France.html

²⁰ <http://www.wpath.org/>

²¹ See Moniq Witig 1992 and Teresa de Lauretis 1989.

²² Butler is quoting Nietzsche's 1887 *On the Genealogy of Morals*

²³ Prosser considers the artist Orlan who famously called herself a female to female transsexual, 'an image trapped in the body of a woman' (Prosser 1998, 64).

²⁴ Halberstam states: 'Conversation rather than mastery indeed seems to offer one very covert way of being in relation to another form of being and knowing without seeking to measure that life modality by the standards that are external to it.' (Halberstam 2011, 12)

²⁵ We could certainly think, for instance, of the relevance for other 'minority' groups, such as the way race is articulated – and studied – through many different discourses and academic disciplines, in a manner that could be seen to be analogous to trans. For instance, race is established through varying discourses that set out to achieve particular ends. We might think of race as genetic or epidermal; as cultural, social or psychoanalytical. We can recall Fanon's noted 1967 text *Black Skins, White Mask*. Critical Race theory has been brought into the realm of the visual and the art world, particularly in the work of Adrian Piper, as well as race as performative, where we can also think of the works of E. Patrick Johnson. In addition race as a category itself has been considered something to be resisted, transcended or even done away with. See Paul Gilroy's *Between Camps* (Allen Lane 2000).

²⁶ See Appendix 1 for my filmography of my historic period of 1979-2010.

²⁷ A paper delivered at the conference 'Queer Sexualities', Sydney, Australia, Tuesday 12th February 2013.

²⁸ She continues: 'In the United Kingdom, transgender characters have appeared in a mainstream prime time television soap opera (*Coronation Street*), a reality television show (*Big Brother*), advertisements for the soft drink "Irn Bru" and in the lyrics of pop songs (such as the Welsh pop group Goldie Lookin' Chain's 'Your Mother's got a Penis'). Stories about transgender individuals are often in the mainstream press (though often they

are sensational stories of transsexual individuals who have changed their minds about their reassignment surgery).’ (Cowan, 2009)

²⁹ Likewise Susan Appleton offers thinking around trans knowledge in popular culture in relation to legislation by considering the Intersex character from the popular novel *Middlesex* in Appleton 2005. For more critical thinking on the film *Transamerica* see Niall Richardson’s *Transgressive Bodies* (Ashgate 2010).

³⁰ See: McCarthy 2001; Heller 2011; Kooijman 2005; Miller 2005; Stadler 2005; Muñoz 2005; Straayer and Waugh 2005; Farr and Nathalie 2008; and Becker 1998. Several of the chapters in *Queer TV Theories, Histories, Politics* 2010 (ed Glynn Davis and Gary Needham) also draw heavily on *Ellen, the L Word, Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* as well as *Six Feet Under*

³¹ Lameck and Witeck, 2011; *Women Gain Visibility in Gay Ad Images*. Valarie Seckler, *WWD: Women's Wear Daily*, 193, 131 (June 20, 2007); Finkle 2005; Witeck 2007; O’Barr 2012.

³² *Back Stage* 10/20/2011, Vol. 52 Issue 42, p2-3

³³ See: http://www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/unseen_on_screen_web_final.pdf

³⁴ See: http://www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/tuned_out_pdf_1.pdf

³⁵ A small study has been carried out by Trans Media Watch, which I will look at later in this thesis, is about trans people in the UK engaging and consuming media items that feature trans people.

³⁶ Philips looks at *Some Like it Hot* (Billy Wilder 1959), *Tootsie* (Sydney Pollack 1982), *Mrs Doubtfire* (Chris Columbus 1993), *Victor/Victoria*, (Blake Edwards 1982), *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock 1960), *Dressed to Kill* (Brian De Palma 1980), *Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme 1991), *Cherry Falls* (Geoffrey Wright 2000), *Boys Don’t Cry* (Kimberley Pierce 1999), *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan 1992) and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (Stephan Elliot 1994). My own critical review of Philips’s book can be found in *Screen* 49:1 Spring 2008.

³⁷ Reed, 2009.

³⁸ Milliken 1998b.

³⁹ *Paris is Burning* was broadcast as part of BBC Arena in 1990. The executive producers were Anthony Wall and Nigel Finch

⁴⁰ See: Rojek 2001.

⁴¹ Meyerowitz 2006b. Other works on Jorgensen include Skidmore 2011.

⁴² The *Observer* article continues: ‘For Christine Burns of transgender political lobbying group and educational organisation Press for Change (PfC), Nadia has emerged as an unlikely role model: “I never in my wildest dreams imagined that after all these years it would be a big-breasted golden-hearted Portuguese nicotine junkie who really turned people’s ideas about us upside down”’ (Barbara Ellen, *The Observer*, 22nd August 2004). Similarly, Lynne Jones, MP and Chair of the Parliamentary Forum on Transsexualism, is quoted in the same *Observer* article as saying: ‘The Big Brother result indicates people haven’t got the kind of prejudices that would in the past have prevented them voting for a transsexual housemate. They’re just voting for her as a woman in her own right. The fact of her being transsexual is not important’. Both Burns and Jones optimistically suggest a cultural sea-change in attitudes towards transgender people. Against the backdrop of the Gender Recognition Act (GRA), then, it might be tempting to deduce that citizenship rights for trans men and women have now been gained.

⁴³ Thank you to Dr Pullen for a copy of this paper which is currently unpublished. Pullen’s published works include: ‘LGBT Transnational Identity and the Media’ (Pullen 2012) and ‘LGBT Identity and Online New Media’ (Pullen 2010).

⁴⁴ This documentary was renamed *Tears, Tiaras and Transsexuals* in the UK

⁴⁵ I will pay closer attention to the series *A Change of Sex* in Chapter 1 and draw on a scholarly article by Roger Silverstone (1984).

⁴⁶ Pullen puts quotation marks around the word ‘equality’ but doesn’t go into detail as to what he means when he write this.

⁴⁷ And if I were to think back to the screening of *Enough Man* at the LLGFF 2007 I would note this scene as distinct from the working-class families that are featured on television. I expand on this in Chapter 6, when I explore taste, values and class.

⁴⁸ *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (Stryker and Aizura 2013) addresses this as it takes a more global look at transgender lives and discourse. See in particular the chapters: ‘Thinking Figurations Otherwise – Reframing Dominant Knowledges of Sex and Gender Variance in Latin America’ by Vek Lewis; ‘Transportation – Translating Filipino and Filipino American Tomboy Masculinities through Global Migration and Seafaring’ by Kale Bantigue Fajardo; and ‘Shuttling Between Bodies and Borders – Iranian Transsexual Refugees and the Politics of Rightful Killing’ by Sima Shaksari (in Stryker and Aizura 2013).

⁴⁹ In the UK we have seen more engagement with government bodies and departments, for instance the Government Equalities Office produced A Transgender Action Plan in 2011. See: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/85498/transgender-action-plan.pdf. Equally, across Europe momentum has been building. See: Swiebel and Van der Veur 2009; Walker 2001; and as regards the European Parliament, see the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association for European activities: <http://ilga.org/> and <http://ilga.org/ilga/en/article/nv2zIV31VA>

⁵⁰ Stuart Hall in an interview with Les Back, in David Scott, ‘Stuart Hall’s ethics’ (*Small Axe* 9.1, 2005, 1-16). See also: http://www.darkmatter101.org/site/2010/11/28/stuart-hall-in-conversation-with-les-back-audio/#foot_2

⁵¹ Other cases analysed by Wallbank include: *Corbett v Corbett* (otherwise Ashley) [1971] P83 Attorney-General v Otahuhu, Family Court [1995] 1 NZLR 603, *W v W* [2001] 2 WLR 673, *Bellinger v Bellinger* [2001] 2 FLR 1048, *Goodwin v The United Kingdom* (European Court of Human Rights Application no. 28957/95; judgment delivered 11 July 2002) (“Goodwin”), *I v The United Kingdom* (European Court of Human Rights Application no. 25680/94; judgment delivered 11 July 2002), (“I”) and the Marriage of Kantaras case number 98-5375CA 511998DR00537WS, 2003 (Florida) (“Kantaras”)

⁵² I will draw further on this research in Chapter 5, where I explore more fully ideas of causality in relation to science and biological determinism.

⁵³ At the Trans Community Conference, convened by Gendered Intelligence in 2008, 123 of 137 delegates (89.8% response) disclosed their gender identity. Some of them described themselves as “Temporary trans-woman soon to become woman”, “Transwoman” “MtF”, “Woman with trans history”, one “ex-trans woman”, “Unusually gendered female”, “Female (happen to be transsexed)”, “Transman”, “Transboy”, “Trans (male-ish)”, “Tranny”, Genderqueer/androgynous”, “FtM”, “Non-existent”, “trans”, “Just me” “Tom-Boy” “Questioning” “Transgender person of colour”, “Constantly changing”, “Generally unsure”, “Ft? (as opposed to FtM)”, “Human”, “Male-to-Unknown” , “Gendervariant”, “Genderfucker”, “Androgynous Dandy”, “Genderblender”, “Male to female crossdresser”, “Transvestite”. (See Trans Community Conference Report 2008, www.genderedintelligence.co.uk)

⁵⁴ The exception here is Grayson Perry’s *Why Men Wear Frocks* (2005 UK), which considers the cross-dressing community and looks to make a distinction between transsexuals and transvestites. In a series on Sky One in January 2008, about wives, the first documentary was called ‘Transvestite Wives’. There are other representations of cross-dressers or gender variant people on mainstream television, however these tend to be celebrities such as Pete Burns or Eddie Izzard, rather than documentaries featuring ‘real’ people.

⁵⁵ See: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/dec/14/gayrights.gender>

⁵⁶ To view the petition see: <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/Stonewall1/signatures.html>. The protest outside the Victoria and Albert Museum, which gathered 100-150 people, was deemed the largest public trans protest in the UK. For one pictorial representation from Queer Youth Network see: http://current.com/items/89513316/stonewall_was_a_riot.htm; also, for a blogger reflection some years later, see: <http://transactivist.wordpress.com/tag/natacha-kennedy/>.

⁵⁷ Here, by revisiting and investigating sex, Butler asks us to think about matter (nature, body, biology) performatively; to perceive materiality as a 'site of inscription', as a temporal space where matter 'congeals' through repetitive acts, once again 'congealing without congealed' (Butler 1993, 38).

Methodology

2.1 The 'Auto' Motive: Queer Methodologies and Autoethnographic Practice

A queer methodology, in a way, is a scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behaviour. The queer methodology attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion towards disciplinary coherence. (Halberstam 1998, 13)

Newton is no hand that writes and never faceless, but neither is she the traditional participant-observer who immerses herself in another culture in order to 'learn' it and represent it. Newton is always of and in the cultures she studies. (Halberstam's foreword to Newton 2000, xv)

In this thesis I carry out close readings and offer a textual and historical analysis of popular TV documentaries that feature trans people. I do this in order to establish meanings produced by and attributed to those knowledge products, to place these products within a historical context and to specify my idea of trans knowledge. I also contextualize my thinking with various theoretical and scholarly writing. Where relevant, I will draw on my own accounts of the various conferences, community events, projects and other platforms that I have attended or that I have been involved in producing or convening.

In addition to those cultural spaces and publics that I occupy, I carry out a series of screenings where I invite my friends and colleagues to my house to watch the documentaries and to discuss them. Like Halberstam I am 'magpie-esque' with my findings; I am a 'scavenger' drawing 'bits' of knowledge and 'bits' of narrative together to form my argument. This methodological approach stands in contrast to an empirical scientific approach to a studied subject and this is, of course, entirely purposeful. Knowledge that is brought about through my project is done so through informal exchanges, sharing and forming 'trans publics'.

In *An Archive of Feeling*, Cvetkovich tells us of her ambivalent relationship to the ethnographic practice she carries out in the achievement of her archive. She states:

Uncertain of my own answers to these questions, I decided to consult with others.
(Cvetkovich 2003, 159)

Like her, I approach this ‘unfamiliar methodology from the vantage point of a cultural critic accustomed to working with an already existing archive rather than creating one’ (Cvetkovich 2003, 165). This chapter aims to attribute the autoethnographic framework that I offer in my investigation for the purpose of gauging the reception of trans knowledge by trans viewers. As part of this thesis I have asked: *How do TV documentaries that feature trans people contribute to the formation of those specific subjects who describe themselves or their experiences as trans?*

In pursuing this, I am compelled to go beyond (or outside) my own readings of these documentaries and to engage with other trans viewers. Moreover, in doing so my approach is to consider these encounters not only as a site of collective, and sometimes mutual, readings, but as interactions and performances themselves, that amongst and between us *make public* and produce new knowledge and discourse. Such ideas of ‘publics’ are integral to this thesis and give reason for my particular autoethnographic methodology as well as giving reason for the TV screenings that I carry out with other trans people in my home.¹

In the foreword to Esther Newton’s ethnographic classic *Margaret Mead Made Me Gay: Personal Essays, Public Ideas*, Halberstam draws on Judith Butler’s ‘uncharacteristic moment of personal confession’ that she foregrounds in her article ‘Imitation and Gender Insubordination’.² Butler details how, as a young person, she experienced an everyday querying of the ‘realness’ of her being (Newton 2000, ix–x). In reading Esther Newton, Butler’s own ‘realisation’ is that ‘drag is not an imitation or a copy of some true and prior gender; according to Newton, drag enacts the very structure of impersonation by which any gender is assumed’ (Butler 1991, 21 in Newton 2000, x). Halberstam draws on Butler as an example of the importance of the ‘personal’ and the ‘theoretical’ coming together, ‘pick[ing] their way to

theoretical understandings through their own histories of unbelonging' (Newton 2000, x).

I too draw from a personal motivation and need to reflect on my forming selfhood in a context of gender and heteronormativity in order to establish my theoretical project. In addition, it is not only my own forming self, but the collectives or communities of those forming selves who describe themselves as trans and gender variant, and who similarly think of and form themselves in a world that establishes us as unreal, perverse or shameful. This 'us', or trans collective, that I talk of in the face of normative intensity is crucial to this thesis. Halberstam alludes to Newton's erotic relationship with those in the 'field', and through this shifts the practices of her discipline. Halberstam states:

For Newton, the best informants, in the end, are not simply those people who give her the most information, they are loved ones with whom she constructs worlds and creates knowledge. (Newton 2000, xv)

My methods, then, are employed in order to achieve a knowledge product, formed *through* the intimate encounter of watching television with friends, colleagues and people I have known for some time. At each screening we watched a documentary together and would follow up with informal discussion lasting approximately one hour. These conversations would be recorded and I would transcribe them later.³ Whilst watching the documentary alongside my fellow viewers I organised some questions that I hoped would allow conversation to flow. In these discussions I did not simply occupy the role of a passive listener, but alongside everyone else I offered my own thoughts about the films and drew on my own experiences. I was initially interested to find out from other trans people how, or if, the narratives that featured in the documentaries might weave into their own narratives; how they might be informed by the journeys, decisions and stories performed by trans people on TV. Furthermore, I wondered if any trans viewer might take on board the various arguments and rhetoric around causality and consider why *being* trans exists or indeed ask the question, 'why am I trans?' More importantly I was interested in the critical encounter with the TV product and to reflect on what these discussions achieved.

The reasons people had for attending my screenings were no doubt multiple. Some were keen to see specific documentaries that they had not seen for a long time, and wished to revisit them, spark their memories and take part in discussion. Others had been sad to miss them when they had been televised and were happy to receive another opportunity to watch them. Some of these trans people were my friends and probably wanted to support me in my own research, whilst others may have come simply for more social or communal reasons. They were all people I had encountered through shared projects and collaborations, or whom I had come across on a regular basis through my grass-roots community work.⁴

I was keen not to produce a generic and overall ‘trans reading’ of these TV documentaries, but to discuss between us our thoughts, experiences and memories around and through these documentaries. This was not a hand-picked group, nor was it diverse and representative of a wider trans collective, and I note that this is problematic as perspectives are certainly missed. Yet my own approach was not to be quite so scientific. I would not be a neutral, objective researcher but myself. We were not in a laboratory but in my home. If my project aimed to challenge grand universal arguments about what it means to be trans, my methodology would need to reflect that and so aimed to generate knowledge through a ‘local’ and specific set of experiences with a small group of individuals.

My wish was to form a set of opportunities that might evoke in the viewer any particular memories, feelings and stories that came out of, or started from, having watched these TV documentaries. I was interested in the conversations, the discussions and the exchange of thoughts between us. I had the idea that such exchanges might bring about something that had not been thought prior to these moments and that collectively we might produce new trans knowledge between us.

Autoethnographic practice has considered the complexity of the relationship between the ‘people’ as an object of study and the position of the researcher/ethnographer/artist (Newton 2000; Foster 1995). In order to flesh out the logic around my engaging in autoethnographic practice as part of my methodology, I wish to detail next the key discussions around these practices, as well as the ways in which they may play out ethically, logistically and reflexively.

2.2 Locating Ethnography after the Postcolonial Turn

[T]here is the assumption that this other is always outside, and more, that this alterity is the primary point of subversion of dominant culture. [Also] there is the assumption that if the invoked artist is not perceived as socially and/or culturally other, he or she has but limited access to this transformative alterity, and, more, that if he or she is perceived as other, he or she has automatic access to it. (Foster 1995, 302)

Historically, conventional models of ethnography, like conventional models of documentary, have used an empirical approach to gaining knowledge of other cultures and phenomena in places far beyond the Western world. Such empirical approaches adopt the standpoint that the ‘nature’ of the object studied (mostly indigenous peoples) sits outside and separate from the identity, viewpoint and cultural framing of the ethnographer. What appears (in the form of written and visual materials) is the impression of a particular objectivity, neutrality and distance from the subject matter, whilst the Western lens through which the ethnographer sees, records and writes, bears a particular set of cultural values that go unnoticed.

Visually and linguistically we see and read how such ethnographic approaches have certain voyeuristic characteristics, evoking a sense of being the outsider looking in on this exotic and different world. Most typically, in visual terms, this appears as the ‘fly-on-the-wall’ documentary mode, in which the filmmaker only presents what is happening and displays little of his or her own intervention in the field. The choices that the filmmaker makes in postproduction – the editing process for sound, the juxtaposition of shots and scenes, all of which construct the narrative – are necessarily surreptitious. Similarly, through the use of certain technologies, methodologies and clever performances, the ethnographer’s identity is rendered invisible and the object of study appears to sit alone in and of itself. In performative terms, the repetition of such acts constitutes ‘ethnographic practice’ and performatively produces the ethnographer as a seemingly integrated entity, rooted in a specific cultural value system that gains power through its unmarkedness.⁵

Western ethnography and ethnographic film-making has until recently been steeped in colonialism. However, a postcolonial turn has challenged and critiqued such practices in order to create alternative stories to those of the dominant discourse.⁶

Russell tells us:

Ethnography is the branch of anthropology concerned with the documentation of culture, and in whatever medium – film, photography, writing, music, or sound – it implies a regime of veracity. Ethnographic film theory and criticism is an ongoing discussion of issues of objectivity, subjectivity, realism, narrative structure, and ethical questions of representation... The ideal ethnographic film is one in which social observation is presented as a form of cultural knowledge, but given the colonial context of the development of anthropology and its ethnographic branch, this ‘knowledge’ is bound to the hierarchies of race, ethnicity, and mastery implicit in colonial culture. The history of ethnographic film is thus a history of the production of Otherness. (Russell 1999, 10)

Whilst the ethnographer’s object of study is Other or rather the object becomes Othered through the ethnographic acts of writing or filming, the betweenness with the ‘I’ that speaks and the ‘object’ that is spoken of becomes a complex entanglement of power relations. Edward Said’s book *Orientalism* has been instrumental to a critical thinking of not only Western imperialism, but the ways in which an epistemology or systems of knowledge production has Othered the ‘orient’ through its ‘aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical and philological texts’ (Said 1978, 12). Here Said argues that the ‘Orient’ holds the ‘Occident’ in place, which, whilst remaining central, thrusts the ‘Orient’ to the margins becoming the ‘constitutive outside’ (Ahmed 2006, 114). Ahmed also tells us: ‘Most important, the making of “the Orient” is an exercise of power: the Orient is made oriental as a submission to the authority of the Occident’ (Ahmed 2006, 114).

In addition, when Gayatri Spivak so notably asked, ‘Can The Subaltern Speak?’ her thinking centred around how power is situated within the position of the academic or intellectual rather than the ‘subaltern’ who is most often in, and of, the focus of study but not permitted to occupy the author’s position (Spivak 2010). Whilst those who are marginalised are rarely in a position of being writer/speaker/artist/maker, any such stories and perceptions that make their way through to a public platform come about through a very particular Western hegemonic framing. As a consequence of these critical race and postcolonial interrogations, the field of anthropology and the practice of ethnography have taken a

postmodern turn, creating considerable debate, not least because of it bearing such colonial legacies (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Clifford 1988, 1997; Geertz 1973).

In Visual Culture Studies the works of Homi K. Bhabha, Kobena Mercer and Gayatri Gopinath consider concepts around borderlines and diaspora, hybridity, assimilation and multiculturalism.⁷ These considerations rose specifically out of the growing numbers of black artists, filmmakers, ethnographers and cultural theorists in the UK as well as elsewhere from the late 1980s. In the early nineties, Kobena Mercer considered 'Black Art and the Burden of Representation' (Mercer 1990) and explored what happens when the 'subaltern' takes up a position in the public sphere, bringing with them a responsibility to represent *all* Black people and an expectation to tell *all of the* story?

In focusing on the exhibition *The Other Story* shown at the Hayward Gallery in London, England, Mercer notes how the curator was

burdened with the role of making present what had been rendered absent in the official version of modern art history.... [and how] a single exhibition had to 'stand for' the totality of everything that could fall within the category of black art.

In short, artists were 'expected to speak for' the black communities from which they come' (Mercer 1990, 62). Certainly this sense of community as monolithic and united is another idea that – drawing on the work of Paul Gilroy – Mercer takes to task. As he offers a critical response to *The Other Story* exhibition, he makes explicit the tensions between members of the black community and reveals the fragility and fragmentation of such an established community. He states:

The unwelcome fact of the matter is that the reluctance to enter into critical dialogue comes from 'our' side of the imagined frontier as our fragile notion of 'community' has been shaped by that unspoken imperative that we should never discuss our 'differences' in public: that we should always delay our criticism and do our dirty laundry in private. (Mercer 1990, 64)

There is certainly something to be learnt from these discourses that we can map onto other 'minority' communities such as trans ones. In addition to this 'them' and 'us' idea within cultural discourse in the process of being Other, Mercer tackles the problem of hierarchy of access and the moral responsibilities in reaching a

position of being seen and heard. Certainly it is asked who speaks for trans people if and when such an opportunity arises and we can locate for instance the dominant in the margins. Moreover, as these voices are challenged or as such voices are made aware of their privilege and power from within those collectives, such jostling and wrangling form an internal politics that is deemed *sort of* 'private' to the mainstream and larger public platforms.

In an article 'Beyond the Pale: Art in the Age of Multicultural Translation', Homi Bhabha considers the 'post' in postcolonial, postmodernism and postfeminism in relation to a temporality rather than a spatiality of the 'borderline'. He states:

Our existence... is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the 'present', marking 'in-between' spaces and asking 'How are subjects formed "in-between", or in excess of, the sum of the "parts" of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender, etc.)? How do strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims of communities where, despite shared histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings, and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual, and even incommensurable?' (Bhabha 1993, 63)

For Bhabha tallying up these plural 'differences' as potential scenes for antagonism and incommensurability resonates with my project of reconciling trans knowledge within and from any forming trans subjecthood. I will address this more fully later in this chapter as I flesh out my ideas around trans publics, but I wish to say at this point that what Bhabha excites in me is how the 'post' – which is so frequently (and jargonistically he tells us) prefixed to the movements of our moment – do not 'indicate sequentially' or 'polarity', but rather 'embody its restless and revisionary energy if they transform the present into an expanded and ex-centric site of experience and empowerment' (Bhabha 1993, 66). That is

the wider significance of the postmodern condition lies in the awareness that the epistemological 'limits' of those ethnocentric ideas [post-Enlightenment rationalism] are also the enunciative boundaries of a range of other dissonant, even dissident histories and voices – women, the colonized, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities. (Bhabha 1993, 66)

In considering this performance of marginalisation, which lies at the heart of normative epistemology and hierarchies of knowledge production, what becomes a postmodern project is its recognition of these limitations. In addition it considers not only those voices on the margins but the antagonistic, messy and complex power play through various scenes of such articulations.

In *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* Gayatri Gopinath places the South Asian diaspora on the margins of the dominant Indian 'homeland'. To further our thinking on these discourses of marginalisation she names the South Asian diasporic cultures as 'queer' in comparison to the heteronormative and patriarchal ideologies abounding within India itself. Referring to this work, ethnographer Kale Fajardo, whose work considers masculinities in Filipino Seafarers, wishes 'not to privilege the homeland/ nation (Philippines) or the diaspora (United States) as sites of cultural authenticity or radical queer possibilities, but rather to keep them in productive tension and dialogue' (Fajardo 2011, 161). I will now consider more substantially the ethnographic work of researcher Kale Fajardo and his book *Filipino Crosscurrents: Oceanographies of Seafaring, Masculinities, and Globalization*.

Fajardo's project considers the everyday lives of Filipino seamen who 'work on ships that transport goods and commodities around the world'. As part of his project he carried out 'cultural studies-inflected ethnographic research' (Fajardo 2011, 5). In the preface to his book he reflects on childhood memories and writes poetically about his childhood where the sea and the shipping industry was so integral to daily life and cultural existence, in terms of both his ethnicity and gender identity. In addition Fajardo contextualises the local and everyday practices within the 'context of capitalism, neoliberalism, neo-colonialism, and nationalism' (Fajardo 2011, 3).

From this, among other things, Fajardo asks, 'How do Filipino seamen working in the global shipping industry understand, embody, and create their masculinities through their work and everyday practices on ships, in ports, and at sea?' (Fajardo 2011, 5). Through an ethnographic analysis Fajardo exposes the cultural construction of masculinity within this context, to site its reiteration and to denaturalise the phenomenon of such masculinities as a contested scene that is culturally, politically and economically construed (Fajardo 2011, 14).

The book considers theories of diaspora and borders familiar to postcolonial studies (Gilroy 1993; Brown, 2005). In addition, and importantly for me here,

Fajardo looks to queer any normative understandings of masculinity and spends some of his thinking around Filipino tomboy masculinities and manhoods.⁸ He argues that, whilst paying critical attention to transgender and female masculinities, queer studies have lent most of their focus to White and European subjectivities. Fajardo states:

Although their critical theories inform my research questions and the way I approached fieldwork and fieldwork questions, it is highly important to consider how masculinity, race, class, culture, sexuality, citizenship, and space/place intersect and coconstitute each other through what women of color feminist scholars and writers theorize as an ‘intersectional’ approach or framework where we cannot see gender in isolation from these other axes of difference, nor is it simply an additive process. (Fajardo 2011, 7)

With this intersectionality in mind and to draw on Fajardo’s research practice, I turn then to his methodology as influential to my thinking and practice in this thesis. Whilst journeys and movement are central to Fajardo’s body of work, they constitute for him a way of *doing* his research as he holds onto the metaphorical concepts and actual conditions of flow and movement at the heart of his work. Describing his approach as ‘situated traveling fieldwork’ (Fajardo 2011, 32), ‘narrative “collage”’ and ‘portfolio of [writing] methods’ (Fajardo 2011, 37) Fajardo can ‘attend to the contradictory or affirming dynamics of encounters and cultural contact in crosscurrents border zones’ (Fajardo 2011, 32).⁹ Drawing on another ethnographer, Kirin Narayan writes:

The loci along which we are aligned with or set apart from those whom we study are multiple and in flux. Factors such as education, gender, sexual orientation, class, race, or sheer duration of contacts may at different times outweigh the cultural identity we associate with insider or outsider status. (Narayan 1993 in Fajardo 2011, 33)¹⁰

Consequently Fajardo’s approach includes ‘discourse analysis, travel reportage, and personal reflection... a combination of ethnography, autoethnography, cultural criticism, travelogue, and documentary photography’ (Fajardo 2011, 38). This multiplicity of approaches sits in line with my own practice here in this thesis

and identifies Halberstam's magpie-esque queer methodology that I refer to at the beginning of this chapter.

What I hope to have highlighted so far in this section is the connection with an engagement of a politics of authorship with the adoption of particular methodological approaches such as Fajardo's. Postcolonial and postmodern discourse offers a particular exposure to the scene of making-public-discourse. This exposure highlights its relationship to one's own subjecthood, one's own experiences and empowerment and in what Bhabha describes as the 'articulation of "differences"' (Bhabha 1993, 62). From this I attach my own knowledge project to my emerging selfhood to consider more experimental, auto and experiential approaches to ethnographic practices.

2.3 Experimental and Auto Ethnography

As Catherine Russell remarks, 'the term 'experimental ethnography' has begun to circulate in postcolonial anthropological theory as a way of referring to discourse that circumvents the empiricism and objectivity conventionally linked to ethnography' (Russell 1999, xi). Consequently such notions of objectivity have been challenged in postcolonial discourse. In addition considering the 'auto' within ethnographic practice has offered a way of approaching the 'Other' *through* the 'Self', as well as *locating* the 'Self' as 'Other'. As Paul Atkinson *et al.* highlights:

Neumann (1996) suggests that auto-ethnography may offer an opportunity to 'confront dominant forms of representation and power in an attempt to reclaim [...] representational spaces that marginalise individuals and others.' [...] Auto-ethnography is a 'discourse from the margins and identifies the material, political and transformative dimensions of representational politics'. (Atkinson *et al.* 2007, 191)¹¹

Additionally the work of feminism has also endeavoured to expose the identity of the authors of knowledge, and to question the authority in which one speaks (Skeggs 1997). Questions were asked from within these discourses: *Who speaks about what (or whom), and to whom?* and more importantly *why?*¹² 'The point', Haraway famously noted, 'is not just to read the webs of knowledge

production; the point is to reconfigure what counts as knowledge' (Haraway 1988). From this, both politically and theoretically, the 'concept of experience gained validity for feminists' as this became a route to achieving another kind of epistemology (Skeggs 1997). Skeggs states:

To challenge the power of normative masculinity, feminists established a popular and research agenda through the sharing of experiences (often through the method of 'consciousness raising'). (Skeggs *et al.* 2002, 356)

Sharing and writing about 'women's' experiences validated both 'woman-ness', as the object of study, and the position of women as writers and researchers (producers of knowledge). Similarly for lesbian and gay activists, the endeavour to gather stories and speak experiences became central to a (re)historicising of the lives of non-heterosexual people and their practices. Such projects of gathering experiences and (re)telling the stories of minorities raised new concerns about the politics of representation. Amongst such communities and subcultures there were, and still are, debates and arguments around whether those products that represented their own lives were deemed 'positive' or 'negative'?¹³

As challenges were made to the dominant hegemonic white, middle-class male, and as minority collectives found space to speak for 'themselves', questions arose around the notion of 'insider knowledge', and about those who spoke of (and for) *their own kind*. Such scrutinising of the 'authentic' speaker for the minority revealed the multiplicity and intersectionality of identity. For instance, a person who 'speaks out' for trans people may also be privileged, white and middle-class. Consequently, we have seen writers and researchers offering an array of adjectives, listing the various identity categories and words to describe and make explicit their own subjectivity. In just the first few pages of the book *Performance Studies*, Richard Schechner describes himself as a 'Jewish Hindu Buddhist atheist living in New York City, married, and the father of two children' (Schechner 2002, 1).

In addition, as 'Inserting one's Self into one's text' has become ever more popular in contemporary scholarly practice, concerns have arisen about researchers falling prey to producing 'author saturated' texts (Geertz 1988, 97) and a kind of 'banal egotism' (Probyn 1993, 80). At a Queer at Kings Conference, entitled 'Tell it Like It Is, Tell It Like It Isn't – Queer Lives Remodelled' which took place at King's

College in London on Friday, 12 June 2009, Peggy Phelan introduced key themes by asking whether it was ‘indulgent to write one’s own (queer) story’ or whether this ‘two (writer and object) for the price of one’ deal was a bonus for the reader. Questions were raised around how queer people might tell their own stories differently in ways that could subvert the historically patriarchal significance of the first person singular. This, Phelan argued, raises questions around notions of authenticity and how hybrid approaches to the various genres of storytelling across fact *and* fiction might locate or *fail* to locate truths.

Much queer writing has been concerned with the autobiographical and, in turn, the autoethnographical. Queer writing commits itself not only to the critical attention of queer subjectivities, but to consideration of the productive possibilities of challenging and reframing heteronormative knowledge productions (Foucault 1976; Warner 1994; Sedgwick 1994). If conventional ethnography is committed to veracity (Russell 1999, 10) then a queer ethnography not only focuses on the lived experiences of queer identified people, but also looks ‘to bend the established orientation of ethnography to its method, ethics, and reflexive philosophical principles’ (Rooke 2009). In addition to the ‘bending’ that a queer ethnography offers, I also understand autoethnographies as necessarily ‘messy texts’ (Marcus 1994, 567) and it is with this bending and messiness in mind that I carry out this project.

2.4 Drawing on Other Autoethnographies

Blurring the conventional distinctions between the self as researcher, the subjects of study and the field in which the ethnographer works reflects a postcolonial practice. In order to cement my own application of such approaches I wish to draw on several examples of autoethnographic practices close to my own research. *Panic Diaries: A Genealogy of Panic Disorder*, by Jackie Orr, offers an insight into the production of panic disorder in relation to the capitalistic machine of modern pharmaceutical industries. As the book progresses Orr marks the shift in diagnosis by which panic (in its extreme forms) is no longer a mental disorder, but has come to be understood as a physical disease. What is noted are the hierarchies and values within medical practice where psychiatry, with its ‘inferiority complex’, looks to become a ‘real’

science that is more empirically based. More specifically, however, this alignment with physical ill health comes about in ‘real terms’, through pressures from insurance companies and pharmaceutical industries who insist on more strictly bounded entities because they then offer systems for prognosis and treatment (Orr 2006).

What makes the research particularly interesting is the way the author’s own experience, as someone who suffers from panic disorders, purposefully and productively influences the research. Taking this further, Orr’s own ethnographic practice leads her to undergo a clinical trial of Xanax – a treatment programme to cure panic attacks. As a psychiatric patient herself, her *insiderness* to the world of clinical drugs trials produces an insightful account of the processes, technologies, discourses and collective goals of the pharmaceutical industry. Additionally, however, what becomes the focus, both for herself and for the doctors, is her feelings consequential to the drugs she consumes.

Knowing ‘who’ or ‘how’ she is, is the aim of both ethnographer and scientist. For Orr, this approach leads to a particular style of performative writing that lends itself to the hybrid approach of the academic conventions of scholarly writing and a more poetic and ambiguous prose. Indeed, more creative styles of writing and layout on the page expose the machine of normative knowledge production and offer new approaches to a wide range of scholarly writing fields, not least ethnography.¹⁴

Likewise, approaches to ethnographic documentaries made in more experimental ways, such as the autobiographical, autoethnographical, diaristic and essayist modes, ‘produces a subjective space that combines anthropologist and informant, subject and object of the gaze, under one sign of one’s identity’ (Russell 1999, 312).

In October 2006 I attended an AudioVisual PHD workshop – a gathering of PhD students who were undergoing practice as part of their PhD using audiovisual material. Here, Gary Anderson demonstrated his critical engagement with his position as a ‘filmmaker’ and a ‘family member’ by screening his own home movies in his house to some of his friends. Examples of the subject matter in each movie are the march against the war in Iraq in 2003, visiting the Che Guevara Museum on a family holiday in Cuba and the 2005 general election in Liverpool. By using subject matter integral to his own everyday life, and drawing on Espinosa’s ‘For an Imperfect Cinema’, Anderson produces himself as a ‘failed film maker’ whilst crediting the roles of ‘Mum’, ‘Dad’ and ‘sons’. Afterwards, over a glass of wine,

Anderson was interested in the conversations that came out of these screenings as a route to gathering meanings around these culturally and historically specific scenes.

At the same workshop, also offering an experimental approach to ethnographic filmmaking, Johannes Sjoberg used applied drama as a way of working within a field, or with a community group. In his project 'Transfiction', instead of presenting traditional headshots featuring the testimonies of trans women sex workers in Brazil, Sjoberg and the sex workers created a film script based on those experiences and cast themselves as actors in order to re-enact the scenes of their lives. This was not done simply for the camera but as a piece of 'film drama'. As this was played out, Sjoberg cast himself as the 'documentary maker'. Here we see him directing and manipulating the on-screen actors, exposing the framework within which the trans women speak.

These examples inform my thinking around my own autoethnography and my documentary screenings. Like Anderson and his home movies, I am interested in the discussions that take place after the screenings of the TV documentaries that feature trans people. I am keen to think through the interaction and knowledge that is passed, performed and produced *between* the trans viewers, the documentaries and me. Like Sjoberg I am interested in exposing the framework of these TV screenings in order to make visible my own subjectivity and my role as 'researcher', from which these narratives are produced. To return to Skegg's essay 'Techniques for Telling The Reflexive Self', she makes a distinction between *being* a reflexive practitioner and *doing* reflexive practice. She points also to an exchange that takes place out of, and through, both the researcher's and the researcher's subjects' own set of experiences. In this way the production of the subjectivities of all counterparts are *at play* through the research process.

This autoethnography takes the shape of multiple methodologies drawing on textual analysis, historical analysis and critical theory, as well as anecdotes generated from my lived experience as a trans person and the world in which I occupy. In addition I construct a particular collective of trans viewers in order to carry out TV screenings of four popular documentaries. I do this in order to capture some of the discussion that is taking place across trans publics, but also to hone in on some of the thinking of these individuals for the purposes of capturing my idea of trans knowledge.

2.5 Modes of Visual Analysis: Gaze upon Gaze upon Gaze

I wish now to route these discussions of methodology more sufficiently within the field of vision and most specifically through psychoanalytic concepts of ‘the gaze’. I wish to expand here upon the ways in which the visual has been analysed and theorised in order for me to draw on such for the purposes of pursuing my thinking around the ways in which trans people *view* TV documentaries that feature trans subjects.

I turn then to consider the realm of the visual and the field of critical visual studies as it may situate for me the political potentiality of the pictured trans subject on our small screens. ‘Visuality’, Mirzoeff tells us, ‘is a specific technique of colonial and imperial practice... by which power visualizes History to itself’ (Mirzoeff 2013, xxx). This idea forces me to think through the relationship that power has with the visual and how, as such, visuality makes concrete ideas, forms and realities – in this case – of what it means to be trans. I wish to establish then the importance of the visual in the production of trans knowledge.

I will then focus on the status of the visual and some key means of analysis that have featured within the field, considering the psychodynamics of spectatorship, before relaying some of these theories, more specifically within the realm of TV consumption and Queer TV studies. In addition I will consider the importance of reception theory in the context of TV consumption and queer approaches to its critical thinking.

Apparatus theory, dominant in film studies from the 1970s, draws on structuralism and psychoanalytical tools for the purposes of reading codifications and establishing meanings within the visuality of the cultural product and bearing its main focus on narrative film. The overarching psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Lacan, the political theories of Marx and Althusser, and the semiotic theories of Saussure have proved useful in establishing visual images as a series of semiotics that produce meaning in the image as well as through the structural form of film narrative. If the image and the narrative could be decoded to its meaning, what this stipulated was an ideological ‘gaze’ – a single positionality of the viewer which could be identified as white, male and bourgeois.

John Berger’s 1972 classic *Ways of Seeing* juxtaposed seventeenth- and eighteenth-century art works with contemporary advertisement. Berger argued that

all of these images featured objectified female bodies through this single endpoint of the 'gaze'. In the same era Laura Mulvey's article 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' became a significant article and contributed productively to the feminist discourse in narrative cinema at the time. Part of its productivity was how it drew on psychoanalytical analysis – a 'political weapon' as Mulvey called it – in order to establish narrative cinema as it

reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle... to demonstrat[e] the way the unconscious[ness] of patriarchal society has structured film form. (Mulvey 1975, 6).

For Mulvey the patriarchal framing of the film narrative casts 'woman' as passive image and 'man' as the one who actively gazes. This gaze is scopophilic in the sense that the looking is pleasurable and the image of 'woman' becomes the erotic object. Moreover the invisibilising effect of the camera work means that this singular viewpoint is voyeuristic, as it is positioned as the outsider looking in.

Feminism, within film theory and elsewhere, drew substantially on psychoanalytical approaches in order to deconstruct the scene of spectatorship. Postcolonial theory has also been keen to offer critical analysis of the 'Western' gaze (Russell 1999, 21) and the 'hostile white gaze' (Fanon 1986 in Ahmed 2006). In her book *Queer Phenomenology – Orientations, Objects, Others* Sarah Ahmed draws on Franz Fanon and Edward Said as she 'orientates' the Orient (Ahmed 2006). Ahmed considers a scene of becoming racialised through (and becoming the object of) the hostile white gaze (Ahmed 2006, 110).

'For Fanon', Ahmed states 'racism "interrupts" the corporeal schema' as 'bodies are shaped by histories of colonialism, which make the world "white" as a world that is inherited or already given' (Ahmed 2006, 111). In addition to this historical inheritance that 'surface on the body', the Western and white gaze also sexualises the 'Orient'. Ahmed recalls the image of the harem as a key example.¹⁵ She tells us:

The Orient is not only full of signs of desire in how it is represented and 'known' within the West... it is also desired by the West, as having things that 'the West' itself is assumed to be lacking. This fantasy of lack, of what is 'not here', shapes the

desire for what is 'there', such that 'there' becomes visible on the horizon as 'supplying' what is lacking. (Ahmed 2006, 114)

What this 'lacking' achieves is to position the Orient on the horizon – visible, within reach and seeking to get closer. It is, Ahmed tells us, at the 'edge of our gaze' – embodying a contradictory proximity of near and far. This we will find is emulated in television consumption where the Other is pictured as exotic and far away – outside the confines of the TV consumer's existence – but comes to us, sufficiently and safely framed by the 'black box' of the television within the private and intimate terrain of our living rooms. Moreover, this 'lacking' that characterises the Western position forms a set of desires to colonise, possess and occupy the Orient through its visual capturing in order that it make 'the stranger familiar' (Ahmed 2004, 116).

In her book *Experimental Ethnography*, Russell considers three more 'gazes' – the pornographic, the zoological and the ethnographic. Together, she argues that they 'share a common disciplinary technology of vision that seeks to control, contain and master the field of the Other' (Russell 1999, 120). Drawing on Nichols, Russell likens ethnography to pornography in the sense that

both modes of representation are governed by a desire to see Others and developed codified systems of controlling this fascination. The body of the Other is held up to the gaze in both cases, but the limits of visual pleasure and the limits of knowledge need to be masked. (Russell 1999, 122)

Turning to the zoological gaze, 'if we add [this] as a third term... the desire for pleasure and knowledge is mapped onto a desire for control and mastery' (Russell 1999, 124). Moreover, 'the zoo is an intermediary zone... [which] is a space where "epistemological inquiry" meets that of entertainment and exploitation in full view... the zoological gaze... belongs to popular culture' (Russell 1999, 122). As this gaze lends itself so neatly to the infotainment TV genre, we can see that it is this kind of gaze that will be so heavily crucial to my considerations of TV documentaries that feature trans people. Throughout this thesis I will signal this sort of spectatorship as normative in its ambition to pin down meaning to the Other, similarly to the pornographic and the ethnographic gaze. However, like zoos, popular TV documentaries promise both educational and entertaining experience and drawing on this dual function bring in pleasure to the scene of 'mastery of vision'.

Moreover the zoological gaze also allows for a consideration of the proximity that such viewing takes place, echoing Ahmed's argument of the Orient. That is where the Other – both as species in the zoo and as trans people on TV – render themselves as both near and far. Near enough to gaze upon them and consequently *know* them, and yet through a carefully considered framing – in the cage in the zoo or on the small screen in the living room – the structuring of such knowledge production renders the viewer at a (safe) distance.¹⁶ Indeed Russell considers the history of the zoo as a site of colonial culture and power, siting the Darwinian world fairs and showcases from 1870 to 1930.¹⁷ She states that:

The motto of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago was 'To See Is to Know' – indicating the coextensive discourses of science, visibility, imprisonment, and imperialism that governed the display of native peoples. (Russell 1999, 123)

Similarly the work that the popular TV documentary achieves in its depiction of the Other is its holding in tow both the ordinary and the extraordinary, the familiar and the unfamiliar, the near and the far. There is also, Russell argues, an uncanniness at play where 'the Other in representation is the knowledge of its un-knowability, the knowledge that to see is not, after all, to know. From that unknowability unfolds a resistance in and of representation' (Russell 1999, 25). And so herein lies the paradox. Russell states:

Looking at the discursive overlap between ethnography, pornography and zoology is a means of analysing the gaze not as a psychoanalytic category but as a technique that plays a role in a variety of disciplines. The gaze can produce tensions between different discourses of looking, and it is this friction that I want to trace... (Russell 1999, 125)

Russell asks us to consider the technology of the gaze in terms of what it achieves, particularly through its positioning within various disciplines. Yet she also asks us to take account of the failures at play within these scenes. Moreover, for Russell, and for me here in my thesis, the functionality of understanding of the gaze is achieved not within the discreet disciplines where it plays out but in the very tensions and 'frictions' *between* such disciplines. This concurs for me my

considerations of trans knowledge and its utility as being between knowledge paradigms.

To add a further complexity in considering gaze theory, I wish here to touch upon the ‘Medical gaze’, as it has been theorised by Foucault in his book *The Birth of the Clinic*. I will return more substantially to this, but it is important at this juncture to point out how medical practitioners featuring in TV documentaries that I study perform an on-screen medical gaze that permits its audience to join in. Medical practitioners on screen – psychiatrists, endocrinologists and surgeons – are licensed to look upon the trans body, to know it and explain it for the audiences at home. Moreover, this is allowed, indeed sought, by the producers that make the documentaries, because of and out of that long historical relationship with power and medical knowledge dating back from the latter part of the eighteenth century.

By positioning the medical practitioner and the medical gaze central to the narrative in TV documentaries, this gives licence to gaze upon the trans person featured and to view them as ‘specimen’, hence maintaining an act of othering, and rendering power in the one which sees. This medical gaze-by-proxy was also central to the popular Victorian Freak Show, where the ‘man in the white coat’ performs an authority that permits such gazing and produces – through the gaze – the ‘abnormal’ bodies on display. In addition the viewer at home and the medical practitioner on screen share a complicity whereby the medical practitioners are given licence (by the TV consumer and through the articulation of the film) to author the knowledge of what it means to be trans.

Whilst I have stipulated power at play at the heart of the act of gazing, I wish to turn now to the ways in which such domination can be resisted. In the first instance this would primarily include an act of exposing the systems of knowledge production, stipulating Apparatus theory as limited and partial. Instead through a multiplicity of gazes, we can find ‘critical strategies of revisioning, rereading, and misreading, viewing “against the grain” of dominant culture’ (Russell 1999, 21).

The rise of the New Queer Cinema in the early 1990s gave way to an extensive body of critical thinking around cinema and visuality, with such notions as rereading. Such thinking considered the rise in queer content in films, and certainly those films that were breaking into mainstream general releases.¹⁸ In her book *Uninvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability* (1999) Patricia White takes classical Hollywood cinema in order to (re)consider lesbian representations in

films such as Hitchcock's *Rebecca*. Bringing the visibility of *being lesbian* to the fore, she determines the strategies Hollywood makes, producing for queer thinkers and their queer publics a kind of archive. In an interview White comments:

Mrs Danvers, the sinister housekeeper, is a recognizable and 'unfeminine' visual type; the heroine is an unformed girl who parallels the audience's own subjection to the 'influence' of a woman. And Rebecca, the object of fascination, is literally unrepresentable, we have to rely on our imagination. (Jagose 2000)

In *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* Jackie Stacey considers the scene of visual pleasure and spectatorship of the Hollywood stars in 1940s and 1950s (Stacey, 1993). In addition she uses an ethnographic approach alongside film theory as she asks participants to recall memories of this era and cinema experiences. Her findings were used to critique a universal positioning of female spectatorship that so far had so firmly established itself through psychoanalytic theories and feminism. Instead her project posited cinema spectatorship as a complex and integral aspect of both popular culture and female sexuality.

By revealing a multiple positionality of viewer, we can 'read' visual objects differently and any meanings generated variously depend on the subjectivity of the viewer. Moreover, the limitations of Apparatus theory concern its inability to theorize other pleasures than those suggested by Lacanian psychoanalysis. Whilst the gaze remains an important structural component of the cinema and television experience and is a means of understanding the relations between films, spectators and people on screen, Gaze theory addresses the pleasures and powers of the viewing experience and 'in conjunction with a more plural notion of spectatorship and a more flexible notion of textuality, the gaze can be thought of a site of power *and* resistance' (Russell 1999, 121; her italics). I turn now then to the Transgender gaze as it has become established through these notions of plurality of spectatorship and as a site of interrogating this said 'power *and* resistance'.

2.6 The Transgender Gaze

The transgender gaze becomes difficult to track because it depends on complex relations in time and space between seeing and not seeing, appearing and disappearing, knowing and not knowing. (Halberstam 2005, 78)

Drawing on Mulvey's seminal essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), Halberstam considers a 'transgender gaze', in an effort to complicate the simple picture that positions its audience member as *either* masculine *or* feminine and to open up the 'possibilities for identificatory pleasure and embodied spectatorship' (Stryker and Aizura 2013, 119).

Halberstam logically poses that, 'because gendered spectators have already consented to limited and finite gender roles before entering the cinema, they will consent to the narrow range of narrative options within narrative cinema' (Halberstam 2005, 84). From this Halberstam asks: 'How does conventional narrative cinema allow for variation while maintaining a high degree of conformity?' (Halberstam 2005, 85). In order to answer the question Halberstam poses for himself, he states that 'every now and then... the gendered binary on which the stability, the pleasure, and the purchase of mainstream cinema depend will be thoroughly rescripted, allowing for another kind of gaze or look' (Halberstam 2005, 85). This gives entry into 'the transgender gaze' revealing possibilities for a different mode or way of seeing and of experiencing visual pleasure. By retracing the complexity of desires and pleasures in Mulvey's work, Halberstam highlights:

Within conventional cinema, Mulvey proposed that the only way for a female viewer to access voyeuristic pleasure was to cross-identify with the male gaze; through this complicated procedure, the female spectator of a conventional visual narrative could find a position on the screen that offered a little more than the pleasure of being fetishized. Mulvey suggests that the female viewer has to suture her look to the male look. Others have talked about this as a form of transvestism. (Halberstam 2005, 85–6)

Yet this notion of transvestism is temporary and Halberstam is interested in what happens when 'gender constructions are overthrown and sexual difference is shaken to its very foundations?' (Halberstam 2005, 86). In order to explore this

Halberstam considers some key films in the canon of transgender representation. One of these that I draw on here is *Boys Don't Cry*, a low-budget independent film directed by Kimberly Peirce in 1999. The feature film is generated following the documentary *The Brandon Teena Story* made in 1998 by Susan Muska and Greta Olafsdottir, both centring around the life and brutal murder of transgender teenager Brandon Teena.

Halberstam points out that in the film a transgender gaze is established through the love story of Brandon and Lana whose shared gazes are adopted by the viewer at various points within the film. This works to '[disarm] temporarily the compulsory heterosexuality of the romance genre' (Halberstam 2005, 86). In a particular scene towards the climax of the film Brandon is made to undress and reveal his genitalia in the bathroom by his perpetrators, who also force Lana, Brandon's girlfriend, to see what is there (or perhaps in their minds what is not there). What Halberstam deconstructs for us through the film *Boys Don't Cry* is the consistent forefronting of the extent to which gazing takes place, and thus exposes the act of gazing or looking – as well as the refusal to look, as was Lana's choice – within an understanding of the generated power that is formed through such acts.

In addition, as the scene becomes more stylised we see an 'out of body' fully dressed Brandon looking in on the action from behind. Brandon sees the dressed Brandon looking and smiling. In considering this scene, Halberstam states that 'the transgender gaze is constituted as a look divided within itself, a point of view that comes from two places' (Halberstam 2005, 88). Such doubled-upness is a crucial characteristic of the transgender gaze stipulated here by Halberstam and this is something that I will shortly turn to as I go onto characterise the trans viewer similarly.

Whilst queer theory, postcolonialism and feminism have considered the gaze extensively within cinema and film theory, we should now look at modes of TV consumption in relation to the gaze and modes of visual analysis. In addition, while I have touched on the presence of trans people on screen and modes of looking upon those subjects, I will now focus on how trans identified viewers might be involved in these modes of gazing.

2.7 Queer TV and Modes of Reception

TV Studies maintain that, although television is often ignored, it is an important mode of reception of information and creator of knowledge. The book *Queer TV Theories, Histories, Politics* asks: ‘how can we queerly theorise and understand television?’ The book argues that queer theory have lent its attention to many things, but has ‘neglect[ed] television in debates about queer media and queer screen culture’ (Davis and Needham 2009, 1). The book aims to go beyond discourses of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ representation and wishes to lend a focus to queer viewing and readership, as well as to consider Queer itself as a particular approach and encounter of, or with, the text or visual product on the small screen.

Davis and Needham state: ‘For this collection, then, we felt that it was politically important to reinstate the queer TV audience as an engaged and affectively involved demographic’ (Davis and Needham 2009, 8). Equally in a chapter in the same book Medhurst asks ‘how do lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and trans people learn to watch television? What is it about specific texts that may solicit queer attention in a manner imperceptible to straight viewers?’ (Davis and Needham 2009, 9).

Placing viewership more centrally the book takes a somewhat critical stance around queer critical practice. In a chapter by Amy Villarjo called ‘Ethereal queer: notes on method’, she takes the works of Warner, Edelman and Fuss as examples to state that, whilst they offer us close textual analysis,

I think it’s fair to say that, in the bulk of these writers’ work and that which is inspired by their example, the social, industrial and political conditions of a given text’s production... are simply not germane to the project of its analysis... preferring instead the implied reader and the hypothetical spectator. (Villarjo in Davis and Needham 2009, 49–50)

Michele Aaron also takes these points on as – borrowing from queer film and cinema theory – she wishes to take on board the psychodynamics of spectatorship as it enters the home. In what she calls “‘the queer: re’”, of queer in relation to’, she asks, ‘what does queer theory reveal about viewers’ experience of television?... How

does sofa spectatorship, with its incumbent issues of visual pleasure... sit astride the normative processes of everyday life?' (Aaron in Davis and Needham 2009, 64).¹⁹

What this reveals for me is the necessary investigation of the ways in which television documentaries that feature trans people are received by trans people. Whilst I engage with a critical textual analysis of the knowledge products it is not enough for me, at least in this thesis, to simply do just that. With similar concerns to that of Aaron and Villarejo it is crucial for me to situate these TV documentaries within the sociopolitical contexts in which trans people, trans collectives and trans publics circulate and operate. Aaron stipulates a particular incompatibility between queerness and television, which sits in contrast to cinema (and I am recalling the whooping noises of the audience at the Lesbian and Gay Film Festival that I wrote about earlier in Chapter 1). Borrowing from queer cinema theory, she states:

Visual pleasure, in other words, engages our desire for, or to be, on-screen characters counter to our 'normal' sexual orientation: we often fall for the leading lady's beauty, or align ourselves with the male hero, even though we are ourselves straight women, for example. Even Laura Mulvey's (1988) offer of a transvestite gaze hardly shields the spectator from, albeit a temporary, sexualised transgression. (Aaron in Davis and Needham 2009, 70)

Flitterman-Lewis (1992) draws a clear line between psychodynamics of desire that pertains in the "'dream-like" space of the cinema' and that of television viewership and claims that cine-psychoanalysis established from the 1970s is not useful for TV theory. Aaron, however, begs to differ, asking,

What happens when the spectatorship of films shifts from the cinema to the sofa, and more 'classical' understandings of visual pleasure enter the home to merge with the 'flow' of family viewing?... Television must be reconsidered, therefore, for its potential influence on subject formation. (Aaron in Davis and Needham 2009, 70–1).

Interestingly Aaron asks, 'Rather than seeing queerness in the form of the text or the form of the viewer, can we locate it instead within the act and psychodynamic of viewing?' (Aaron in Davis and Needham 2009, 71). Certainly some of the trans viewers that I have gathered as part of my thesis spent the time to recall and reflect

on their experiences of watching TV documentaries that feature trans people with their families at the time of them being broadcast. I will go on here to describe in more detail the ways in which I capture such recollections and further reflections around their viewing of these knowledge products.

In the chapter ‘Epistemology of the Console’ Joyrich looks to complicate the scene of looking ‘at (or away from) queer folks’, as she ‘tries to understand how TV *comes to know* sexuality, how it comes to construct what we even count as knowledge about sexuality’ (Joyrich in Davis and Needham 2009, 17; my italics). Equally then my project is about the relationship looking has with knowledge; and how audio visual constructs conveyed on TV produce such knowledge of being trans. I carry out my project here, in order – and borrowing from Aaron once more – ‘to recognise the relationship sexuality and television [has].... in terms of politicising and sexualising the space of viewing’ (Aaron in Davis and Needham 2009, 72) This is not about audience research but to engage with ‘the politicised practices... that underlie our engagement with culture and with each other’ (Aaron in Davis and Needham 2009, 73)

I hope here to have laid out my considerations of the ways in which modes of visual analysis work to enrich my thinking of trans knowledge, not least by highlighting its performative and productive dimensions within TV documentaries. In this thesis I place myself central to the ethnographic process and such practice (and findings) come about because of my own subjectivity and positionality. I do this in order to embrace a more experimental approach to knowledge production, which, as Russell articulates, hopes to ‘overcome the binary oppositions of us and them, self and other, along with the tension between the profilmic and the textual operations of aesthetic form’ (Russell 1999, 19).

In addition, borrowing from Stephen Webster, Russell states that ‘postmodernist ethnographic forms... seek to integrate with, rather than represent, the social practices that are their object’ (Webster in Russell 1999, 21). In this way ‘one’s family becomes an ethnographic field’ and ‘in the eclipse of referentiality, the distance between signified and signifier closes down, and a new realism of identity politics emerges’ (Russell 1999, 24).

2.8 Trans as Category

I hope to have outlined my position on autoethnographic practice and to have stipulated a multiplicity to my approaches to knowledge production. I turn now to the complexity of forming and naming such particular people as ‘trans’. In his book, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*, David Valentine positions himself as ‘a non-transgender gay man... white male-bodied, middle-class professional’ (Valentine 2007, 5) and an ‘anthropologist interested in transgender communities’ (Valentine 2007, 6). As Valentine maps the various spaces of bar/club/dragball culture in New York City’s transgender world – the activist group Transsexual Menace and a support group for HIV positive trans sex workers held at the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center in Manhattan – he marks these spaces as ‘sites of community’ and as such ‘realise[s] that a transgender community does not exist outside the contexts of those very entities that are concerned to find a transgender community’ (Valentine 2007, 68).

Importantly, as he maps these ‘sites of community’, Valentine notes that the ethnographic rhetoric of ‘living with the natives’ does not make sense, as there is no specific location where trans people reside. Indeed, he looks to question the notion that the ‘transgender’ community is constituted as something ontologically different to the ‘gay and lesbian’ community. This, he argues, is produced through academic, activist and social services discourses rather than by trans and gay people themselves (Valentine 2007, 100). Through his ethnography he identifies such gender-variant experiences, performances and self-naming as ambiguously happening across both transgender and homosexual categories of being. Interestingly, as he reflects on these two categories and their history of distinction, he offers his own gay identity as central to his motives (as well as his everyday life working in social services, distributing safe sex guidance among trans sex worker communities). It is his own identity and set of experiences that holds his ethnography together. In short, without him being *who he is* the research would not be *what it is*. From this one could argue that all ethnography is autobiographical as Valentine concludes:

All across New York City, lines of connection, knowledge, friendship, and affiliation join these different places and the people in them together. I know these other places, having spent time in them, observing their rhythms and noting their

membership, busiest times, comings and goings. It feels to me rather as if I, and the literature from GIP [Gender Identity Project] I carry, are the only real connection between all these places, and that somehow this thing called a 'transgender community' is something of a misnomer. (Valentine 2007, 77)

My own involvement with trans people from across the UK (and the growth of my organisation, Gendered Intelligence) has equally come about through various artistic and creative projects, youth groups, events and conferences. These 'sites' of collectives, which I draw on, are from community support groups, grass-roots activism, community arts projects and the voluntary and charities sector provision in the UK. Similar to Valentine in the USA, here in the UK it is in the systems that are in place to service trans people, meet their needs, account or lobby for trans people that such collectives exist. However we are to map, service, capture and *know* trans collectives, one must think complexly around the notion of 'collectives' itself.

As I have formed a group of trans people who come together to watch TV programmes that feature trans people, I, like Valentine, also represent the connection between the people in the group; I am central to the production of these 'sites' of trans collectives that come about through my own experiences, connections and *being amongst* other trans people. I wish to consider how ideas of trans subjects, collectives, and what I call 'trans publics', relate to one another and distinguish themselves as terms. I also wish to locate trans knowledge as the exchanges that are played out between these entities. The trans collectives of two, six or eight trans people that have gathered each time at my TV screenings are groups of varied but specific people who bring with them their own imaginings of themselves and their forming knowledge of what it means *to be* trans.

2.9 On *Being* Trans

I was rather nervous when the first group of people arrived for the viewing of *Middlesex*. Coincidentally my partner, Catherine, had met some of the younger members on the tube, herself heading home from work. We had all worked together on youth projects in the past and it was exciting for everyone to see each other again as it had been a while. I was in the kitchen preparing my lentil and tomato soup

whilst Jordan and David were having a bit of a catch up in the living room before the rest arrived. After soup, we headed upstairs to the 'TV room'.

I had prepared the room for enough people to feel as comfortable as possible, arranging cushions on the floor. Many of the people present would have been familiar with me carrying out a focus group and recording discussions as those were the sorts of things I would be asked to do when organisations wished to consult with members of the trans community about a particular topic. However, that such an act should take place in my own house seemed unfamiliar and strange. The DVD was ready to play and the Mirantz sound recorder took centre stage in the middle of the room.

As we sat down around the television I asked everyone to introduce themselves. I also asked each person to describe how they identified their gender. Even as I uttered my request, the question seemed immediately stilted and I was embarrassed as people seemed to feel awkward about responding. I was also self-conscious because the event was for my own personal research and I found myself playing down its importance.

Jordan said, 'Sometimes I'm just a man, sometimes I'm a gay man, and sometimes I'm a trans man.'

Sam said, 'I'd say gender queer but more in terms of how I view gender rather than how I view my own, but that affects how I view my own.'²⁰

Neil stated:

I don't really particularly analyse my identity so much... I feel more so that I'm identified as trans by, say, the medical establishment... I don't particularly think of myself as having a transgender identity. I'm just a guy and was born female etc. I don't think it makes that much of a massive impact in my life any more particularly.

Before even watching the films a rather strange contradiction seemed to be arising. Here I was attempting to bring trans people together in order that we could reflect on what *being trans* might mean, when some of the people who volunteered to do this did not *think of themselves* as trans or even identify with the term 'trans' itself. In contrast, others – myself included – have appropriated *being trans* as a key term with which to describe themselves and tell their stories. This conundrum echoes

something Valentine experienced in his own ethnographic practice. Valentine finds the term ‘transgender-identified’ as useful for several purposes:

On the one hand... [the term ‘transgender-identified’] validates those people who adopt transgender as a meaningful category of self-identity; but it also draws attention to how people are identified by others as being transgender even though they may not necessarily use this term in talking about themselves. This phrasing thus highlights how self-identity and one’s identification by others are complexly intertwined and shaped by relationships of social power. (Valentine 2007, 26)²¹

The tensions around what ‘trans’ is, and the discomfort or sense of alienation experience by some who are attributed the term, have been the subject of debate for quite some time. At a trans community conference that I convened in London in 2007, US guest speaker Jamison Green said:

We can’t lament that everyone doesn’t agree about what ‘trans’ is; we have to rejoice in those differences and accept them as part of the fabric of the world we’re dealing with. (Trans With Pride Conference 2007²²)

What is relevant here are not only the words that trans people choose or do not choose to describe themselves, but also the diverse knowledges of what it means to be trans, that get taken up by any subject. As I consider how to position and describe such contradicting and antagonistic trans knowledge and self-understandings across these collectives, I hold onto the important shift, identified by Sedgwick, which takes us away from asking ‘which or whose knowledge is true?’ and rather towards considering: what do these knowledges *do*? And more so, as these come together, what do these contrasting, juxtaposed and sometimes irreconcilable knowledges achieve? Consequently, I am not solely interested in how these notions of *being* trans that are posited on TV are held in relation to any individual forming their (trans)self, but also in considering how these performing tensions between ‘us’ produce what I am calling a ‘trans public’. I turn now to this idea of public spheres and the significant writing of Michael Warner.

2.10 Publics vs Private

In his seminal book, *Publics and Counterpublics* (2005), Michael Warner pays particular attention to queer and trans lives in relation to a theoretical backdrop of public and private spheres. There is, he claims, a distinct private and inner world that is paramount in the formation of a trans identity, offering the sense that ‘individuals... are to be formed primarily in the private’ (Warner 2005, 48). The distinction between public and private is crucial to the formation of the individual, and is embedded in much of our legal framing, not only for trans people but for all individuals. The rights to privacy, Warner argues, evoke a liberal idea, which defines humanity itself (Warner 2005, 39). Drawing on Habermas, Warner states:

The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public. (Warner 2005, 48)²³

The bourgeois project of public behaviour is where ideologies of particular values and morals are performatively produced as ‘bourgeois’. I will address systems of class and taste formation in Chapter 6, but here I wish to continue to discuss the tensions around trans visibility in relation to a legal framing of human rights with regard to notions of privacy. Indeed, a person’s right to a private life, embedded in Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, is of particular current significance as it concerns protection of a person’s privacy and of their private correspondence. We can think of the Leveson Inquiry following the phone hacking scandal from 2005, where tabloid newspaper the *News of the World* was eventually closed because of its illegal hacking into the phones of not only celebrities and public figures, but also victims of 7/7 and murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler.²⁴

It was this invasion of the personal privacy of an ordinary member of the public that brought about such a public outcry and that led to the final demise of the newspaper and the consequent damage to Rupert Murdoch’s company News International. Similarly the ‘super-injunctions’ saga in 2011, where the courts issued super-injunctions to protect public figures (including professional football players) and to secure their rights to privacy, became incredibly difficult for the legal systems to tackle. This was especially complex as these super-injunctions proved ineffectual owing to the international and speedy nature of new social media platforms such as

Twitter, on which information can spread so fast and so far across the world that it cannot be held accountable to one particular country's legal framings.

In 2002, it was also through Article 8 that the European Court of Human Rights claimed the UK was in breach of its obligation, under the European Convention on Human Rights, towards the human rights of transsexual people. This led to the legislative achievement of the Gender Recognition Act 2004, which gave full legal recognition to people in their 'acquired gender'.²⁵ The process of gaining this legal recognition involves applying to the Gender Recognition Panel for a Gender Recognition Certificate, which, if issued, enables the applicant to receive a birth certificate in their 'acquired gender'.

Hence those in receipt of a Gender Recognition Certificate no longer have to reveal their biological sex at birth. Instead it remains private. From this all employers and organisations must understand that their employees, students and service-users have a right to privacy and confidentiality around their gender identity and gender history. It is an offence for anyone in any official capacity to disclose that someone has applied for a Gender Recognition Certificate, or whether or not they have been given one. Unlawful disclosure applies to spoken, paper and electronic communication and includes disclosure by an employer, manager, colleague, administrator or anyone working in an official capacity for a public agency or service provider.²⁶

Being trans – or specifically undergoing, intending to undergo or having undergone Gender Reassignment – is, at least in legal terms, a private matter. This is crucial when considering the visibility or the visibility of trans. The dualities of privacy/invisibility and publicness/visibility are enmeshed in complex ways, as they form part of everyday trans living. For trans people, being 'visibly' trans can mean genuine fears and realities of discrimination, harassment and danger. Similarly the disappointment and dejection felt when a trans person is treated differently as a result of people *knowing* they are trans can be difficult to live with. (This is often expressed in the form of the unrealness of their self-identified gender.) Hence maintaining one's privacy in being trans can be preferable and sometimes necessary.

Cross-dressing acts have been typically understood as something practised behind closed doors, or taking place at private gatherings, such as underground clubs, private functions and house parties. In particular, visible 'femme' or 'female' performances carried out by visibly male-bodied people continue to be thought of as

prohibited and are violently denounced by members of the public.²⁷ The logical consequences of such everyday denouncements are that some trans people keep their trans history or trans identity private, and choose to ‘live stealth’. ‘Living stealth’ means not disclosing to others that your sex/gender is different to that which was assigned to you at birth. It means living an everyday life in which no one knows that you are a ‘transgender-identified’ person (to use Valentine’s term). In addition, it may be that you are ‘stealth’ in certain areas of your life, for example at work or university, and not in others, for example your hometown.

The principle behind the Gender Recognition Act 2004 is that any individual should be able to control their own disclosures and decide for themselves who and what they tell about *who they are*. We cannot, however, consider such rights to privacy outside of this context of prohibition and violence. We must understand these moments of disclosures, or ‘coming out’, as acts carried out within a culture of hetero and gender normative dominance. After all, Warner tells us, you do not have to come out as heterosexual (Warner 2005, 52). Warner states: ‘We blame people for being closeted. But the closet is better understood as the culture’s problem, not the individual’s’ (Warner 2005, 52).

2.11 Trans Publics and Trans Viewers

To study the intricacies of trans visibility (in relation to public/private encounters), I wish to draw on the opening pages of Warner’s chapter ‘Publics and Counterpublics’. In it Warner considers the photographic cover of the book, which features a group of trans women in their mid-fifties to mid-sixties in New Jersey.²⁸ The photograph is taken from a photographic book called *Casa Susanna*, which was edited by Michel Hurst and Robert Swope and published in 2005. This particular photograph appearing on the front of Warner’s book is interesting because the women featured are holding domestic cameras and taking photographs of each other posing. It offers a very complex pictorial account in which conventional aesthetics of glamour, catwalks and red carpets are referenced by the photographers and the photographed (the women taking up both of these positions), and suggests a certain *desire* to be in the public eye, but also a *failure* to be in the public eye as they are actually situated in a domestic space.²⁹

The image is further complicated by finally *being* in the public eye, albeit some decades later, as it forms the front cover of Warner's book and is discussed by Warner himself (as well as by others including me here). What we learn from this image of photographing-photographed-photograph is that, whilst the posing is carried out in a private space, the act of posing is itself an act of *becoming* public. As they take these photographs of each other, we ask: for *which* public do they pose? They are producing, Warner tells us, their own kind of 'sociability' and 'solidarity' (Warner 2005, 13–14); an insular discourse and culture that fulfils a shared desire for identity formation that is brought about not in the private but through a necessary public, a 'minor' public perhaps but nonetheless a public in the same sense that publics are:

essentially intertextual, frameworks for understanding texts against an organized background of the circulation of other texts, all interwoven not just by citational references, but by the incorporation of a reflexive circulatory field in the mode of address and consumption. (Warner 2005, 16)

To map this idea onto my project I posit that, as the TV documentaries make public trans knowledge through the various trans people featured, the consumption of these knowledge products taken up by trans viewers forms 'trans publics' through an additional circularity of discourse and sociability. Whilst trans viewers can be understood as forming a public, 'the public' is more than its viewership as it is also notional and fictional, existing 'by virtue of their imagining' (Warner 2005, 8). Trans viewers too, then, become trans publics only through their own circulated discourses and actions carried out in the 'moment of meaning'; the performance of 'articulation' and the 'use-production', to recall the insights of Stuart Hall and Lyotard again (Hall in Storey 2009; Lyotard 1984). Moreover these performances too produce a 'sociability' (Warner 2005), an array of networks that produce 'new' or counter discourse and culture. A 'trans public' is a 'counter public' (Warner 2005) as, like all counter publics, it is 'defined by [its] tension with a larger public' (Warner 2005, 56). It stands:

against the background of the public sphere, enables a horizon of opinion and exchange; its exchanges remain distinct from authority and can have a critical relation to power; its extent is in principle indefinite, because it is not based on a

precise demography but mediated by print, theatre, diffuse networks of talk, commerce, and the like. (Warner 2005, 56)

Whilst a ‘trans public’ stands counter to the general public in the sense that it may wish to challenge discourses that abound within it, a ‘trans public’ also sits in *relation to* the ‘general public’, or rather in relation to its own imagined ‘general public’. That is to say there is a notional general public that is ‘conjured into being’ by the trans viewer as they consume the knowledge product, as they form and perform their opinion and produce discourse. This becomes a complex idea which is caught up in *how* a trans viewer actually comes to watch these popular TV documentaries. The texts, discourse and knowledge that circulate through TV documentaries require a trans viewer to understand them with a mindfulness to the fact that they are not aimed at people like themselves, and therefore part of their concern as a trans viewer is to imagine how the non-trans viewer views *being* trans.

2.12 In the Trans Public Eye

Ratings are concerned with majorities, not minorities, as broadcasters too often conceive of the ‘public’ that they serve as the majority, not the entire public... (Gray 2008, 125)

Minorities will invariably be culturally bilingual, while members of the dominant majority will have no such burden or opportunities. (Gross 2001, 151; quoted in Gray 2008, 125)

It was clearly understood by the members of the groups at my TV screenings that television documentaries that feature trans people are not aimed at them, but at a non-trans viewership – the majority, *the* general public. Trans viewers no doubt view these documentaries with this in mind.³⁰ ‘Trash’ TV is typically consumed through a kind of osmosis – subliminally, without much serious attention – whilst any sense of importance and focus given by a trans viewer will warrant a different mode of attention and form particular thoughts and opinions about the work (Glynn 2000). These distinctions are noted, and it is the kinds of investments that trans people have in the documentaries that will typify a ‘trans public’ and how trans viewers, as a

minority, achieve this bilingualism to which Gross points. Warner tells us that publics are formed 'by virtue of being addressed' (Warner 2005, 64), but if trans viewers are not addressed by these TV documentaries, what kind of public are they?

In addition, simply by *being* trans, trans viewers will *see* particularities in these TV documentaries that the general public will not. The trans viewer's relationship to the documentary will *feel* different. In some cases a trans viewer might even know the actual person or persons taking part in the film and so the proximity of the film will feel greater compared to a viewer from the general public who may deem trans as removed from themselves and alien to their lives. Also the investment the trans viewer may have when watching these documentaries concerns the use-value of the knowledge product. This concern is a critical one about how trans knowledge, generated by and in 'the general public', comes about through these documentaries. The concern is also about the way these understandings will go on to impact on trans people themselves, or rather how trans people might *imagine* members of the general public will treat them given their newly acquired trans knowledge. For instance, after the screening of *Middlesex*, David offered this pertinent response:

I didn't really think about what they were saying, really. I was kind of thinking about how it came across as a documentary and how I thought... who would be watching it and what they'd think about. I didn't think about what I thought about it. When I see documentaries like this I am more concerned about how they're affecting other people and how they're potentially viewing me in light of that documentary.

David performs a kind of doubled-up viewing, where his viewpoint is split (or bi-culturally doubled) as he reflects on his own watching with a sort of heightened concern *through* his perception of the 'general public', the majority – the non-trans person. This secondary viewpoint is conjured up by his *imagining* and overwhelms his own viewpoint. He does not form opinions of the documentary based only on his own reflections. Indeed he does not even feel inclined to. The moment of meaning is not a simple exchange between text and viewer. David's judgement, his approval or disapproval and what is meaningful to him, are formed through his imaginary *Joe Public* figure. He imagines what the film will achieve in shifting his viewpoint, what 'the general public' will come to know about trans and, in turn, how such knowledge will work to legitimise being trans and hence legitimise himself.

My project here does not set out to measure the impact of such documentaries on the general public, but rather to think about David's (and other trans viewers') projections of such achievements through this 'bilingual' critical encounter with the documentary. As the trans viewer forms their value judgement (deciding whether it is 'good' or 'bad') they do so in relation to an imagined positive shift in the social and cultural behaviours of 'the general public' towards trans people (such as themselves) and indeed to an imagined consequential set of engagements that they will go on to have in their everyday settings. This thesis explores the 'burden' and 'opportunity' of being a trans viewer in this bilingual encounter with these popular documentaries in relation to the production of trans knowledge (Gray 2008).

2.13 Conclusion

To summarise, the screenings that took place at my flat were viewed by fellow trans viewers and myself, an audience that constitutes a 'minor' public. As a result of such small numbers, the screenings became opportunities to 'mediate the most private and intimate meanings of gender and sexuality [and] make possible new forms of gendered and sexual citizenship' (Warner 2005, 57). Of course, in 'ordinary' circumstances any trans viewer watching television documentaries that feature trans people would be doing so in their own home setting and any contribution to a trans public would be carried out in different modes and circulate across different platforms.

Due to the small and intimate setting of my home, the after-screening discussions produced a very particular trans public. Being together as a viewership meant that a significant amount of banter and laughter could take place. In addition, viewers could disclose personal thoughts and intimate details about their lives. For instance, at a screening with just two others, one friend recalled a discussion he had had in his therapy session that day and another talked about a 'mental breakdown' he had had in his past. Responses to the TV documentaries represented not only a critique of their content and meaning, but the relating of the viewers' own narratives, thoughts and feeling to those that featured became pertinent. It is crucial to acknowledge the ways I cut and paste these discussions and comments for my own

purposes, juxtaposing them with critical thinking and scholarly writings in order to form my argument.

I recognise the complexities and problems around my methodology with regards to the informal conversations and small number (and particular types) of trans viewers. However, it is not my intention to work with a sample of subjects which can more scientifically and ‘properly’ point to a more ‘respected’ mode of scholarly practice. Instead I am involved here in producing something of a more perverse sort of knowledge; one that sits counter to more normative ethnographic practices. In this way I cannot deny the problematics of my interview subjects as friends and acquaintances, nor that their responses were not somehow caught up in an array of motives, in part no doubt complicated by a desire to please me.

I would state, however, that at this stage of the thesis, I had yet to fully form much of my hypothesis and indeed much of my thinking came as a consequence of listening and hearing other trans people’s about these documentaries and the conversations that ensued. Whilst I acknowledge the ‘skewed data’ that may have been produced as a consequence of my methods, I would critique – as have many of the theorists I have drawn on in this chapter – any notion that ethnographic practice can be anything else but skewed. That is to say, any original and authentic thinking prior to the ethnographic framing and positioning of the participants is unobtainable and fictive.

By offering these notes on my methodology I hope to have positioned and problematised the kinds of looking a trans viewer performs in relation to a cultural knowledge product that considers what it means to be trans and what trans living is like. I also hope to have firmly positioned myself as central to this project as I draw in part on the TV screenings, as well as textual analysis to frame my thinking and contribution to discourse. This leads on, in the next chapter, to a consideration of the TV documentaries as texts, contextualised within a sociopolitical specificity that enables me to chart the rise of ‘popular’ TV documentaries that feature trans subjects.

Notes to Chapter 2

¹ For details of the screenings of the documentaries see Appendix Two

² Newton's work, writes Halberstam in his/her foreword, forms part of the 'self reflexive turn in anthropology' (Newton 2000, xiii), upon which I will expand later in this chapter. For Butler, see: Henry Abelove, Michele A. Barale and David M. Halperin, eds. 1993. *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 307-20.

³ See Appendix Three.

⁴ It is important to reflect on the overall whiteness of the group. All participants are White British with the exception of Kris, whose national identity is North American, and Carl, who has mixed heritage. At the time the communities around trans activism and community work had been (as they continue to be) predominantly white. It must be said that in the trans youth programmes at Gendered Intelligence there is an established contingent of members who identify their ethnicity as non-white, but none were available to attend the screenings. The lack of a non-white trans presence amongst trans community activities and activism has been noted variously across the voluntary sector, with many debates and consultations signalling the intersectionality of minority communities such those representing disability, race, age or faith.

⁵ See: Phelan 1996.

⁶ See: Said 1978 and Spivak 2010.

⁷ For the development of 'diaspora' see Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*, Hutchinson, 1987.

⁸ In order to define 'Tomboy' Farjardo states:

Tomboy here broadly refers to Filipino masculine or male-identified fe/males who generally have sexual/emotional relationships with feminine females. I use the term "fe/male" because tomboys are female and masculine-identified, whereas others are male and masculine-identified. Tomboys may also identify as "FTM" (female-to-male), indicating a movement or shift in sex/gender identification. This movement or shift may entail medical procedures on the body to change sex (e.g., top/bottom surgeries, hormones, or none of the above). There is indeed a spectrum of tomboy FTM female masculinities. "Fe/male," to me, indicates this fluidity or range of sex/gender identifications among Filipino tomboys. Although analysed as "lesbians" or "women"... tomboy can also be understood as a form of transgressive sex/gender practices and/or identities.' (Fajardo 2011, 154)

Fajardo goes on to explain how the Filipino language is gender neutral, for example it does not have gender pronouns. Also social and interpersonal contexts are given more importance than the biological body, for instance "lalaki" means both male and man and the distinctions between sex and gender in the everyday senses of these terms in the United States and the UK are also not pronounced in the Filipino language (Fajardo 2011, 154).

⁹ Fajardo draws on James Clifford for the use of 'narrative "collage"' in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997, and Anna L. Tsing for 'portfolio of [writing] methods' in *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005.

¹⁰ The original text is Narayin, Kirin. 1993. "How Native is a 'Native' Anthropologist?" *American Anthropologist* 95, no 3 671 – 672.

¹¹ Neuman, M. 1996. 'Collecting ourselves at the end of the century', in Ellis and Bochner 1996.

¹² I will return to these questions in my concluding chapter, as key political questions regarding trans subjectivities in visual culture.

¹³ Endeavours such as Black History Month, or LGBT History Month, which take a month of the year to platform and celebrate famous and ‘successful’ people from these histories, continue to grapple with these politics. Such agendas, driven mainly through school programmes across the UK, Europe and the United States, are honourable in that they look to tackle bullying and poor behaviour and they celebrate diversity. Nevertheless one critical response has been around the normative processing of this kind of (re)canonisation and how such lives are read through a Western, heteronormative and capitalistic value system that perpetuates its own values. What constitutes ‘good’ or positive citizenship is determined by deeming certain acts as ‘positive’ contributions to society and identifying ‘success’ within these specific frameworks. Crucially these systems themselves go uninterrogated. See Halberstam 2011.

¹⁴ Most notably such works as *Minha* 1992 or ‘White Glasses’ in Sedgwick 1994, amongst many others, offer a certain poetic sensibility that flows through or sits alongside the rigour of academic conventions.

¹⁵ Fajardo also talks at length about the femininity of South Asian and Pacific culture (Fajardo 2011).

¹⁶ See also: Couldry Nick and Tim Markham 2008 “Troubled closeness or satisfied distance? Researching media consumption and public orientation” *Media Culture & Society* 2008: 30: 5.

¹⁷ Regarding this, later in this thesis I will also turn to the phenomenon of the Victorian Freak Show where comparisons have been made, namely by Van Dijck 2002, with that and Infotaining TV documentaries.

¹⁸ We can think of Gus Van Sant's 1991 film *My Own Private Idaho* for example.

¹⁹ In addition to this particular TV viewership, Aaron also posits a ‘rigorous contextualisation of these shows within the contemporary sociopolitical scene.... This means situating queer TV against both the socio-historical events and conditions that gave rise to queer activism and art in the first place, and within what could be called the New Queer Cinema. ‘ She continues: ‘By this I mean the mainstream embrace of a certain kind of queerness as a departure from the radical intent of queer texts, in particular those of the so-called New Queer Cinema.’ (Davis and Needham 2009, 64-65). Similarly here for me as I concentrate on TV documentaries that feature trans people, it is not straightforward to me to perceive these TV documentaries as queer objects as they work so coherently to reinforce gender norms. However, like Aaron, I perceive queerness around the knowledge products precisely because they intrigue and indeed matter to many trans and queer viewers, igniting as such a ‘mainstream embrace of a certain kind of queerness’. I explore this in Chapter 3.

²⁰ ‘Genderqueer’ describes someone who identifies their gender as other than ‘man’ or ‘woman’, or someone who identifies as neither, both, or some combination thereof. Some genderqueer people may identify as a third gender or move between gender descriptions in a fluid way. Genderqueer as a political term challenges the binaries of gender and heteronormativity.

²¹ Other phrases that have arisen to tackle this conundrum are: ‘a person with a trans history’ or ‘ex-trans’. When it comes to monitoring and counting trans people on equal opportunities forms, there are occasions when people are asked to tick one of the following: ‘male’, ‘female’ or ‘transgender’. Consequently some trans people have raised concern as this suggests that ticking the ‘transgender’ box implies that they are not also the ‘male’ or ‘female’ person they feel themselves to be. One way around this is to allow people to tick more than one box. Another question that sometimes gets asked is: ‘Is your gender identity different to the one you were assigned at birth?’ This counts ‘gender reassignment’ in its broadest sense. Other additional gender categories are ‘gender neutral’ or ‘non-binary’ or ‘gender queer’. However, using the term ‘queer’ as a reclaimed word continues to be too problematic and too controversial, in particular for government departments and agencies.

²² See: <http://genderedintelligence.co.uk/trans-community/past-conferences>

²³ Jurgen Habermas 1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*, trans. Thomas Burger. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

²⁴ Interestingly, the organisation Trans Media Watch submitted an account to the Leveson Inquiry outlining how the press's intrusive behaviour affects and compromises the rights to a private life for trans people. See: <http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Submission-by-Trans-Media-Watch.pdf>

²⁵ See: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/7/contents>

²⁶ For more on this see <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/about-us/vision-and-mission/our-business-plan/transgender-equality/>; <http://www.pfc.org.uk/> and Stephen Whittle's blog, <http://whittlings.blogspot.co.uk/>

²⁷ We can think of other highly regulated platforms and rituals where cross-dressing is socially permitted, such as pantomimes, light entertainment TV programming, drag acts, raising money for charity and stag dos.

²⁸ Michael Hurst and Robert Swope found a large body of original photographs at a New York flea market. The series of albums contained photographs depicting a group of cross-dressers/trans women at Casa Susanna, a house of one of the individuals in small-town New Jersey. The book *Casa Susanna* was edited by Michel Hurst and Robert Swope and published by powerHouse Books.

²⁹ We can also think of the 'family' albums which were found in a flea market as both a kind of 'failure' and a 'success' in achieving a public encounter.

³⁰ Warner states: 'The public is a kind of social totality.... brought about by speaking of the public, even though to speak of a national public implies that others exist; there must be as many publics as polities, but whenever one is addressed as the public, the others are assumed not to matter.' (Warner 2005, 65-66) A survey carried out by Trans Media Watch suggests that trans people actually avoid popular culture items such as infotainment documentaries and tabloids, in part because of how they depict trans lives. 30 people said they never read newspapers, with several stating that this is because they expect them to be discriminatory, uninformed or transphobic. ('How Transgender People Experience the Media' Conclusions from research November 2009-February 2010).

3

Historicising UK TV Documentaries that Feature Trans Subjects

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I offer some of the historical context to the emergence of popular documentaries broadcast on television, which feature trans people. In this context my work will say how the representation of the trans subjects on TV has shifted over time from 1979 with the first documentary that featured a trans person, but more substantially from the early 1990s through to 2010. More importantly I will state why this is so. I will locate what has been happening sociopolitically and culturally

for trans people from this 20-year period, specifically in relation to the legislation and the lobbying work that was taking place in the UK during the time. I will go on to contextualise these documentaries in relation to the broadcasting remits of TV channels – in particular Channel 4. Finally I will chart the shift in aesthetics, tone and style as the TV documentary genre more generally has adapted over time in order to become ‘popular’ and garner higher audience ratings.

I wish to mark this period of 1990–2010 as the heyday of TV documentaries that feature trans people, as this period saw television as a main source of information for trans people, where much of their knowledge and self-recognition would start from. For so many, certainly in the UK, I argue that this is coming to, or in fact has come to, an end. Now that we have multiple channels of communications, whilst broadcasting is still there, it sits amongst other on-line social platforms, which are becoming increasingly more utilised by trans people. Today there is little doubt that if you are a trans person the most significant way of finding out more about what it means to be trans would be to go on to the Internet. With so many trans people from across the globe posting blogs and making YouTube videos, the Internet has overtaken broadcast television as the main medium for trans people seeking trans representation. It should be noted, however, that non-trans people will continue to obtain their trans knowledge from broadcast television, and for these reasons critical thinking and a certain trans attention will be given to them.

3.2 The Emergence of Trans Activism

‘Transgender’ moved from the clinics to the streets over the course of that decade, and from representation to reality. (Stryker 2006, 2)

In the introductory chapter I commented that trans activism in the UK from the early 1990s centred predominantly on gaining legal recognition around the rights for privacy and the right to marry. I also mark the early 1990s as the point in which documentaries about trans people started to appear more frequently on TV. I wish here to extrapolate further on these activities and to draw more fully on the sociopolitical picture of trans lives in the UK. I do this in order to form a relationship between the shifts in representations of trans life and trans narratives with that of the political status of trans people, of the legalities surrounding those statuses and the

current medical treatments of trans people at the time. My question in this next section is: *How do these documentaries relate to the legal recognition and political backdrop that was sought in this period?*

In the introduction to the *Transgender Studies Reader*, Susan Stryker bookmarks an important historical period with two anecdotes about two conferences that she attended. The first was in 1995 at the ‘Lesbian and Gay History’ conference organised by the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies (CLAGS) at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. She remarks on the contributors not reflecting a particularly gender diversity that she would have liked and how her presence as a transgender person seemed to be usurped by the dominant concerns with gender identity only in relation to sexualities and sexual practices. In her mind the ‘new wave of transgender scholarship’ was well underway and was not being addressed at this conference. The second conference that Stryker talks of comes ten years later in 2005 at another CLAGS conference in the same auditorium. She writes:

What began with the efforts of emerging and marginally situated scholars and activities such as ourselves to be taken seriously on our own terms, and not pathologized and dismissed, has helped foster a sea change in the academic study of gender, sex, sexuality identity, desire and embodiment.... New modes of gendered subjectivity have emerged, and new discourses and lines of critical inquiry have been launched. Academic attention to transgender issues has shifted over the span of those ten years from the field of abnormal psychology, which imagined transgender phenomena as expressions of mental illness... into field that concern themselves with the day-to-day workings of the material world. (Stryker 2006, 2)

In order to consider the historical period that gave rise to the emergence of Transgender Studies, Stryker maps out what was taking place in the early 1990s in the United States. Sandy Stone’s 1991 celebrated article, ‘The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto’, called for refiguring transgender as resistant to a medicalized normalization (Papoulias 2006) and to visibilise the uncongeniality of transgender embodiment and histories. Such stipulations were integral to the growing trans activism and engaged rigorously with the radical feminists of Janice Raymond and Sheila Jeffreys.

In 1991 the Michigan Women’s Music Festival expelled transsexual Nancy Jean Burkholder.¹ In addition the anthology *Body Guards: the Cultural Politics of*

Gender Ambiguity was published which, Stryker tells us, ‘offered an early map of the terrain transgender studies would soon claim as its own’ (Stryker 2006, 5).² In 1992 Leslie Feinberg’s influential ‘pamphlet’ *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come* was published, in which the term ‘transgender’ gained solidity and solidarity to recognise the broad range of peoples that identified their gender as different to that which they were assigned at birth. ‘Transgender’ as a term allowed for a range of choices of how an individual pursued and perceived their own gender identity, which may or, importantly, may *not* have included medicalised processes. In the same year Transgender Nation formed in the region of San Francisco and trans activists were seen to become more mobilised. In 1993 the direct action group Transsexual Menace was founded by Rikki Anne Wilchins. Papoulias tells us:

In the context of postmodern critiques of identity, transgender activism forged a challenge to hegemonic gender binaries and their naturalising force and invoked the possibility of fluid mobile and provisional enactments of gender. (Papoulias 2006, 231)

Kate Bornstein’s book *Men, Women and the Rest of Us* published in 1994 came out as she pursued the university and community circuits with numerous performances that were autobiographical and drew on experience of being a ‘Gender Outlaw’. To mark the transgressive potential of the transsexual, Sally Hird draws on Bornstein. She tells us ‘Bornstein argues that transsexuals are not men or women, not because they are “inauthentic” but because transsexuals, by their very existence, radically deconstruct sex and gender’ (Hird 2002a, 589). Also in the early 1990s, activist Lou Sullivan presented openly as a gay trans man inviting new debates around sexual orientations and practices that were not always heterosexual within transgender communities, as much as the discourses, certainly medical ones, had implied up to that point.

Communities were becoming more connected and communications through newsletters were far reaching. As such these networks became integral to trans people’s knowledge about being trans and how they might constitute their own trans identities. In San Francisco, Jamison Green joined the local FTM Support Group and extended its reach across the United States and beyond.³ The rise of the home

computer, the Internet, and online forum groups from 1990s allowed trans publics to be more visible and accessible. Whittle states:

Online, this newly formed community was able to discuss its experiences of fear, shame, and discrimination, and, as a result, many community members developed newly politicised personal identities. (Whittle 2006, xii)

Stryker notes that ‘transgender academic work in the UK tended from the outset to be more policy-orientated, and more focused on medical and legal issues, than work originating in the United States, which has tended to be more concerned with queer and feminist identity politics’ (Stryker 2006, 6). In the UK lobbying group Press for Change formed in 1992 and focused predominantly on seeking legal recognition and rights through the courts.

In her e-book *Pressing Matters – A Trans Activism Memoir Volume 1 (1990 – 97)*, Christine Burns tells us of her experiences as a trans activist predominantly with the lobbying organisation Press for Change. She prefaces the book with an account of the court case *Corbett vs Corbett 1970* where April Ashley’s marriage to Lord Arthur Corbett was deemed unlawful and annulled on the grounds that she was assigned male at birth.⁴ This set a precedent in law defining ‘transsexual people as forever the sex assigned to them at birth on the basis of concordance between their external genitals, their internal reproductive organs, and their presumed chromosome configuration’ (Burns 2013, 3%). Dr John Randell was an ‘expert witness’ in the Court of Appeal case of *Corbett v Corbett* as Transsexualism was understood as a condition requiring psychiatric intervention.⁵ Burns tells us:

Justice Ormrod’s ruling [in *Corbett v Corbett*] privileged the view of psychiatrists over the opinions of surgeons and endocrinologists.... his approach created the mould in which gender reassignment treatment took shape under the command of psychiatrists in the 1970s, framing trans experience as mental illness to be cured or ameliorated rather than a natural form of sexual diversity to be accommodated in the binary worlds of men and women. (Burns 2013, 3%)

Following Ormrod’s precedent, in 1974 another court case *R. v Tan* deemed that it was not possible to be legally recognised in a self-identified gender different to the one assigned at birth for the purposes of marriage and to be able to change other

identity documents into a person's acquired gender, honouring the previous case *Corbett v Corbett*. This meant that identity documents could no longer be changed, forcing trans people into a 'limbo' situation. Through the 1980s and 1990s cases were fought (and mostly lost) through the courts. Cases centred on two key objectives – for trans people to have the right to privacy (Article 8) and for trans people to have the right to marry (Article 12) in accordance with the European Convention of Human Rights.⁶ In a judgement delivered at Strasbourg on 11 July 2002 in the case of *Christine Goodwin vs the United Kingdom*, the European Court of Human Rights held unanimously that:

- there had been a violation of Article 8 (right to respect for private and family life) of the European Convention on Human Rights;
- there had been a violation of Article 12 (right to marry and to found a family);
- no separate issue had arisen under Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination);
- there had been no violation of Article 13 (right to an effective remedy).

As a result English legislation was now violating human rights under ECHR Article 8 (respect for private life) and Article 12 (right to marry) and the Government's response to these decisions of the European Court of Human Rights led to the Human Rights Act 1998 (set up to prevent anyone from needing to take action in to Strasbourg) and the Gender Recognition Act 2004, which gives legal recognition for a transsexual person's reassigned gender.

The two earliest and most polemical documentaries featuring on TV at the time were *Sex Change, Shock Horror Probe* (1989) and *The WAR CRIES: Thanks a Bunch Lord Ormrod* (1996). *Sex Change, Shock Horror Probe* charts the rise of media interest, and in particular the red-topped newspapers, as well as exploring the legal issues and their relationship with the medical world. The documentary featured, among others, Mark Rees who pursued court action and Dr Russell Reid who was practising as a gender identity specialist in the private sector.

Before this Reid had come from West London NHS having worked in the Gender Identity Clinic from 1982 to 1990.⁷ It was the first film to be broadcast on the new Channel 4 and was directed and produced by a trans woman Kristiene Clarke. *The WAR CRIES: Thanks a Bunch Lord Ormrod*, broadcast some seven years later and also on Channel 4, was a 'polemic film that explores the legal injustices and restrictions experienced by transsexuals living in the UK and comparing those

experiences with other countries.⁸ The documentary was also directed by a trans woman, Pamela Hunt, and took as its starting point the consequences of the 1970 ruling by Lord Ormrod that annulled the marriage of April Ashley in the *Corbett v Corbett* case.

In addition to the Human Rights agenda, Press for Change were also pursuing court action with regards to employment rights and the right to treatment under the National Health System. The most important case hearing that dealt with discrimination of trans people in the workplace was the industrial tribunal *P vs S and Cornwall County Council* which was won in 1993 and was supported by the Equal Opportunities Commission (Burns 2013, 4%). Consequently in 1999 the UK Sex Discrimination Act was amended to include protections on the basis of ‘Gender Reassignment’.⁹

Funded treatment from the NHS was a far more complex story. Whilst it had been granted in some jurisdictions, it was not until the verdict of the court case *R v North West Lancashire HA Ex p. A, D and G 1999*, which held that transsexualism was an illness and so that all transsexual people were entitled to treatment under the auspices of the National Health Service Act(s).¹⁰ Debate around whether treatment should be available on the NHS forms some of the discussion points in the TV documentaries broadcast through the 1990s and this point that transsexualism being an illness is an important message that the documentaries look to convey.

In a health series *The Decision*, a two-part documentary called *The Wrong Body* was broadcast in early 1996 on Channel 4. In *The Times* newspaper on 6 February 1996, Nigella Lawson wrote an article entitled ‘Sex Change Operations Don’t Work’. In it she contextualises the documentary with the lobbying that was taking place and headed up by campaigning organisation Press for Change. Alex Carlisle, the then Liberal Democrat Home Affairs spokesman, had won a place in the ballot for a Private Members Bill in Parliament and put forward a proposal to correct the birth certificates and status of transsexual people.¹¹ In her newspaper article, Lawson wrote:

As tonight’s moving television programme, *The Wrong Body* (part of Channel 4’s Decision series) shows, even while transsexuals complain about the intolerance that the rest of us have for them and their condition, it is they who are so intolerant [...] All transsexuals are utterly convinced that they are, as they say, trapped in the

wrong body. But does this make them right? I know psychiatric care is already provided, but there must be some kind of approach that might help people really to work out what is at the root of this incredible distress. (Lawson 1996)

Lawson goes on to argue that the distress and intolerance a transsexual person feels towards their own body needs psychological rather than surgical intervention. 'There is', she says, 'obviously an identity problem here, but I cannot help feeling that it is not one that can always so easily be solved with a sex-change operation or, as it is now called, gender reassignment.' Her article moves on to the polemic of receiving treatment on the National Health Service. She states:

The issue of this operation, and whether it should be available on the National Health Service, is becoming ever hotter. More and more health authorities are refusing treatment, and indeed only last week a number of transsexuals who have been unable to receive the treatment they want on the NHS began legal action to try to enforce their rights to it. What I'm not saying is that such operations should be outlawed. Treatment there should definitely be – these people are suffering horrendously – but I cannot see that this should inevitably be in the form of surgery. (Lawson 1996)

Her argument shows how wrong body discourse was gaining momentum alongside the lobbying and court action for the right to undergo gender reassignment surgery and hormone therapy. In addition, the documentary *The Wrong Body* draws on scientific findings that the brain is sexed and Lawson stipulates that she is not convinced. She said:

I was stunned in the programme by two unconnected comments by a couple of the girls who wish to be boys. The one, in her/his late teens, spoke of her/his horror at developing breasts at puberty: 'I wanted to be like my father.' The other, a child of 13, brought up by mother and stepfather, said that she/he wanted to be called Rick 'short for Richard which is my Dad's name'. You don't need to be Freud to see there is something going on there. The voice-over of tonight's programme, however, reported that some post-mortems of transsexuals showed that their brains accorded with the sex they thought they should be rather than with the sex their genes made them. This, if true, would indeed be staggering evidence, though the vague, unscientific nature of its reporting hardly makes it sound, so far, conclusive. (Lawson 1996)¹²

These discussions around brain sex determinism will be expanded upon in Chapter 5, but it is important to contextualise the documentary in relation to its historical and sociocultural specificity, to gauge the opinions of popular journalists as well as the emerging political agendas of activists. What the article also makes clear is the importance of believability in relation to the statements made by the documentary. That is to say, *if* Lawson were to believe that the brain accorded to the sex a trans person feels themselves to be then she *might* recognise the need for and acquiesce to NHS treatment. In short, should the documentary offer a more compelling and ‘proper’ argument based on scientific evidence, her view *might* shift.

What is noted here is the potential productivity when gaining social recognition and legitimacy for trans life (and the granting of medical treatment) are sought through adopting scientific approaches to knowledge production. However, it strikes me that the failure to convince Lawson – and presumably others like her, including the readership she sets out to win over – is what is most pertinent here. It is this importance of failing to convince that I will work through in my thesis. Yet this mainstream documentary certainly will have played its part in contributing to the debate around NHS treatment for trans people and it would have been three years later when the courts granted NHS treatment and stipulated transsexualism as an ‘illness’.

In my introduction to this thesis I wrote about the popular and determined transsexual, marking a distinction between the trans person who gains legal recognition through undergoing gender reassignment and those that do not. Here I outlined how the Gender Recognition Act 2004 gained legal recognition for trans people who wished to live in the ‘opposite’ gender that they were assigned at birth. It applies to anyone who is over 18 years old, has lived in their self-identified gender identity for more than two years and has been diagnosed with ‘Gender Dysphoria’. Once gained a Gender Recognition Certificate a person is issued a new birth certificate and knowledge about a person’s trans history is entirely confidential. In addition a person in receipt of a Gender Recognition Certificate is legally entitled to marry a person of the ‘opposite’ sex or civil partner a person of the ‘same’ sex.¹³ In addition you are able to be named appropriately as father or mother on a child’s birth certificate.

The documentary *Make Me a Man*, broadcast on Channel 4 in the summer of 2002, features the story of four female-to-male transsexuals. One of these trans men is Stephen Whittle, lawyer and key member of Press for Change. He stipulates in the documentary how he is currently not the legal parent of his four children and if anything were to happen to his partner, the mother of their children, he could not be guaranteed next of kin. The documentary shows his everyday family life as well as his involvement in the campaigning work that would lead to the Gender Recognition Act.¹⁴

The Equalities Act in 2010 merged and homogenised much pre-existing Equalities legislation, including the Sex Discrimination Act. The Act highlights 9 protected characteristics: race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion of belief, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership and gender reassignment. A trans person is protected from discrimination if they intend to undergo, are undergoing, and have at some time in the past undergone, gender reassignment where they are a service user or employee of a public sector service. This applies also to those who are under 18 years of age and so includes schools in its remit. In addition the previous requirement to be under medical supervision has been removed, meaning that a person can self-identify as someone intending to undergo, is currently undergoing or having undergone 'gender reassignment'.

Having spent some time fleshing out how legislation impacts on the lives of trans people, I wish now to explore more fully the legislation and activities pertaining to the broadcasting and commissioning that gave rise to the influx of TV documentaries featuring trans people as well as to the ways in which trans people feature on TV documentaries.

3.3 History of Broadcasting

Commercialisation, deregulation and convergence are the particular ways in which broader trends to globalisation have manifested themselves in the media and communications industries... The principle that broadcasting be accountable to the public, and subject to regulation in the public interest, has come under siege. (Sinclair and Turner 2004, 1)

Despite the high ratings achieved by *A Change of Sex* (1979) it took some time for more documentaries featuring trans people to be broadcast on TV in the UK. In his book *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty*, John Ellis divides television consumption into three distinct eras: scarcity, availability and plenty. The book describes and historicises the debates and tensions inherent in television's dual role.

In the first instance it was (and is) a public service broadcasting tool (the BBC), but this became complicated through the emergence of the commercial channel ITV in 1955. In addition to this dualism of public service / state, mapped onto these two channels were other dualities of highbrow, lowbrow, middle- and lower-class tastes and cultures, the elite and the popular. What this shows is how *all* television consumption offers a sense of 'being between', and manages a productive tension between these two polarities of public service (information and educational remits) and commercialisation (entertainment and pleasure based consumption). Here we can surmise that any knowledge gained through television is knowledge that sits between these described binaries. Ellis states:

On the one side lay a public service television whose primary ethos was one of national unit, whose aims were the education, information and improvement of the population. [...] Against this ethos was an unstable coalition of regional interests, populist tendencies and entertainment interests, allied with companies concerned with developing the consumer market. (Ellis 1999, 56)

Historically from the 1950s the BBC and ITV in simple terms represented these polarities. However, as more terrestrial channels had been inaugurated the scene became more knotted and intricate. As a public service, 'the Corporation [BBC] had to learn to survive in a much tougher climate without damaging the basic principles on which it was founded' (Cain 1992, 10). A series of tensions surround the complex and intertwining dualism of the privately owned commercially driven channels vis à vis public service broadcasting. A second channel for the BBC was launched in 1964. Called BBC2, its brief was 'to make programmes for minority tastes which were being badly catered for by BBC1 and ITV' (Ellis 1999, 150).

Documentaries were key here and it is important to contextualise *A Change of Sex* alongside other documentary programmes such as *Man Alive*, *Police* and *Living with Fear*.¹⁵ Ellis tells us that

the uniqueness of *Man Alive* in 1965 was the role it gave to ordinary men and women in Britain. They were accorded a new respect and dignity. Instead of being brought on as evidence for the propositions of legislators and academics, they were allowed to speak their feelings and beliefs directly, within a structure provided by discreet editing and commentary. (Ellis 1999, 51)

However, Ellis also states that *Man Alive* ‘trod a careful line between respect and salaciousness in its coverage of social problems [...] these early programmes sometimes found it difficult to judge the point at which revelation gave way to exploitation’ (Ellis 1999, 150).

The promotion of unregulated competition and market forces were ideologies central to Thatcher’s government from the early 1980s. Consequently shifts in the laws of broadcasting no doubt influence the culture of broadcasting and hence the commissioning and programming too. In 1982, a fourth terrestrial channel in the UK, Channel 4, emerged as another independent channel similar to ITV, but with a particular remit to cater for tastes and interests different to those of the ITV viewership. Instead it was to focus on ‘innovation and experimentation in the form and content of programmes’ (Ellis 1999, 152) and to offer ‘contrasting and sometimes specialist programmes’ (Cherry 2005). It was originally funded by the ITV companies who sold advertising space on the new channel.

Of the 23 documentaries featuring trans subjects that have been broadcast on television up to 2010, 10 of them were broadcast on Channel 4. Because of this I will spend some time here fleshing out a historical context to the emergence and progress of this new TV channel. Channel 4 is a public service broadcaster, regulated and served with a specific remit previously mentioned. In addition, Channel 4 is self-funded through its advertising streams. It has no shareholders and is a not-for-profit organisation.¹⁶ Channel 4 is a publisher broadcaster and so commissions independent production companies that are scheduled. Such a business model was the first of its kind in the UK, and now is adopted by other television channels including the BBC. What this kind of commissioning meant at the time was that independent production

companies did not have to rely on owning a ITV licence to air their programmes, as was necessary prior to 1982. Consequently, the rise in interest, and therefore supply, of independent production companies forced a change in the industry which soon became highly competitive.

In 1990, through the Broadcasting Act, Channel 4 took over the selling of its own advertising through a stage process, becoming fully independent from ITV in 1999 (Johnson and Turnock 2005). The relationship it had with ITV from this point was severed and revenue gained through advertising for Channel 4 increased. In 1993 Channel Four Television Company became Channel Four Television Corporation and from here there was a marked shift in style and direction that ultimately looked to (and achieved) an increase in ratings and revenues. The Communications Act 2003 brought in a new regulator Ofcom taking over the duties of the Broadcasting Standards Commission amongst others. To ensure that the channel did not lose sight of its primary purposes, the Communications Act 2003 made clear that:

The public service remit for Channel 4 is the provision of a broad range of high quality and diverse programming which, in particular:

- (a) demonstrates innovation, experiment and creativity in the form and content of programmes;
- (b) appeals to the tastes and interests of a culturally diverse society;
- (c) makes a significant contribution to meeting the need for the licensed public service channels to include programmes of an educational nature and other programmes of educative value; and
- (d) exhibits a distinctive character.¹⁷

Freed from any requirement to adhere to majority audiences, Channel 4 has gained reputable status in addressing minority sexual cultures,

[o]ften willing to court controversy, the channel has come under censure from the regulators and been subject to hostile campaigns in the tabloid papers. Protected by its remit and now by its success in the market, it is able to resist these pressures towards sexual conformity. (Jane Arthurs in Sinclair and Turner 2004, 11).

This is best exemplified with Channel 4's *Brass Eye* broadcast in 2001. It took as its subject the media hysteria of child abuse, which prompted mass

complaints by the general public to the broadcasting regulators. Jane Arthurs states:

Channel Four defended its right as a public service broadcaster to deal with problematic social issues, and argued that there should be no taboo areas for satirical treatment. The satire was directed at media hysteria, misinformation and political hypocrisy that prevent an informed debate on the causes and prevention of child sexual abuse. (Athurs in Sinclair and Turner 2004, 13)

In addition the notions of ‘diversity’ and ‘minority’ were considered integral to the scheduling of programmes on Channel 4. The *Black on Black* and *Asian Eye* series were commissioned to put forward the views of black and Asian people and the gay series *Out on Tuesday* was also aired. In 1989 *Sex Change, Shock Horror Probe* was the first documentary featuring content about trans people broadcast on Channel 4.¹⁸ In 1995 *Finishing School* was also broadcast on Channel 4 as part of the Red Light Zone – a series of late night programmes aimed at an adult audience with topics that were ‘taboo, highly sexual and potentially disturbing’ as stated by the voiceover introducing the programmes.¹⁹

The episode *Finishing School* formed part of the series ‘Whatever Turns You On’, and was broadcast alongside another documentary about the red light district of Subic Bay in the Philippines and two short dramas called *Panty Head* and *Hookers, Hustlers, Pimps and Their Jons*. Looking back, it is difficult to see anything taboo or sexual about *Finishing School* as it centres mainly on facilitated workshops for transvestites and transsexual women who are offered beauty and speech therapy and other tips about how to be more feminine.²⁰ Nonetheless we can see how gender variance was positioned in television culture at the time as taboo and late night watching. Things have certainly moved on though as topics of gender variance have moved more significantly towards medical health concerns. This has shifted the viewing times to more prime time post-watershed slots.

Since the mid 1990s TV documentaries on Channel 4, as well as other factual television programmes and genres, have continued to fulfil its remit to cater for minority audiences, to be innovative and risk taking in content and approach. In achieving this bodies – and in particular ‘different’ bodies – as well as the ways in which bodies are regulated are central to this remit. Topics such as body size, including obesity, anorexia and bulimia are central to its current factual TV genres.

Also health matters, such as illness and disease, sexual health, disabilities, pregnancy and birth, collectively form much of Channel 4's primetime viewing.

Again, as I have already stipulated, these programmes tread the careful path of managing the intrigue that the viewer has, the pleasure of repulsion and the sensational with whilst holding onto brand reputation as 'high quality' and not falling (at least too much) into the exploitative, offensive and more 'trashy' principles and aesthetics of TV making. For programmes that hold these two entities in tow we can think of *Embarrassing Bodies* as an example, which, on the one hand appeals to the voyeuristic and zoological gaze (the desire to see and know about bodies that repel and disgust), whilst at the same time breaks down taboos, generates knowledge and opens up discussion by exposing the 'realities' of diverse bodies, the ways in which illnesses and disease affect the body.

Another representation, and arguably a successful one, was the 2012 Summer Paralympics televised on Channel 4. Their promotional campaign ran with the tag line 'Thanks for the warm up' and their trailer *Meet the Superhumans* won a Golden Lion award at the Cannes Lions Festival in June 2013. In addition to airing the event, a round up discussion TV show *The Last Leg* also proved popular as it gave a humorous account of the day's events, as well as featuring comedy, guests and discussion that certainly subverted common stereotypes and assumptions around dominant disabilities representations. Whilst I have traced terrestrial broadcasting history for the period that I study, another important aspect of TV culture comes from the deregulation and convergence of digital multi-channel and multinational TV consumption.

3.4 Deregulation and Convergence: The New Millennium

A movement towards deregulation and commercialisation marked the end of the twentieth century, where principles of privatisation become more firmly established. Furthermore another key component of the shifts in broadcasting is the move towards convergence and multi-channel commercialism. Television now forms only part of a picture of telecommunications technologies – including broadband, mobile phones, network and channel subscriptions – and consequently we are seeing

conglomerates of large multinational companies owning multiple communications media across multiple nations. Consequently:

A trend to concentration of ownership has been paralleled by an increasing industrial and technological convergence as telecommunications, information technology and the electronic media coalesce under the same corporate umbrellas. (Turner 2002, 4)

Although the technology had been there for some decades it was not until the 1980s that satellite and cable networks began transmissions of multi-channels to British consumers. In 1984 the Cable and Broadcasting Act was passed. The digitisation of television has led to multi-channels and created demand for more content. People 'record' the programmes that they wish to watch and consume at their own convenience rather than adhering to the broadcasters' scheduling. In addition globalisation – the importing and exporting of programming and convergence – are key components to the television industry at the turn of the millennium. Turner tells us:

Television now addresses an individualised and fragmented audience rather than a community of aggregated audience... television programming targets a specialised taste fraction – a particularised consumer – rather than a community member or citizen.' (Turner 2004, 5)

Television is no longer a consumable entity that sits separate from other platforms. The reality TV show, *Big Brother* is a key example where alongside the edited programme broadcast on TV, live streaming and participating in chat rooms would take place on-line as well as other activities such as public events (Turner 2004, 4). The rise of satellite channels, digital TV alongside terrestrial networks is an integral backdrop to the rise in tabloid TV and sensationalist popular programming such as talk shows, chat shows and infotainment documentaries.

In the first instance, they are cheap to produce. The first series of *Big Brother* for example cost \$286,000 compared to \$1.3 million for a sitcom (Levine 2003, cited in Sinclair and Turner 2004, 68). The low production costs relate to overall budgetary constraints of the channels as, whilst there is more capacity for content

through multi-channels, competition intensifies as advertisers have more choice and purchasing power. Sinclair and Turner state:

Cheaper programming is a significant strategic adaptation for a television industry in which, since deregulation in many countries, both in Europe and elsewhere, there are too many channels chasing too few advertisers. (Sinclair and Turner 2004, 68)

The increase in numbers of documentaries that feature trans people cannot be disentangled from these wider broadcasting contexts including budgets and constraints. In addition there is something to add about the widespread appeal to the transgender subject to the mass audience that such documentaries capitalise on. With this in mind, as producers look to get a ‘bigger bang for their buck’, we can identify how ‘new genres of media spectacle have developed to attract bigger audiences’ (Kellner 2003). Such genres are

ideally suited to the dissemination of scandalous stories, whether of celebrities, politicians or ordinary people.... [because] scandals excite interest by exposing sexual transgression while legitimising the exposure through public condemnation of the behaviour revealed. This ambivalent structure means they function not only as morality tales to reinforce normative values, but also as an outlet for transgressive fantasy and wish fulfilment (Lull and Hinerman 1998, quoted in Sinclair and Turner 2004, 12).

Moreover, a psychoanalytic analysis of scandal points to its use to disavow shame.²¹ The questions posed here are: *Why does the public retain such a profound fascination with what is by now a ‘stock’ subject? Are there unconscious forces at work not acknowledged by the mainstream (straight and non-trans) viewer?* These are questions I will come to answer throughout my key chapters – 4, 5 and 6. Arthurs continues:

nevertheless, it is also argued that visibility can become a substitute for political and social equality and a form of disciplinary constraint in itself, as new modes of sexual citizenship become publicly defined (Arthurs in Sinclair and Turner 2004, 11).²²

Taking the example such as an episode of *Heart of the Matter* called 'More Sexes Please' (1997) broadcast on BBC1, we can see how particular approaches to trans subjects on television have shifted. Presented by Joan Bakewell, the programme takes a more journalistic approach as it gathers various people with specific diverse and contrasting viewpoints in order to raise debate around gender variance and identities. This discussion follows after one of the contributors, Stephen Whittle, has set the scene, calling for 'more sexes'. Whittle offers a historical and diverse cultural framework in which many people have understood themselves as between or outside the binary of 'male' and 'female'. Bakewell introduces us to the contributors who, including Stephen Whittle, are: a photographer, Del Grace; an author, Dr Georgina Somerset; the Vicar of Jesmond from the evangelical wing of the Church of England, Reverend David Hollow; and Deputy Editor of *The Spectator* magazine, Anne McElvoy. Each argues for or against the 'bipolarity of sex and natural variation'.

The format offers the democratic idea and practice of 'proper' debate, where multiple representatives with different viewpoints present their take on the issues. Consequently, as they are broadcast to a wide audience, the various angles on the debate allow the viewer to engage in the programme by allying him/herself to a certain subject position or possibly by sitting between the outlooks, concerns or ideas that are put forward. Such formats, used in topical or news programmes, such as *Newsnight* or *Question Time*, aim to gather public consensus democratically through a myriad display of opinions (Couldry *et al.* 2010; Glynn 2000). Since the mid 1990s it has become rare for such formats to frame trans subjects and produce trans knowledge.

Indeed it is in live chat shows and daytime TV shows (most notably *This Morning*, *Kilroy*, *The Jeremy Kyle Show* and *Trisha* amongst others, and in the USA *The Jerry Springer Show* and *The Oprah Winfrey Show*) that trans subjects and their stories have gathered most numerous²³. Chat shows, instead of presenting participants who form coherent arguments about a subject, are concerned with personal life stories, and in them emotional displays of shock, sobbing, rage and general misbehaviour make for great television viewing.

We can see how popular documentaries have borrowed from live chat shows, rather than the considered debates of *Heart of the Matter*. Popular documentaries share an interest in diverse various subjectivities, such as trans people, alcoholics, drug addicts, gay people, ex-gay people, half-ton men, women and children

alongside anorexics and bulimics – each performing their ‘freakiness’ for the voyeuristic and moralistically infused pleasure of the viewing audience (Grindstaff 2002; Glynn 2000; Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998; Dovey 2000; Gamson 1998). Charting this distinction, Abercrombie and Longhurst state:

Contemporary society is performative, spectacular, and focused on the self and individual identities. (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998, 175)

Like chat shows, popular documentaries are interested in portraits of subjectivities, narratives and emotions, rather than in debates about ideas, principles or concepts, or even objective truths. In the popular documentary it is the visual narrative that is privileged over and above the scientific content of fact-based knowledge, and it is in this context that the trans subject emerges as a stock figure (Hines 2007). Whilst Silverstone argues that narrative is always there, even in the most science-based documentary, it is important to note that visual narratives have developed in relation to the ‘contemporary society’ of which Abercrombie and Longhurst write – in which dramas are heightened, emotions are laboured and the visuality is ever more spectacular and sometimes gruelling. To flesh out my explanation of the shift that the TV documentary genre has typically made in order to become more ‘popular’ and gain a wider audience, I turn to explore the ‘popular’ and hybrid genre of Infotainment Documentary.

3.5 Charting the ‘Popular’ in the Documentary Genre

Next I chart the shift in emphasis towards the visual narratives that have become privileged over and above ‘scientific’ and empirical approaches to documentary making. I do this in order to contextualise the ways in which trans knowledge circulates amongst TV products, especially as we see these formats shift in style in order to reach and appeal to a mass audience. In this next section I position trans knowledge through and out of the growing popularisation of the documentary genre.

I expand on the key emergence of the hybrid genre of ‘Infotainment’ documentaries and, by tracking back to before its emergence, I compare and contrast ‘harder’ programming with the ‘dumbed down’ versions that emerged from the mid-1990s onwards. My thesis asks: *what is known about trans people through television*

documentaries and, crucially, what does such knowledge do for the purposes of trans subject production?

In this chapter I note the productivity of the rise in the visual presence of trans subjects through infotainment television documentaries; I consider the impact of large audiences on the production of trans knowledge and what is achieved by appealing to such mass viewership. In addition, I chart the critical encounter with these documentaries – sparse though it is – including with reference to the TV reviews written by broadsheet journalists at the time of airing.²⁴

I do this in order to set the scene for considering the relationship between this new hybrid form and the trans subject, and in the following chapters I will go on to think about how trans knowledge is shaped and framed within such particular settings. I turn first to an exploration of the way the ‘real’ and ‘being real’ is manifest in this complex genre of documentary. By considering the history of the documentary genre and its relationship to the real, I go onto show how infotainment documentaries, whilst typically trading on realness, also have a penchant for the dramatic.

In Chapter 2 on methodology I showed how educational value and a principle of objectivity is typically attached to anthropological filmmaking. Similarly, medical and scientific worlds have historically brought the camera into their laboratories and operating theatres in order to document their practices, disseminate their findings and use such footage as pedagogic tools. Considering these scientific endeavours brings about a deep sense that there is an object or matter *out there* to be observed by a subject who plays no part in the production of that object. Indeed the use of camera equipment *to see* creates further alienation or distancing from this exchange and further separates the natural world (things, matter or objects) from the social world (culture, discourse and people). As traditionally documentary films are set up to convince, prove and perform scientific approaches to knowledge production, their historical link to scientific empiricism is clearly established. As Renov states:

Documentary is the domain of non-fiction that has most explicitly articulated this scientific yearning. (Renov 1999, 85)

Historically, documentary has set itself up as a mode or genre in which seeing realities, capturing the ‘real’ world and being ‘real’ are of paramount importance in

its production and performance. Moreover, documentaries of the past have typically gained value and success through and out of the believability of their own authority to speak. By employing various performance styles, techniques and devices ‘Documentary’ as a genre *produces* the ‘real’.

In *Faking It: Mock Documentary and the Subversion of Factuality*, Craig Hight tells us:

Documentary holds a privileged position within society, a position maintained by documentary’s claim that it can present the most accurate and truthful portrayal of the socio-historical world. Inherent to such a claim is the assumption that there is a direct relationship between the documentary image and the referent (social world). Within documentary then, the image and the record of that image are seen as being one and the same, suggesting a strong and direct connection between the cinematic record and ‘reality’. It is because of such perceived connections between the recorded and the originary event that documentary continues to suggest a ‘fullness and completion’ in its representation. (Hight 2002, 6)

Establishing the distinction between ‘the actuality of events’, or the ‘natural’ or ‘real’ world, and its image, text or discourse is complex, and has been debated within much scholarly writings on documentary making (for example Hight and Roscoe 2001, and Nichols 1991 and 1993). Certainly, to identify documentary’s capacity to collapse the real into its representation allows for such power to be accumulated (Hight and Roscoe 2001, 6). When the real and the represented are conflated, the argument, perception or subjective viewpoint of the filmmakers becomes invisible and the knowledge itself is posited as if it stands alone as ‘truth’ or ‘fact’.

Peggy Phelan considers the importance of perceiving this relationship between the real and the image as performative. Phelan quotes Judith Butler’s (1990) essay, ‘The Force of Fantasy’ in which Butler points out that the confusion between the real and the representational occurs because ‘the real is positioned both before and after its representation; and representation becomes a moment of the reproduction and consolidation of the real’ (Butler 1990, quoted in Phelan 1996, 2). Phelan continues:

The real is read through representation, and representation is read through the real. Each representation relies on and reproduces a specific logic of the real; this logical real promotes its own representation. The real partakes of and generates different imagistic and discursive paradigms. (Phelan 1996, 2)

Traditionally, documentary making has a remit to disappear as a form, erase its decision-making process, and naturalise these performances. The aim here is to present the knowledge product *as it really is*. As Nichols states:

Documentary may talk about anything in the historical world except itself...
(Nichols 1991, 17)

To critique this, in his book *Blurred Boundaries*, Nichols makes a case for a more performative approach to documentary making, whereby exposing the construction of the documentary renders visible the film-making process and he asks questions of documentary as a truth-making machine. This approach upsets the notion that documentaries disseminate – that the real is prior to or outside of its constructed film narrative. Instead, a performative approach to documentary making exposes the constructs that cause the knowledge product to lose its appearance as objective or fact-based.

3.6 The Fight to be Male

I wish next to draw on an earlier documentary, *The Fight to be Male* (Edward Goldwyn, UK, 1979, BBC), which considers gender identity formation through scientific endeavours. I do this in order to exemplify the particular methods and approaches, the tone and pitch of documentaries, as they consider themes of gender, sex and sexuality. This will provide a useful point of reference as I go on to offer a textual analysis of popular documentaries generated from the mid-1990s onwards. The sixty-minute film was part of the *Horizon* series for the BBC, and was written and produced by Edward Goldwyn.

The documentary is concerned with scientific understanding in relation to intersex conditions, homosexuality and gender nonconformity. It explores the borders of being 'male' and 'female', concentrating mainly on the role played by hormones. The filmmaker sets up questions, debates and arguments, which examine scientific research that was carried out throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Such findings are juxtaposed with contrasting viewpoints from within the medical field and work to engage the viewer in the debate about gender and sexuality formation.

The film begins with a family from an unnamed Caribbean island. The voiceover tells us how a doctor visiting the island on holiday was 'utterly amazed when they [members of the village] told him what had happened to the children.' A set of parents are shown to have had several children who were 'born female', but at puberty 'became men'. Scientists carrying out a study found that 37 girls in the village, from 23 different families, had changed into men over the last 50 years. The doctor published his findings but they went unread for two decades until the 1970s when they eventually became, 'the focus of scientific research'. The voiceover proposes:

These children [pictured] are evidence in new understandings of how the difference between men and women arises.

The film concentrates on the Bastita family, in which four of seven girls have changed into men at puberty. The location and culture of this family is depicted as exotic and primitive with a strong Christian belief system. The

documentary offers anthropological elements familiar to conventional documentary making, as well as clearly informative teaching aspects around normative and non-normative sex development. These are depicted through simple animated drawings, which are much more in line with a science lesson. Throughout the documentary the viewer is shown simple animated illustrations of cross-sections of human sex organs forming in utero (see Figure 3.1).

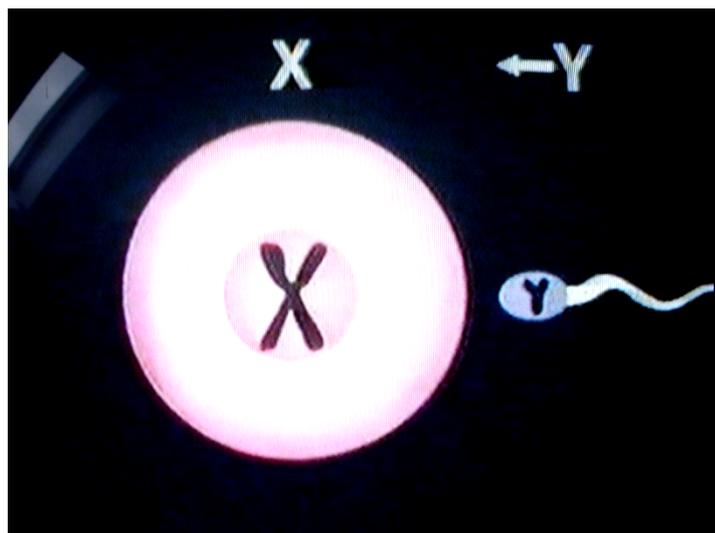


Figure 3.1 Depicting an egg about to be fertilised in *The Fight to be Male* (Edward Goldwyn, UK, 1979, BBC).

The film also looks at scientific explanations of the causes of homosexuality, citing some scientific studies carried out in the 1960s that looked at sex hormones in relation to the passive and active sexual behaviour of rats. The documentary also invites the viewer into the laboratory where the experiments on rats are carried out. We are shown microscopes, test tubes and Petri dishes, as well as the laboratory assistants who carry out the research. Male rats are given the female hormones oestrogen and andogryn; the viewer witnesses the rats consequently behaving passively, and therefore they are understood as either ‘female’ or ‘homosexual’.

In fact, though, it is not clear whether the oestrogen-hormoned male rat is understood as ‘female’, ‘homosexual’ or indeed ‘trans’. What we see is the arching back of the treated buck which signals to another buck to mount. What is ‘proved’ here, and what we can see for ourselves, is that through this experiment behaviours, acts and – if we are to translate this to human beings – identities, are

effected by sex hormone levels in the body. As dominance (the penetrator) and passivity (the penetrated) are mapped onto the phenomenon of being 'male' or 'female', the viewer quickly understands how the crossing of these boundaries (i.e. for a 'male' rat to be passive/penetrated) is exposed as a homosexual act.

The film is no doubt a product of its time. It positions homosexuality as deviant and explicitly states that the fundamental aims of these scientific experiments were to establish a cure for this 'abnormal' behaviour. As we are introduced to the Institute of Experimental Hormone Research in East Berlin, founder Dr Dorner's work makes the direct correlation between the behaviour of the feminised rats and the explanation of human male homosexuality. The voiceover introduces Dorner by saying, 'His efforts to understand and cure homosexuality began eleven years ago.' In an interview Dorner says:

One day there was a ballet, a wonderful ballet, and I saw the female-like behaviour of the male dancers and I had the imagination that there might be a biological basis.

Later on he adds:

I think there may be the possibility in the future to prevent at least in part homosexuality. And that will be a question that we, for example... if we are right that we find abnormalities in sex hormone levels and I think we should ask the mother if we should correct it – only correct it – these abnormalities of sex hormone levels. And a question for the whole society, not only for me [*sic*].

On the whole, the documentary asks open questions around the nature or nurture of sex differences: 'Where will his [pictured baby] male behaviour come from? Is he born already programmed to find girls erotically stimulating or will he learn that? Are girls born with a maternal instinct or do they learn it? Are any of the differences between maleness and femaleness programmed into our brains before birth or are they taught?' The film looks to scientific research for answers. It sets up multiple and contradictory scientific responses to these questions. Whilst it posits that most scientists would say much of sex differentiation is culturally produced, it counter argues with other scientific findings which look to prove that neuroendocrine status plays an important role in gendered acts – most specifically the behaviours of sexual passivity and dominance.

The juxtaposing of contradictory science-based arguments complicates the picture intelligently in a way that documentaries made from the mid-1990s onwards tend not to. Moreover, there is no music throughout, and far fewer emotion-orientated strategies than are found in later documentaries. What is important (and a marked contrast with the more recent documentaries that I study) is how *The Fight to be Male* explicitly states the limitations of the scientific theories and admits that no conclusions have been drawn. Here knowledge is not *fully* known and the claims made are more humble. The voiceover states:

The fact that he became male in spite of a female upbringing suggests that he was born with a latent masculinity. That interpretation is disputed and there are other personal histories as remarkable as his, which contradict that view.

Another example with regards to the fertilization of a human egg is offered as, again, the voiceover states:

One sperm gets into the egg, the rest – their heads stuck to the surface – spin the egg, but why? No one knows.

3.7 ‘Dumbing Down’

Unlike *The Fight to be Male*, the popular TV documentaries broadcast more recently reiterate the scientific research but do not offer any explanation of those knowledge productions or ask questions about the limitations of such findings. Likewise there are no assertions or questions, from either the filmmaker or other people featured, challenging the monolithic scientific viewpoint that, for instance, transsexualism is a medical condition with which one is born. For example, in the *Wrong Body* the voiceover states:

The latest research has confirmed at post mortem that the brains of transsexuals are the gender they always thought they were, although their genes and genitalia advertise the opposite.

Additionally, in *My Mum Is My Dad*, the father of transsexual Cheryl states:

Cheryl wants to do this. It's in her genes.

Such lay, or secondary, citing of scientific research into the causes of transsexualism works to stabilise the binary of sexed identities, and offers little to be questioned around how such knowledge was reached. Moreover, depicting medical conditions through lived experience rather than science-based research makes the programme more watchable. As Hodgetts and Chamberlain state:

Health documentaries are a highly mediated cultural forum in which meanings of health are negotiated. Portrayals of lay people are ubiquitous in health coverage. Depictions of lay people personalize health concerns, facilitating the grounding of coverage within lived experience (Livingstone and Lunt 1994). Such depictions add emotional content to programmes, heighten the legitimacy of their claim to represent social concerns and enhance the significance of the topics investigated. (Hodgetts and Chamberlain 1999, 330)

Documentaries such as *The Wrong Body* and *My Mum Is My Dad* demonstrate an appropriation and simplification of science-based knowledge production through a repetitive articulation of undisputed facts simply regurgitated for public consumption. From this we can surmise a particular 'dumbing down' around popular documentary filmmaking in terms of conventional knowledge production. Instead, the energies of the filmmakers are focused upon the story of the trans subjects themselves. It is noted above that narratives complicate and problematise science knowledge projects (Lytotard 1984; Latour 1993).

Turning next to the problem of narrative in relation to knowledge production and to documentaries about medical science, I will offer some thoughts around the distinctions between factual and fictive genres on television and the way narrative runs through these categories.

3.8 Narrative Structures in Documentaries

It is crucial to draw a distinction between different forms and formulations of knowledge and it is crucial to regulate the line between fact (the real) and fiction (the

imaginary). This is the case, not only of documentaries, but of all knowledge production as this distinction predominantly continues to form the basis of how we categorise knowledge. Distinguishing ‘fact’ from ‘fiction’ is no easy matter as ‘the distinction between fact and fiction blurs when claims about reality get cast as narratives’ (Nichols 1994, ix). Certainly much has been challenged from within the documentary-making world itself, as well as in the worlds of drama-based television and film, and through postmodern reflexive models of film practice (Nichols 1994).

Added to this are the many documentaries that have queried and blurred the boundaries of the fact/fiction binary. Upsetting and hybridising the various styles, strategies and structures is a growing trend of docu-dramas, reconstructions of historical events and mockumentaries and this has made for interesting viewing (Nichols 1994; Hight and Roscoe 2001). Such films set out to question the real, and to problematise the fact-making of such visual strategies of filmmaking.²⁵

Likewise one might also recognise the certain charge that is present in cinematic feature films when a ‘real’ person is central to its story. Historical figures and leaders, kings and queens, political dictators and rock stars who ‘actually exist’ are repeatedly the protagonists of films whether they are big-budget action thrillers or small, independent productions. *Monster* (Patty Jenkins, USA, 2004) and *Boys Don’t Cry* (Kimberly Peirce, USA, 1999) are examples of feature-length drama films that followed commercially and critically successful documentaries about the real-life stories of Aileen Wuornos and Brandon Teena respectively.

There is indeed a certain productive effect generated from a narrative based on true events. At the ‘Between Fact and Fiction’ conference organised by the Theatre And Performance Research Association (TAPRA) in Birmingham, England, on 5 September 2007, David Edgar made a keynote address that explored this relationship. He charted the rise in the political interest of TV drama in the UK since 9/11, with the various hybridised docu-dramas, drama documentaries, fact-based dramas, historical event television or fictions such as *Who Bombed Birmingham?*, *9-11*, *David Kelly*, *The Real Guantanamo*, *Hear the Silence* (about the MMR vaccine leading to autism) and the Blair-Brown saga dramatically televised in *The Deal*.

The ‘real’ produces an array of complex discourses, all of which concern themselves with the varying powers, work and productivity at play (Phelan 1996). Indeed, drama-based scriptwriters have capitalised on the power of the real and have prided themselves in adopting, for instance, the appropriate journalistic and

documentary-making principles of rigorous research, drawing on a wide evidence base and multiple sources, and using ‘official documents’ as integral to their plot lines. Even the use of verbatim, familiar to fact-based theatre, where a testimony is given and re-enacted word for word by trained actors, has been employed on television. At the same time, despite such particular approaches to embracing the real, these approaches give way to the subtlest of choices, such as pace, inflection or gesture, and ultimately commit the resulting film to the fields of the dramatic and the fictive.

This blurring of fact and fiction also plays a part in the shift towards the popular in television documentaries. Next in my analysis of the documentaries that feature trans people across the years, I turn to the use of dramatic form and narrative structure in the genre of documentary.

Indeed the complex relationship between narrative and the ‘real’ has been widely debated within the scholarly world (Nichols 1991, 1994; Russell 1999; Corner 2002; Renov 1993; Silverstone 1981, 1985, 1994). In addition to their role in Documentary Studies, narrative, testimonial and autobiography have also been central components of Queer Theory, as well as of Feminism and Performance Studies (Duberman 1997; Hart and Phelan 1993; Martin 1996; Phelan 1993). Debates around sincerity, authenticity and subjectivity have been critical for engagement particularly with the autobiographical work of minority identities and ‘otherness’. This has come from phenomenological ideas that privilege ‘experience’ and ‘being in the world’ and which have become central to a political and theoretical exploration of female/feminine, queer, black, disabled, and indeed trans, lives. I turn now to the first transsexual story to appear on UK television in the documentary form.

3.9 The First Trans Narrative on Television in the UK: *A Change of Sex*

A Change of Sex (David Pearson, UK, 1979, 1980, 1994, 1999, BBC 2) is a series of documentaries that follow the life of Lancashire born Julia Grant. This was the first television documentary in the UK to place centre stage the life story of a transsexual woman. The first programme entitled ‘George – The Big Decision’ was broadcast in 1979 and re-broadcast in 1980 along with two other episodes. Another film ‘The

Untold Story' portrays the film crew returning some 14 years later, in 1994, and the final film, a further 5 years later, was broadcast in 1999, offering a final update on Julia Grant's life.²⁶

On 15 October 1980 'George – The Big Decision' was watched by an audience of 4.3 million (8.3% of the adult population in the UK), on 16 October the second episode reached audience figures of 7.4 million (14.1%) and the third episode was broadcast on 17 October, with its audience increasing to 9.6 million (18.4%).²⁷ With TV consumption of such epic proportions, the nation witnessed the 'trials and tribulations' of a white, working-class transsexual woman from the north of England.²⁸ She is depicted as overcoming a host of obstacles, including navigating a psychiatric encounter, surgical intervention, job loss and discrimination. In addition, we see her reflect on her upbringing, visit her hometown and perform drag acts in gay bars. *A Change of Sex* generated the first, and indeed the largest, audience for a TV documentary featuring trans subjects.²⁹

The first episode of *A Change of Sex* begins with a wide-angle shot of an empty street lined with houses. A low piano chord plays and the text '1979' appears at the bottom of the screen. The camera is situated high up above the roofs, and is angled to look down godlike onto a residential street. The music is a dark and deep piano chord which moves into a haunting melody with sad undertones, evoking a tragic love story. It is early in the morning and sky is grey. There are remnants of snow on the rooftops. In the distance an individual walks towards us. The individual is wearing trousers and a coat and we can slightly hear the footsteps (see Figure 3.2).

As the person heads towards us, the camera moves to follow gently lowering. The camera hones in on this individual and we see them go towards their house. When they enter their house the camera has come to ground level and we are no longer looking down. We hear the key enter the lock and the image fades out. We do not know what goes on behind closed doors but through the genre of the documentary we are about to find out.

Next we are on the other side of the door and the individual enters the house opening the door towards the camera. It is a medium shot and here we are given a better 'look' at this person who is wearing a shirt and tie. Now we are in the bedroom face to face with a headshot of this person. The camera pans down and we watch them getting undressed. It is incredibly close-up and we watch the hands unbutton

the shirt, pull it out of their trousers and take it off revealing the flesh of the torso. The body moves as the clothes come off and the nipples show.

The image cuts to the same person washing their hair standing over the sink. Then it cuts to an extreme close-up of this person shaving their face. We can hear the razor making its noise. Then a zip of a bag is next heard as make-up items are taken out, once again all in extreme close-up. The music has faded out and we see a close-up of the eye with make-up on and more make-up being applied. One minute 30 seconds into the documentary and a voice-over is heard as the image of applying make-up continues.



Figure 3.2 Julia Grant in *A Change of Sex*
(David Pearson, UK, 1979, BBC2).

I've led a double life since about the age of 15 and since then when I first saw the doctors I felt as though I have been a woman trapped inside a man's body and it's been a very, very emotional fight with myself and with friends to be able to prove that I am what I am. I have now decided there is no other step for me to take but to again seeing [*sic*] the doctors and hope that they will agree for me to have a sex change.

The image ends with us seeing the whole of Julia's face until it fades out. The credits and introductory part of the documentary follow. The quest is set and the plot is ready to unfold. The image shows a Russian doll type figure with a picture of a man who looks like the person we have just been introduced to. As the camera zooms in towards the doll, the top half of the doll flies off and reveals another smaller doll inside. Instead the second doll is a woman. This animation gives the viewer a literal representation of being in the wrong body and echoes what Julia has said through the voiceover. As the camera rises above the head of the doll it looks up

and gives the viewer a wink. The shot widens, revealing the male outer shell of the doll lying next to it and the title 'A Change of Sex' emerges.

In less than three minutes into the documentary, not only is the rhetoric of being in the wrong body so neatly and visually represented, but through a range of visual and audio cues, we are succinctly shown the outside world where Julia presents as male, the private world of her application – literally through make-up – of femininity and we are given the plot laid out through Julia's voiceover: Julia is going to get the doctors to agree to her having sex change surgery.

In 1981 sociologist Roger Silverstone published his first book *The Message of Television*. In it he analysed the broad narrative patterns underlying the storytelling power of television.³⁰ In 1984, he published 'A Structure of a Modern Myth: Television and the Transsexual' in which he offers careful critical analysis of the initial documentary broadcast of 1979. In the article he states:

The demonstration of persistence in narrative form across time and culture seemed to me to be significant, above all for raising the question of the nonuniqueness of our culture and the paradoxical centrality of television, which is an essentially nonliterate medium, in establishing the nature of that nonuniqueness. (Silverstone 1984, 95)

What he articulates here (and indeed across much of his work) is how myths are used to structure the 'real' through the factual programming and documentary genre on television in the same way myths structure fictive narratives. With a methodology of structural analysis he outlines this 'nonunique' narrative in its 'nonliterate medium' of the documentary *A Change of Sex*. That is to say he exposes that which 'we recognise without thinking, the "mythical" elements in the western, in space fiction, or in the epic film' and the repeated storyline of 'heroes and villains... trials and tribulations of the seekers after justice, riches, and glory' through the visuality of TV production (Silverstone 1984, 96).

Reading Silverstone's article it seems at first to be almost arbitrary that he focuses on a transsexual story, as his purpose is to identify contemporary myths on factual television. His writing and his understanding of transsexualism are dated, he uses 'George' and male pronouns throughout to describe Julia and he does not draw on gender discourse. Nonetheless it is a compelling read and the only study of its

kind to offer such close reading and forensic deconstruction of a piece of visual text about trans people on TV.

His project, effectively, is to demonstrate how the ‘presentation of factual material on television is subject to the same processes of narration as fictional material [and so] will serve to undermine this prejudice in the *privilege of fact*’ (Silverstone 1984, 96; my italics). The transsexual figure, it turns out, is key to making this point. This is due to the idea that the transsexual is a ‘potent threat to the moral order of society... [and] any attempt to present it in culture *must* take on the form and the function of myth’ (Silverstone 1984, 97). That is to say that in order to obtain control of such a phenomenon, myth serves its purpose of pinning meaning to this object and restoring equilibrium (those values which were prior).

Silverstone’s interest in the phenomenon of the transsexual is purely semiotic: ‘it may be medically impossible to change sex’, he states, ‘it is, however, semiotically entirely possible to change gender’ (Silverstone 1984, 97). He continues:

The transsexual experience thus throws society into sharp relief by *making visible the process by which society itself is made visible*. In our society our bodily appearance is of crucial significance and that appearance, if it is to be successfully accomplished, is a communicative act of great subtlety and complexity. It is a semiotic act... The presentation of such a transformation on television is not, of course, a neutral event... Television is a distinct kind of focusing device; it makes the unfamiliar familiar and generates a content in which the familiar appears as unfamiliar. The transsexual, in his ephemeral appearance on the screen, gains a momentary legitimation. (Silverstone 1984, 97–8; my italics)

The repetition of the transsexual narrative in contemporary documentaries since *A Change of Sex* is linked to this social need – as with all myths – to articulate a set of anxieties and to seek to resolve them. Silverstone tells us that there are fundamental aspects that are integral to the production of myth. Firstly ‘a chronology – a before and after’ dynamic is necessary and secondly it needs to have its own logic, to have ‘a synchrony of constructed meanings’. In addition there is a need for ‘equilibrium’, ‘simple resolution of an initial disharmony’, where ‘the loss – of power, of identity, and of a specified object – is restored by the narrative’. Moreover, myths are not things in themselves but come about as ‘products of a myth-making

facility, a facility in turn required by the existential demand that people create order in their world... [which is] generated through the manipulation of the tangible, concrete elements of everyday life' (Silverstone 1984, 100).

Drawing on Vladimir Propp's analysis of narrative functions, Silverstone carries out a conventional structural analysis of the documentary by outlining the plot of each episode, thinking through its chronological morphology and analysing the structure as well as its geographical, social, techno-economic and physical codes.³¹ Such codifications are typically visual and contribute to the constructive narrative of the documentary. Silverstone identifies George as the hero with a 'lack' and makes clear that it is his/her quest for the object (to become Julia) that will drive the narrative forward.³² 'The princess he seeks', states Silverstone, 'is the princess within himself' (Silverstone 1984, 109).

George draws on 'potential helpers' who will directly help him to achieve his object. For instance, we see the shopkeeper help him pick out a 'female' outfit and the hairdresser giving him/her a 'female' haircut. Cultural and social signifiers (femininity/femaleness) are produced through interactions with these helpers, giving George a form of power and legitimacy.³³ The villains of the story are – as a collective – the doctors. They are the means by which Julia can obtain her final or most meaningful goal – the primary and secondary female sex characteristics that can only be achieved through the medical interventions of surgery and hormone treatment. The psychiatrist, Silverstone tells us, 'has a complex function... acting both as "dispatcher", that is "setting the task, 'If you can demonstrate...'" and also as the villain.... "to me".' Silverstone continues:

The psychiatrist holds the key to George's success, and the struggle with him is presented as being the most significant test of the narrative.³⁴

Interestingly the surgeon, who Julia seeks privately for breast augmentation, is her ultimate 'helper' as such a signifier, or 'gift' as Silverstone calls it – the thing that gets her closer to her object (becoming Julia). However, the surgeon is also a villain of sorts as he holds the power to grant Julia's 'transition'. The role of the medical establishment is split between that of helper and that of villain.³⁵ Eventually, at the end of the first documentary, we see the villainous psychiatrist by-passed and replaced 'with remarkable narrative ease' (Silverstone 1984, 114) and the final scene

is of Julia walking on the beach with her boyfriend and pushing a pram. The scene, as Silverstone describes it, is arbitrary. We do not know whose baby this is, but the image is enough to complete the narrative and arrive at a resolution – that is of hetero and gender normativity.

We can see then the on-screen presence of these ‘characters’ and the actions that take place between them and our protagonist, Julia Grant. In addition we can identify the ways in which the narrative becomes visual, or rather how the visual functions as integral to its narrative and consequently to its knowledge production. To reiterate: we see her have her hair cut; we see her pick out her outfit and consult the shop assistant; and we see her with her boyfriend. These gender performances are made visible for an audience who are confronted with the ways in which gender is played out in such everyday settings. We see the ways in which people make visible gender identity, revealing, as Silverstone tells us, ‘the process by which society itself is made visible’ (Silverstone 1984, 97).

Through his close analysis Silverstone shows us that gender is semiotic (although granted he does also say that ‘sex’ or rather ‘changing sex’ may be something different). He also makes clear that the televisual form is not neutral, and that these visual sequences have been constructed to render the transsexual subject as familiar and yet strange, close and yet distanced, comprehensible and yet also incomprehensible. Such a strong visual narrative as *A Change of Sex*, which was so notably taken up by the general public through its large viewership, set the scene for more documentaries to come, in particular as it foregrounded the visual narrative of the transsexual subject over any science-based content.

3.10 The Emergence of Infotainment Documentaries

I am having trouble defining the genre of the program: is this medical information or is it plain entertainment? (Van Dijck 2002, 537)

Hybridity is now the distinctive feature of factuality. (Hill 2007, 2)

In current health documentaries we continue to see doctors depicted teaching their students, and we are shown scientific drawings, computer animations and plastic

replicas of dissected body organs. Equally, as a conventionally ‘serious’ genre, documentaries are historically conducted under the journalistic principles of rigorous research. This approach posits a robustness of argument and puts forward its case with autonomy and strength. However, for the most part popular TV documentaries, in particular the ones that focus on bodies and health, are increasingly made with a remit (from the television networks) to entertain.

Entertainment strategies might include more dramatic narrative structures where climax or catharsis is fundamental to the documentary or where scopophilia, spectacle and viewing delight are prioritised over scientific methods of generating ‘truth’. Van Dijk puts forward key questions such as: ‘Should the medical-scientific film be manipulated to fit the requirements of a dramatic format? Should narrative techniques overshadow operation techniques?’ (Van Dijk 2002, 548). John Corner contends that we are now living in a ‘post-documentary’ culture, in which the hybrid genres of contemporary factual television-making allow for the legacy of documentary to still be at work, ‘but... signal the scale of its relocation as a set of practices, forms, and functions’ (Corner 2002, 266). In *Performing the Real: Documentary Diversions*, Corner states:

When a piece of work in documentary format is entirely designed in relation to its capacity to deliver *entertainment*, quite radical changes occur both to the forms of representation and to viewing relations... thereby contribut[ing] to a *weakening* of documentary status. (Corner 2002, 263; my italics)

A genealogy of documentary produces the genre as serious and ‘proper’ through its own ‘scientific yearning’ (Paget 1990, 8) as it seeks to provide video and audio evidence with principles of objectivity and factuality (Hight 2002, 9). That is to say through *being* ‘scientific’ the genre presents itself as ‘high’ value and ascribes itself a ‘strong’ status. Given this, how might a framing of ‘entertainment’, and the ‘radical changes’ of which Corner writes – the codes and tropes attributed to a product *being entertaining* – result in what he terms a ‘weakening’ of status? When a documentary fails to be scientific (or chooses not to be) what might we make of the ‘low’ value or ‘weak’ status of these products? If the mode of visibility – the documentary itself – loses status and value on these terms, how does the trans knowledge derived from it also suffer?

Ellis *et al.* tell us of the ‘devolving and skewed road leading from the founders of *cinéma vérité* to the frenzy of TV reality shows, with many stops of self-reflexivity on the way’ (Ellis *et al.* 2006, 333). It is this ‘frenzy’, which frames the TV knowledge production of trans subjects, that I hold central to my thinking in this thesis. Moreover, I explore the usefulness of such frenzied and messy knowledge production, its low status, its weaknesses and failures. I do this to question and to queer normative modes of knowledge production. I turn now to this demise that establishes itself most firmly at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

3.11 Becoming TV Fodder

Having fleshed out the shift in style and a particular ‘dumbing down’ of documentaries that has occurred in order for them to appeal to wider audiences, I turn now to the rise in the number of documentaries that feature trans people and the impact of becoming TV ‘fodder’. In *Restyling Factual TV*, Annette Hill profiles the shifting style and approaches to factual TV in Britain and Sweden by using ‘viewing practices as a means to understand the restyling of factuality, to compare audience responses to different factual genres in order to highlight the role of the audience in the transformation of factual television’ (Hill 2007, 21).

What arises here is the way factual programming has become identified as potential primetime viewing, and has consequently over time adapted ‘harder programming’ into more ‘popular’ viewing. ‘The biggest difference can be found in the production of popular factual’, she remarks and explains that production increased from 720 to 1203 hours across the ITV network in the UK. Currently, she continues,

on average 30 factual programmes are shown during peak time every night of the week on terrestrial and digital terrestrial channels. The great appetite for factual programming shows a major shift in the commissioning and scheduling of a range of genres (Ofcom 2006a). (Hill 2007, 33)

Hill also asserts:

Traditional factual genres can inform viewers about political, economic and social issues, and can help in their development as citizens who take part in democratic processes. The counter-argument is to see factual content as undermining democracy through an overemphasis on entertainment. Commercial factual genres are thought to be infotainment, providing poor quality, overly stylized, ratings-driven programmes that *work against the knowledge project*. (Hill 2007, 12; my italics)

Whilst trans knowledge is placed firmly in the minds of the general British public, understandings of what it means *to be trans* have been appropriated for such palatable popular viewing. One example of this is the factual programme *Changing Sex* (Amanda Murphy, UK, 2002, Channel 4), which offers a historical account of being trans, looking in particular at sex-change technology chronologically from the 1930s up to the present day. Its format is similar to the popular formula of favourite top 100 moments programmes (examples would be *100 Greatest Scary Moments*, *100 Greatest Sexy Moments*, *100 Greatest War Films*, *100 Greatest Movie Stars*, which are shown typically on Channel 4 at this time, but are also often broadcast across the digital networks).

In these types of programmes we are shown a number of juxtaposed talking heads, who offer commentary and perspectives on particular events. Such documentaries, including *Changing Sex*, piece together voices from various medical fields with biographers of trans figures, sociologists and trans subjects themselves. Added to these interviews are archival television clips and newsreel, as well as print media and photographs, which together produce grand narratives around: the development of technology and medical surgical procedures; the invention of synthetic testosterone and androgens; the construction of a vagina and penis; and the international globe-trotting (most notoriously to Casablanca in the 1950s) to obtain surgery.³⁶

Popular documentaries tread a distinct path that holds onto a sensitivity and a sensationalism when it comes to picturing trans lives. Across the various TV reviews in the broadsheets we read fairly standard commentary on how the trans people featured are 'brave' and the film making 'sober and tactful' or 'illuminating, sensitive and moving'. In a review in *The Scotsman*, published online on 2 August 2004, the reviewer comments on the documentary *My Mum Is My Dad*, which features two male to female transsexuals whose 'stories were traced with decorum on

this gravely made and enlightening documentary [...] This late-night exercise in unpacking a lifetime's baggage was very sensitively, respectfully, earnestly made.'

Yet simultaneously, the emergence of trans knowledge in documentaries certainly sits within an emerging cultural fascination and popularisation with the freakish. Indeed, as gender reassignment crosses other themes of cosmetic surgery and body modification – to which are dedicated whole channels on digital TV networks across the globe – trans stories are often situated with and linked to the diseased, the disabled, the smallest, the tallest, the largest penis, the smallest penis amongst others (Gamson 1998; Dovey 2000).³⁷

Of course stories that locate the 'Other' have historically been a key topic for documentary makers and no doubt by charting subjectivities which are deemed to be outside social norms, such subject matter works to inform and form such norms themselves.³⁸ However, as popular documentaries similarly work to regulate and govern normativities around bodies, identities, genders and health, shock tactics have been foregrounded. We can see this most clearly in the titles given to popular documentaries often used to draw audiences in. For instance, from the *Body Image* series on BBC 3 transmitted in March 2007, of the eight documentaries produced two feature trans stories: *Lucy the Teenage Transsexual* and *Danny: Escaping My Female Body*. The others in the series being *Under 18 and Under The Knife, My Penis and Everyone Else's, Help! I Smell of Fish, I'm a Boy Anorexic, How Dirty Can I Get?* and *Britain's Tallest Man*.

Make Me a Man, screened just six months after *Changing Sex* also on Channel 4 offers a story of transsexual female to male people.³⁹ The increase in the numbers of documentaries featuring trans people is noted in a TV review of the documentary, 'The Parts and Minds of Men', by *Guardian* writer Gareth McLean on 1 August 2002, who comments:

Of the 2,000 female-to-male transsexuals in the UK, is there one who hasn't been followed around by a Channel 4 documentary team? It feels like rarely a month goes by when there isn't 'an illuminating, sensitive and moving' film documenting Jo, Jean or Julie's transformation into Larry, Len or Lance. It was only in January that we learnt how doctors turn a clitoris into a penis. And it's not as though these things are easy to forget [...] Who would have thought that gender dysphoria could have become so pedestrian.

It is not only the increased number of documentaries about trans people that is noted here by McLean, but also the over familiarity of particular tropes and storylines and the resulting affect of boredom through repetition, which impacts on the trans knowledge production.⁴⁰ As channels churn out the non-unique visual narratives that Silverstone described, there are particular slants, twists or focuses on different lives and ‘problems’ when it comes to being trans.

My Mum Is My Dad (2004) and *My Dad Diane* (2005) focus on the transition from male to female within family life, and parenthood in particular. A more international viewpoint on trans is pictured in *Middlesex* (2005), and a specifically Middle Eastern viewpoint from Iran in *Iran’s Sex Change Operations* (2005) and *Transsexual in Iran* (2008). The only documentary that focuses less on transsexualism and more on tranvestitism or cross-dressing is Grayson Perry’s *Why Men Wear Frocks* (2005).⁴¹ *Make Me a Man Again* (2004), broadcast for the BBC and *Return to Gender* (2005) broadcast on Channel 5, were documentaries that consider notions of regret. Explorations of children and young people are in the subject of *Teenage Transsexuals* (2004), *Danny Escaping My Female Body, Lucy: Teen Transsexual* and *Lucy Teen Transsexual in Thailand* (2007) and *Sex Change from Her to Him* (2009).

Having charted the rise in popular documentaries that feature trans subjects, a question arises as to whether such a shift towards the popular TV documentary can be regarded as more productive because of its far greater reach and its cutting across a wider cohort of classes, genders and races. Alternatively, would a return to ‘harder’ documentary programming, reaching a smaller, and arguably a more elite, middle-class audience, be preferable? Whilst one perspective may show disapproval at popular documentaries becoming *too* entertaining and *not* informative enough, another view would to show joy (and hope) that there are documentaries out there that might reach and ‘teach’ the wider general public something about being trans.

In this project I hold onto the notion that popular knowledge is important and useful as its discourse takes place across the masses. In fact, its usefulness comes about precisely because of the large numbers of people who are involved, and who consume such knowledge. Gray calls on John Hartley’s (1999) idea of ‘democratainment’ – an idea that a talk show can ‘make democracy a reality by circulating ideas, ideals, beliefs, opinions and information that many viewers would otherwise never encounter’ (Gray 2008, 141).

Popular TV documentaries about trans people are reachable, watchable, accessible and enjoyable and this means that they can encourage a large number, and a diverse range, of viewers to engage in discussion and intellectual activity around gender identity and what it means to be trans. Halberstam points out that:

For Gramsci and Hall, everyone participates in intellectual activity, just as they cook meals and mend clothes without necessarily being chefs or tailors... Hall, like Gramsci, is very interested in the idea of education as a popular practice aimed at the cultivation of counterhegemonic ideas and systems. (Halberstam 2011, 17)

My thinking here does not call for a return to the older, more informative and less entertaining documentaries, but rather to consider what these ‘weaker’, low, bad and trashy modes of epistemology might offer. What is the potential of bringing the trans subject and understandings of sexed identities into an arena which is deemed to be lacking in rigour – one which is thought ‘lighter’, less intelligent, even trashy? Can Infotainment documentaries offer us a way to intervene, by inverting, questioning and upsetting the value of the ‘scientific’ that is transmitted through conventional documentaries, interrogate power and expose hierarchies of knowledge?

3.12 Knowing and Not Knowing

In his *Guardian* article, *Minor Alterations*, of Friday, 29 October 2004, Sam Wollaston writes:

I thought I was a reasonably modern and open-minded sort of person. Cross-dressers, trannies, dads who turn into mums, men who dress as babies... I can deal with all of that, no problem. But when it comes to kids, I’m a bit of a reactionary. Call me old-fashioned but I just feel more comfortable when boys are boys and girls are girls. Which is why I found Teenage Transsexuals (Channel 4) a little alarming.... In fact it was with Kris's granddad that I felt most empathy. He seemed a bit confused that his grandson was starting to turn into a granddaughter. ‘I’ve never heard of it,’ he says, shaking his head. ‘This is new.’... Or maybe Kris’s granddad and I need to loosen up our outdated ideas about gender.

Despite this increase in numbers, then, it is striking to note how journalists are happy to continue to express their lack of understanding, discomfort and feeling of being rather flummoxed about trans subjects, despite them appearing so numerous on TV. ‘It’s not just the use of pronouns that’s perplexing’, says Gareth McLean in the *Guardian*.⁴² If we are to think about hierarchies of knowing, it is also crucial to consider hierarchies of not knowing. Such performances of not understanding – as in the cases of journalists McLean and Wollaston – offer insights into heteronormative powers at play and the privilege of unintelligibility around gender diversity and the demand for simplicity (Sedgwick 1994).⁴³

I am reminded here of the Silverstone article, drawn on earlier in this chapter, in which he posits the transsexual subject as a ‘moral threat’. In order to control such a subject we must pin meaning to it, reinforce equilibrium and resume a moral order. It strikes me how such repetitions in documentaries that feature trans subjects (and indeed other ‘freaks’ and ‘oddballs’) allow mass viewers not only to know something about being trans, but also to *not* know something about being trans, and it is between these polarities that trans subjects come into a formation. Indeed it is a formation that is simultaneously comprehensible and incomprehensible and the trans subject lies between being known (and understood) and not being known (or not being understood, or being misunderstood). I argue not only that this position of being between these states produces the trans subject, but that the positioning of being between is productive for trans subjects – indeed all subjects – because it offers us the potential of being outside or beyond the borders of that which is legible and that which has been sanctioned. Once more I draw upon Silverstone, who states:

In *A Change of Sex*, the problem of transsexuality is given a human form and named, and it is through the name and its change that the theoretical problem is practically resolved. However, as I have already noted, this theoretical problem, that of establishing a clear boundary between the sexes, is not solved and indeed cannot be. Its attempted resolution here is at best a concrete and specific placation of what is irresolvable in abstraction. (Silverstone 1984, 115)

3.13 Conclusion

In this chapter I have contextualised the specific shifts in the making of TV documentaries that feature trans people up to 2010. I have outlined the various ways in which infotainment documentaries inflect the tropes of the ‘proper’ and authoritative knowledge production for which conventional documentary making strives, and how the emphasis shifts to the storytelling of individuals. Popular documentaries have come away from an educational remit towards a more spectacular, entertaining, pleasure-based consumption. This produces a very particular way of coming to know about *being* trans. Whilst being trans may be visualised through shock tactics, churning out TV documentaries for popular consumption nonetheless renders an audience bored by, and over-familiar with, the trans subject.

The next chapter pays more attention to the kinds of tactics that I have highlighted. Specifically, it considers the gravity of the condition of being trans and how performances of the ‘serious’ produce particular notions and knowledge of what it means to be trans. I consider how the medical world plays a part in the production of such seriousness and how documentaries that feature trans people often sit within other documentaries about health, disorders and non-normative bodies. I consider how the voyeurism of the viewer is justified on medical grounds, the pleasures of seeing the surgical interventions upon trans bodies and how the trans subject is cast as ‘freak’.

A key twist to this idea of ‘being taken seriously’ comes about by mapping the various productivities when popular TV documentaries fail in themselves to be ‘serious’ modes of production. Consequently, since such documentaries offer an (un)bearable lightness when it comes to being trans, we must consider the productivity when consuming these documentaries, which are cast as ridiculous, stupid, trashy and failing, to ask how they might play out and be productive for the purposes of being and doing trans.

Notes to Chapter 3

¹ See Burkholder 1993.

² See Epstein, J and Kristina Straub 1991.

³ The group was renamed FTM International as a consequence to spreading their networks and communications further a field.

⁴ See <http://www.pfc.org.uk/caselaw/Corbett%20v%20Corbett.pdf>

⁵ In a 2008 report, 'Gender Identity Services in England' : The Mapping Project Report, prepared for the Department of Health and carried out by Ryan Combs, Dr. Lewis Turner, Prof. Stephen Whittle it states that 'by 1980, he [Randall] had seen 2438 (1768 male and 670 female) trans patients'. It also states:

In the 1970s there were gender reassignment clinics based in very few places. They were often led by some of the great names in the history of psychiatry and endocrinology, who either saw the transsexual person as a 'fascinating' case, or as was the case in a very small number of clinics, a 'certain empathetic' view was taken. There were larger clinics in Newcastle upon Tyne under psychiatrist Professor (later Sir) Martin Roth and endocrinologist and intersex expert Professor Charles N. (Natty) Armstrong, and in London at the Hammersmith (Charing Cross) Hospital under psychiatrist Professor Randall.

See: http://www.pfc.org.uk/pdf/UK_GIC_%20Mapping&ServicesProject%204DoH.pdf

⁶ Cases were put forward by Mark Rees 1986, Caroline Cossey in 1990, Kristina Sheffield and Rachel Horsham in 1997, Stephen Whittle 1997, Christine Goodwin and 'I' 2002

⁷ More commonly known as Charring Cross Hospital.

⁸ Cited from the production company's website: <http://www.rawcharm.tv/productions.htm>

⁹ Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999. See: <http://www.hmso.gov.uk/ Statutory Instrument 1999 No. 1102>.

¹⁰ R v North West Lancashire HA Ex p. A, D and G, 1999.

See:

<http://www.pfc.org.uk/caselaw/High%20Court%20judgment%20in%20the%20case%20of%20A,%20D%20and%20G%20v%20North%20West%20Lancashire%20Health%20Authority.pdf>

¹¹ See: http://www.lgbthistorymonth.org.uk/history/trans_pmb.htm and Christine Burn's blog: <http://blog.plain-sense.co.uk/2011/03/revisited-end-of-beginning.html> for the context of this historical moment.

¹² See Paris Lees's blog and a plethora of comments around this article: <http://lastofthecleanbohemians.wordpress.com/2011/04/10/paris-lees-transgender-nigella-lawson/> Thanks also to Christine Burns who provided me with some really useful information via e-mail. In addition, her diaries for 1996 can be found here: http://blog.plain-sense.co.uk/2011_12_01_archive.html

¹³ The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 came in at the time of writing this thesis.

¹⁴ See Sharpe, Andrew. 2007. "Endless Sex: The Gender Recognition Act 2004 and the Persistence of a Legal Category". *Feminist Legal Studies*, April 2007, Volume 15, Issue 1, 57-84; Sharpe, Andrew. 2007. "A Critique of the Gender Recognition Act 2004" 4(1) *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry* 33-42;

Sharpe, Andrew. 2009. "Gender Recognition in the UK: A great leap forward" *Social and Legal Studies: An International Journal* 18 (2) 241 – 245, Sharpe, Andrew. 2009. "Gender Recognition in the UK: A Return to the Truth of the Past". *Social and Legal Studies: An International Journal* 18 (2) 259 – 263; Whittle, Steven and Lewis Turner. 2007. "'Sex Changes'? Paradigm Shifts in 'Sex' and 'Gender' Following the Gender Recognition Act?" *Sociological Research Online*, Volume 12, Issue 1; Whittle, Steven. 2006. "The Opposite of Sex is Politics

– The UK Gender Recognition Act and Why it is Not Perfect, Just Like You and Me”. *Journal of Gender Studies*. Volume 15, Issue 3, 2006, 267 – 271.

¹⁵ *Man Alive* was edited by Desmond Wilcox from 1965 to 1972; *Police* was made by Roger Graef in 1976; *Living with Fear* was made in 1967.

¹⁶ On Channel 4’s website it states:

We are funded predominantly by advertising and sponsorship, but unlike other broadcasters such as ITV, Channel 4 is not shareholder owned. Channel 4 is a statutory corporation, independent of Government, and governed by a unitary board made up of executive and non-executive directors, who are responsible for ensuring that Channel 4 fulfils its remit and delivers its financial responsibilities. Non-executive directors are appointed by OFCOM in agreement with the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. This system ensures our not-for-profit status; that we are held accountable and that all profit generated by our commercial activity is directly reinvested back into the delivery of our public service remit.

<http://www.channel4.com/info/corporate/about>

¹⁷ See <http://www.channel4.com/info/corporate/about/channel-4s-remit>

¹⁸ Interestingly, *Sex Change, Shock Horror Probe* was made by a trans woman, Kristiene Clarke. As part of my research I have been in e-mail contact with Kristiene Clarke. In an e-mail to me she writes:

The film includes education about trans issues, medical information, media interest in the subject, religion, the social aspects and legal issues of being transgendered and features Adele Anderson of *Fascinating Aida*, Oscar winner Tilda Swinton, Mark Rees and Dr. Russell Reid. It is also the first film ever about the subject of Transsexuality made by a Transgendered director/producer and played a vital role in our struggle for societal and cultural recognition and is an important part of our history with the media.

I wish to thank her for her time and also for agreeing to hold a screening of the documentary followed by a post-show discussion with an invited audience.

¹⁹ John Ellis considers the ‘Red Light Zone’ slot on Channel 4 in reference to the scheduling conditions where similar types of independent programmes could be brought together making it clearer to the viewers at home what to expect and when (Ellis 2000, 158).

²⁰ Laura Graham, who runs the organisation Chrysalis, delivers the workshops. DRG, who distributed the documentary, write on their website: ‘As part of the progressive Red Light Zone season, *Finishing School*’s director Kate Jones-Davies handles the thorny subject of transexualism with sympathy and humour. Her remarkable film is a tender document of the pupils’ growth in confidence as they learn to cope with everything from how to get out of a car, through bad hair days to violent confrontation.’

See: <http://www.drg.tv/ProgramDetails.aspx?ProgramDetail=10102>

²¹ See Rose, Jacqueline. 2003. I return to this in Chapter 6.

²² See Bell and Binnie. 2000.

²³ Interestingly, Thomas Beatty, the ‘first’ pregnant man, who appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, augmented the media storm with his and his partner’s story. Multiple media products emerged, including a ‘Cutting Edge’ documentary, *The First Pregnant Man* (Elizabeth McDonald UK 2008, Channel 4). However, I do not pay significant attention to the documentary as Thomas Beatty is from the USA.

²⁴ With the exception of Roger Silverstone's article, 'A structure of a modern myth: Television and the transsexual' (Silverstone 1984), there has been no academic encounter with or interrogation of these knowledge products. Instead, many of the writings I draw on are from TV reviews in newspaper articles, as well as on-line platforms such as websites, blogs, social media sites and forums. Whilst I will refer to some of these TV reviews, blogs and websites here and throughout the following chapters to serve my own purposes, a complete study of these writings is beyond the scope of this thesis.

²⁵ Examples of such docu-dramas are: *The Laromie Project* (Moisés Kaufman 2002) and *Touching the Void* (Kevin MacDonald 2003).

²⁶ In 1999 all documentaries were broadcast again. The life of Julia Grant is well documented, and not just through these documentaries. Her autobiography, *Just Julia – The Story of an Extraordinary Woman*, published in 1994 by Boxtree Limited, offers an insightful account of her childhood and adolescence as well as her experience being in the BBC documentary. In a television review for the *Independent*, titled 'A change isn't always as good as a rest', on Friday 19th August 1994, Tom Sutcliffe wrote about the re-run of the documentaries and the final updates of 1994. Sutcliffe writes ambiguously about the transitional process. Naming the off-screen presence of the psychiatrist as a 'Dickensian' who treated Roberts like 'a naughty school boy', Sutcliffe also points out that Julia Grant is not a 'success' story in terms of achieving happiness. 'For though Julia insisted that she didn't regret having surgery' he states, 'it was clear that it had caused as many problems as it solved' and 'fifteen years on – after alcoholism, bankruptcy and personal humiliation – she has little in her life but intense work, a labour of lovelessness' See also: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/television-review--a-change-isnt-always-as-good-as-a-rest-1384447.html>

You can also read an article about Grant and her sister in the *Independent on Sunday*, 1st August 1999, by journalist Hester Lacey. The article is called: 'We used to be brother and sister. Now we're women together' and can be read here: <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/we-used-to-be-brother-and-sister-now-were-women-together-1109914.html>.

In later years, Julia Grant has been involved in the LGBT club and bar scene in Canal Street, Manchester and was interviewed about her involvement in Gayfest and Europride and about the controversy over money raised for charity. See: <http://www.g7uk.com/video-julia-grant-interview-part-three.shtml>

²⁷ These figures are gained from Roger Silverstone's article, 'A structure of a modern myth: Television and the transsexual' (Silverstone 1984) and were supplied to him by the BBC.

²⁸ The expression 'trials and tribulations' is noted in Chris Pullen's conference paper 'The Transgendered Body and Documentary Narratives: Resistance, Partnership and Domestic Screen Memories', given at the Popular Culture Association and American Culture Association Conference, in April 2009 in New Orleans, USA. It is a term that I will come back to with regards to those narrative structures that typify transsexual stories.

²⁹ Audience ratings were extremely high compared to more contemporary ratings due to the deregulation of television as part of the Broadcasting Act 1990, and the growth of satellite and cable networks.

³⁰ See also *Framing Science* (Silverstone 1985), *Television and Everyday Life* (Silverstone 1994) and *Consuming Technologies* (Silverstone and Hirsch 1992), *Media and Morality: on the rise of the Mediapolis* (Silverstone 2006). Silverstone's interests lie specifically in how information and communication technologies become 'domesticated' in the complex settings of everyday life.

³¹ Propp, Vladimir, 1968. *Morphology of the Folktale*, 2nd edition Austin: University of Texas Press, discussed in Silverstone 1984.

³² Silverstone uses male pronouns and speaks of 'George' where I have chosen to use female pronouns and Julia.

³³ I use 'George' and male pronouns here as I am drawing from Silverstone who uses such.

³⁴ I will talk extensively about the role and representation of psychiatrists in the documentaries that feature trans people in Chapter 4.

³⁵ ‘Ultimately’ Silverstone continues, ‘it stands in for her “absent father”.’ (Silverstone 1984) Silverstone does not go any further with this comment, but leaves this thought somewhat hanging. We might consider nonetheless the positions of the father, the medical establishment and the villain within the realm of the Law.

³⁶ There are also links to the growing industry of cosmetic surgery and its relation to the glamour and beauty industries, where some trans women, for example Caroline Cosy, made their fame. Added are legal changes relevant to trans people and the campaigning of trans people such as Stephen Whittle, for him (and others like him) to become legal parents. In short, the documentary offers a whistle-stop tour of the canon of transgender histories and discourses predominantly from the UK and the USA.

³⁷ Week on week we see trans women going ‘in for the op’ on *Sex Change Hospital* (Chris McKim USA 2007, MORE4), in May 2007. Avia TV is the UK’s first TV channel dedicated to broadcasting programmes about cosmetic and plastic surgery.

³⁸ *Nanook of the North* (Robert Flaherty USA 1922) is most heavily discoursed as an ethnography of Inuit people, whilst *Coal Face* (John Grierson UK 1935), *Night Mail* (John Grierson UK 1936) and *Housing Problems* (John Grierson UK 1935), among others, looked at postwar working class lives that are identified as ‘other’ to the assumedly more educated, middle class documentary-interested viewer.

³⁹ In the *Media Guardian* (1st August 2002), Jason Deans states: ‘The documentary had 3.4 million viewers and a 15% audience share between 9pm and 10pm, according to unofficial overnights.’ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2002/aug/01/overnights>.

⁴⁰ See Appendix for a filmography which lists these television documentaries in chronological order. In 2011 and 2012 a further 8 documentaries featuring trans people were broadcast. Of these, one series was *My Transsexual Summer* (2011). I draw on *My Transsexual Summer* in particular as part of my Conclusion chapter, as it represents a notably distinct turning point in depictions of trans people on television, but post-2010 documentaries do not enter into the body of my thesis.

⁴¹ A series called *Transvestite Wives* was aired on Sky One in 2008, but as a digital channel this is outside of my studies here.

⁴² Gareth McLean, ‘The parts and minds of men’. *The Guardian*, Thursday 1 August 2002.

⁴³ I will pick up on this idea of simplicity in Chapter 5, and will return to such notions as the privilege of unintelligence in the conclusion of my thesis.

On the (Un)bearable Lightness of *Being Trans*

For the true transsexual self-mutilation and suicide are attempted if the genuine sufferer is denied the treatment he craves. (*The Wrong Body* 1996)

Discourses of sobriety are sobering because they regard their relation to the real as direct, immediate, transparent. Through them power exerts itself. (Nichols 1991, 4)

It doesn't work if people are happy. It's not entertaining. (Trans viewer Carl, on TV screening of *Return to Gender*)

4.1 Grave Indeed: Death, Pain and Loneliness

In my introductory chapter I asked: what happens when we *see* trans? What *trans* do we see? And what does *seeing* trans do? Also in my introduction I laid out how the popular trans subject depicted in documentaries is the transsexual subject – those who are transitioning from one gender to the ‘opposite’, stating that they have ‘always felt this way’, and a discourse of causality is commonly presented within a biological deterministic model of being. It is this specific way of being trans that is made visible and rendered intelligible by this particular mode of knowledge production of TV documentaries.

In this chapter I explore how the trans subject is visually produced and reproduced through the mode of the ‘serious’. It is somewhat paradoxical, having detailed in my previous chapter the demise of seriousness and ‘proper’ documentaries, to be confronted with another way of being and doing seriousness – that is with identifying the transsexual subject within the context of death, pain and loneliness. As we see a growth of more spectacular and dramatic tactics in documentaries focusing on the stories of ‘ordinary’ people, I argue that such visual narratives about being trans continue to ascribe a particular gravity to the condition of being trans, albeit in less serious modes of knowledge production.

Whilst the emergence of the new hybrid programming of infotainment has placed trans people firmly on the horizon for the psyche of the British public, such

attempts to be taken seriously – indeed sobriety itself – have become compromised. Given this, I wish to present the consequences of such performances and to think about the kind of productivity that places the trans subject in this new ‘lighter’ version of documentary. This chapter considers the consequences of such visualising of seriousness and also the failure to achieve it. I draw on textual analysis of the various documentaries that feature trans people and I explore how each of the documentaries in my TV screenings was taken up by these trans viewers. I consider how those screenings and the commentary that followed produce trans knowledge, specifically in relation to the seriousness and the gravity that is commonly associated with what it means to be trans.

For an ITV series called *Real Lives*, Nicola Stockley directed the documentary *My Mum Is My Dad* (2004). The opening credits to *Real Lives* pictures people inside their houses viewable to us because they are near the window. This voyeuristic or peeping tom cliché of the outsider looking in on the private lives of these people is made explicit through its use of windows as a montage of people at their windows flood the screen. Next the word ‘Real’ followed by a drawing of a window followed by the word ‘Life’ appears. As the documentary begins, the music is upbeat, the pace of the cuts is fairly rapid as we are shown images of a family at a bowling alley. The voiceover asks: ‘What do you do if your Dad turns round and says he actually wants to become your Mum?’

The film begins at a fairly fast pace in order to pack in the life story of Sheryl, the first trans person featured. The film uses an array of talking head shots of each family member including each of the children, the wife of the trans person, the trans person and the father of the trans person. The voiceover pieces the testimonies together forming knowledge of what it means to be trans and does so in such a way that brings no speculations or investigations of such, only authority. Whilst we see still photographs of Sheryl as a baby and child, both Sheryl and her father reflect back. In a light-hearted way the editing juxtaposes the two versions exposing the incongruence of expectations and manifestations of gendered life. For instance Sheryl’s father says ‘I thought she might be a wrestler or a boxer, you know’, before cutting to Sheryl doing the ironing. Next, whilst Sheryl is pictured in close-up, applying make-up, the voiceover tells us ‘in fact Sheryl was suffering from a serious condition – gender identity disorder’. Underneath we can hear low-level music which works to enhance the drama.

The film describes two biological fathers, Cheryl Williams and Stephanie Roberts, who go on to transition and live as women. The Williams family live in a city in northern England, in a predominantly working-class suburban area. Each interview takes place in the homes and sometimes the bedrooms of the family. The children are interviewed in their bedroom; Cheryl's wife is in an armchair and the father of Cheryl is at the kitchen table. Other locations featured are hospital corridors and reception areas. We see her having her tattoo removed, and electrolysis to remove facial hair. We see photos of the children and ornaments on the mantle piece. There are also sometimes wide cityscapes and looking down at cars driving past. In addition, at times we are offered static shots of the outside of the house and the surrounding neighbourhood.

Stockley interviews the members of the Williams family and each reflects on their own journey, from the moment Cheryl told her wife and three children that she wanted to go full time as a woman. With Cheryl's history of cross-dressing, Bernadette, Cheryl's wife, is unsurprised but understands immediately that the marriage is over. We see them continue to negotiate the maintenance of family life. Stephanie Roberts' family live in the Greater London area and their story reveals how the father's absence contributes to the production of an unhappy and dysfunctional child.

The documentary explores the various roles in the family and considers how gender is fundamental to the exchange or dynamic between family members. It asks questions about whether a family can stay together or function when gender roles and identities shift. It measures the impact of transitioning on these family positions, not only the (re)naming of 'Dad' to 'Mum', but also the expectations of behaviours within these roles and the social stigmas attached to deviating from gender norms.¹ The two families exhibit different approaches to these negotiations with different levels of success (success being measured in the documentary by the conservative concerns of the relative preservation of the family unit). In this documentary being trans is visually narrated as something that deeply threatens the family unit; the stories told by the various individuals feature school bullying, violent behaviour, feelings of rejection and breakdown of marriage.

Questions about the self, selfishness and sacrifice in relation to the family are clearly raised. Through the use of voiceover the filmmaker describes surgery as the 'biggest challenge yet' and questions whether the potentially dangerous surgery will

be the final thing to split up the family – the implication being that surgery itself might lead to death. The idea of the danger of surgery is dramatically heightened when Cheryl is identified as a high-risk candidate due to her being overweight. The film suggests that, since the surgery is risking her life, the choice is a selfish act on the part of the trans person, and goes against the principal of preservation of the family.

Arguably, the judgment that a person puts him or her self before the needs of the family goes against social expectations not only of parenthood, but also of womanhood in particular. On the other hand, what is demonstrated is how the willingness to risk life performs the seriousness of the person's intent, will or strength of feeling to live and *be* the 'opposite' sex. In short, to rather die than live without Gender Reassignment Surgery, contributes to being, or being perceived as, a 'real' transsexual. Performing such seriousness of intent is a necessary rite of passage for all transsexuals wishing to access medical services for treatment. Indeed, whether it be risking 'drastic surgical intervention', being a victim of hate crime or having suicidal tendencies, the calling to a life or death situation sits at the heart of many documentaries which feature trans subjectivities.

I first wish next to explore briefly the relationship between the real and the image and its relation to death, pain and loss. In *Representing Reality*, Nichols shows concern for the collapsing of the real into the represented (image), which is key within documentary discourse. I am intrigued, however, by Nichols's reading of Baudrillard in relating death to the real. He states:

Baudrillard no longer perceives a reality out there but only images that simulate something that is no longer accessible except through these simulations.... Reality has been constituted by and for the shadow-play it entertains... all metaphors of depth and abstraction of 'higher' or 'deeper' levels of meaning and reality collapse into endless surfaces of simulations and simulations of simulations... Intriguing as these assertions are, I do not accept them.... The reality of pain and loss that is not part of any simulation, in fact, is what makes the difference between representation and historical reality of crucial importance. It is not beyond the power of documentary to make this difference available for consideration. (Nichols 1991, 7)

Nichols's distinction between the representation of the real and the real itself cautions us not to conflate the two. The reason Nichols understands historical reality

to be before (or beyond) the image – to be *already out there* for the documentary maker to capture and to make images of – is the ‘reality of pain and loss’. For Nichols it is this that separates the real from ‘simulation’. Moreover, it is the documentary maker’s job to make clear that there is a ‘reality’, and by representing it they perpetuate the continued perception of it, and therefore produce it, as if it were prior to the discourse achieved.

Nichols places suffering and death or ‘pain and loss’ – that which cannot be simulated – at the heart of reality, and it is unsurprising that picturing pain and loss is central to the world of documentary. Nichols’s ‘specific logic of the real’ is the privileging of the materiality of the body, subjectivities in (potential) pain, and life itself – all of which comes together through its own absence: death. In short, *being real* means bearing pain and a direct relationship with one’s own mortality. From this we see why documentary making often examines the more horrific and painful aspects of living (Nichols 1991; Winston 1995). In addition Phelan considers the importance of perceiving the relationship between the real and the image as performative. Peggy Phelan tells us:

As Judith Butler points out, the confusion between the real and the representational occurs because ‘the real is positioned both before and after its representation; and representation becomes a moment of the reproduction and consolidation of the real’ (‘Force of Fantasy’: 106). The real is read through representation, and representation is read through the real. Each representation relies on and reproduces a specific logic of the real; this logical real promotes its own representation. The real partakes of and generates different imagistic and discursive paradigms. (Phelan, 1993, 2)

As themes of the horrific and painful capture reality, we might also think of them as producing the ‘real’ performatively. We can also see this more generally across filmmaking where gritty realism is associated with the dark and depressed.² Consequently, positioning trans subjects within a life or death situation gives such subjects a reality of their own.

Indeed the seriousness of conventional documentaries may chime with the perceived seriousness of transsexuality itself. As the conventional genre of documentary has investment in the real world and in investigating what *really happened*, its rigorous approach to truth-making in many ways appeals to those trans

stories that wish to be taken seriously as the ‘real thing’. As trans subjects historically have been held within psychiatric frameworks, there is a reciprocal relationship in which the sobriety of documentary making positions being trans outside the rhetoric that casts trans subjectivities as delusional, fantastical and pathological, working instead to cast being trans as something that truly exists and is real. The productivity of the real and the serious is brought to bear here because the apparent risks involved in being, ‘coming out’ as, or *doing* trans are billed in mainstream TV documentaries as grave indeed.

The gravitas of the trans situation likewise appears in the documentary *Middlesex* (2005), one of the documentaries chosen for my TV screenings. The documentary as a whole offers a wider global perspective, engaging with diverse cultural understandings and lifestyles of trans people, from the Ladyboys in Thailand to the Hijra people in India. The film begins with the spectacle of the Ladyboys’ on-stage performance. At the Club Calypso, Bangkok, Thailand, the stage lights sparkle, the music is flamboyant and mirrors revolve on stage as a large group of burlesque type performers take their bows. The voiceover states: ‘At the Club Calypso the most fundamental distinction – man/ woman, falls away.’ The camera floats across the bodies of the performers as they ‘work’ their feathers swishing and swaying in a pink lit fest of femininity.

After the performance ends, the documentary cuts to the after-show frenzy, ‘a special treat between shows’ as the voiceover states. We see the audience members with their cameras, peruse the line of performers as they are invited to have their photographs taken with the performers and, as the voiceover states, to ‘get up close, record the moment, experience the excitement and yes, the danger of it all’. Just a few minutes into the documentary the film takes a dramatic shift into the more disturbing and worrisome aspects of trans lives as it begins to chart two stories of hate-crime killings in the United States. From the smiles of the audiences having their photographs taken with the Ladyboys the camera zooms out and stylistically warps and slows down the image to enhance the shift in mood.

The music immediately offers a dark and intense mood with a deep and sustained bass note, before the image cuts to a reconstruction scene. We see the dark sky and the moon is full and clouds pass over it.³ The text ‘reconstruction’ appears on the screen. The camera cuts to a small truck making its way down a hill. As the truck turns its headlights flare into the lens of the camera. A childlike piano melody

is played as the re-enactment scene continues and we see the dead body of a trans woman being buried by two males in a shallow grave in the forest of the High Sierras in California (see Figure 4.1). As much of the scene is dark we see people using flashlights to navigate, as the voiceover tells the story:

According to later court testimony, two of the young men had had sexual relations with their victim.... All hell had broken out at a party when someone blurted out that their girl was transsexual – in their eyes a boy faking it as a girl. With one of her former lovers screaming out, ‘I can’t be gay, I can’t be gay’, Gwen was kneeed, punched, beaten over the head with an iron skillet and finally strangled with a rope.



Figure 4.1 *Middlesex*

(Anthony Thomas, UK, 2005, Channel 4).

The narrative of the killing comes to us through the voiceover. Indeed voiceovers are a common tool that drives much of the documentaries that I study here in this thesis. The tone of the voiceover is sombre and the viewer is immediately taught to understand the seriousness, and sometimes tragic consequences, of being trans or, more importantly, of ‘faking it’, of not being ‘real’.

Just a few minutes into this documentary we are beginning to see the complex way in which the trans subject is held in relation to both the ‘real’ and the ‘unreal’, muddying these distinctions somewhat. Already we see how the ‘Ladyboys’ as spectacle rely on their *appearing to be* women, whilst they are *known to be* male. As such, within the conventions of performance, this offers little threat

within the confines of the artificial stage. In the ‘real’ world, however, things are different. Paradoxically and interestingly the trans subject is acknowledged as having a ‘realness’ through living a life of mortal peril but one that comes about from a transphobic refusal of being trans as something that is ‘real’.

We are issued with a sepia still photograph of the victim followed by an interview of the mother of Gwen. She describes in detail the event whilst the music fades out. Following Gwen’s mother’s testimony we are given another interview with two American trans women who tell us about the extremity of violence experienced by some trans women.

Being a victim of hate crime is indeed the extreme of transphobia. In the USA and in the UK there has been a growing investment in resources by the police, government bodies and the voluntary sector for reporting and reducing the numbers of trans-related (as well as race-related, disability-related and homophobic) hate crimes.⁴ Equally, remembrance days for those killed through transphobic violent acts are annual events for trans community groups around the world.⁵ The various representations and narratives of hate-crime killings have been a vehicle to push forward LGBT rights and to change legislation.⁶

Paris is Burning (Jennie Livingston, 1990, USA) and *The Brandon Teena Story* (Susan Muska and Gréta Olafsdóttir, 1998, USA) are two documentaries where violent ends – of Venus Xtravaganza and Brandon Teena respectively – speak such stories and they have consequently been the subject of much discourse (hooks 1992; Butler 1993; Phelan 1993; Halberstam 2005) as well as direct activism.⁷ The extent to which the trans community and political activism should highlight the importance of these most serious aspects of hate crime is also the source of some tension.

Some of these arguments are put forward coherently by Ann Cvetkovich, who, whilst being pleased at ‘queer trauma achieving national visibility’, is also concerned that ‘other more insidious forms of violence... will be obscured by a too exclusive focus on violent death’. In her project of locating a queer trauma, she asks: ‘Are there other forms of hatred that will never find their way into the courts and that must also be the object of our cultural if not legal attention?’ (Cvetkovich 2003, 273).

The repetitive focus on transsexual killings by mainstream documentaries, such as *Middlesex*, offers dramatic gravitas to the film and consequentially affects

the viewer. Yet this focus also perpetuates notions of the trans figure as victim and exacerbates the deep concern felt by family members for the well-being of their trans loved ones. The viewer may sympathise with the humanness of the story and perhaps even more so when the voice of the dead transsexual's mother is added. Indeed, in my own community work with family members of trans people, one of the most common responses from parents of trans people is not that they would reject their child or find *being trans* disdainful, but that they are *worried* about the well-being of their child, and concerned that they may become a victim of hate crime.⁸

Being worried is an important emotional labour, which produces and reproduces such visual narratives. Documentary makers may feel it necessary to address this worry – after all, these stories of killings are in fact real. However, it suffices to say most trans people are not killed through hate crime. Such dominant narratives around hate crime that gain such wide media attention overshadow other narratives that speak more positive and life-affirming stories, and which may work to reassure parents and family members, as well as trans people themselves.

The quest for more positive representations and role models within mainstream media is taken up by LGBT community activists, as well as black and ethnic minority groups and other minority communities.⁹ Certainly picturing positive, 'happy', life-affirming transsexuals does not make for good television precisely because being happy cannot be performed as 'real' with the same effects as pain, loss and death are offered to the viewer. This understanding works to cast the trans person as an innocent victim and a certain sympathy is no doubt evoked by the dead transsexual and (perhaps even more so) by the family members who mourn their loss.

In the TV screening of *Middlesex*, Sam stated that 'the shock tactic [...] was the discrimination' that trans people face. This was recognised by the group watching as a device used to heighten the drama in the documentary and to have a particular impact on the viewers watching at home. Its overarching message was the fear that the wider Western society has around sexual diversity, and it investigated the consequences and repercussions of those fears, namely hate crime killings and the dangers attached to *being trans*.

Furthermore pain and loss continues with the theme of loneliness in many of the documentaries that I study. From *A Change of Sex*, broadcast in 1979, to

documentaries that were broadcast right up to 2010, rarely, if ever, are there trans subjects depicted within or as part of a community or collective of trans people. Instead the focus often centres on the single trans person and their surrounding family, local neighbourhood and the occasional close non-trans friends, as they discuss their coming to terms with the undesired trans situation. In *Return to Gender* (2005), for instance, we see the lonely character of Paula Rowe walking the streets, shopping in Somerfield, throwing a stick into the sea and playing her guitar on a park bench. Watching *Return to Gender* at my TV screening both Jordan and Carl became quite angry and saddened by Paula's isolation. Carl said:

Now I think it's very unfortunate in her case that she had such appalling lack of support from her family and it was quite clear as well that the bloke that she was with, if he had have carried on living, she wouldn't have felt so much pressure to go back. That's a huge thing. If you get recognition and support and people are really happy that you've changed your gender then you'll be happy, but unfortunately that wasn't the case with her.

In response Jordan said:

None of them talked about the fact that they had any communication with the trans community and what really helped me was just that summer that I had talking to you guys so much and meeting so many other trans people and people who had decided not to do it, like Z_ and people who were thinking about it like B_ and J_.¹⁰

Similarly in the discussion following *A Change of Sex*, Daniel remarked:

[Julia] seems to be... a person in total isolation from everyone. Random strangers and trying to deal with them, people who work in dress shops and psychiatrists and that's not what people are like really. You're around people you know and she talked briefly about having lots of friends and you didn't see any of them at all.

Loneliness is often performed by queer figures across other mainstream news and media coverage, and being part of a community does not figure. Depictions of gay men living with HIV and AIDS from the early 1980s offer a comparison (see Figure 4.2). In addition we see the photographic images pictured within government guidance around tackling homophobic bullying in schools (see Figures 4.3 and

4.4).¹¹ The positing of such a conservative agenda has been taken to task by Daniel Monk in his paper, ‘Queering the Homophobic Bullying Agenda’, in which he argues that the agenda for reducing bullying in schools similarly positions the young lesbian or gay person as innocent victim, isolated and vulnerable.¹²

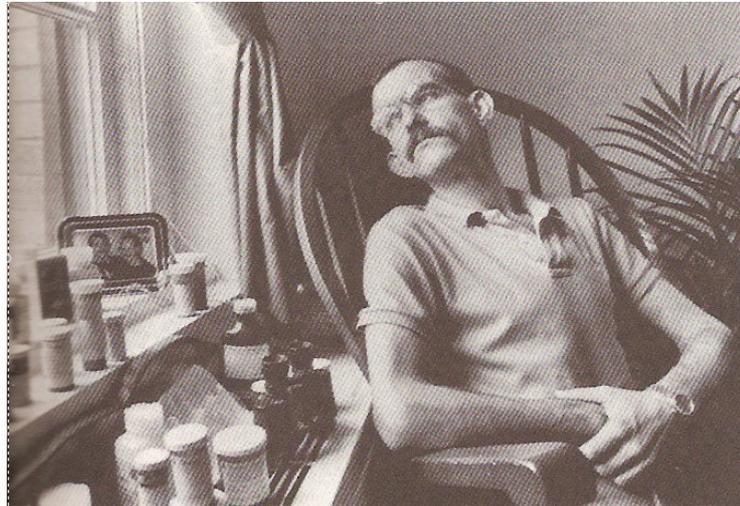
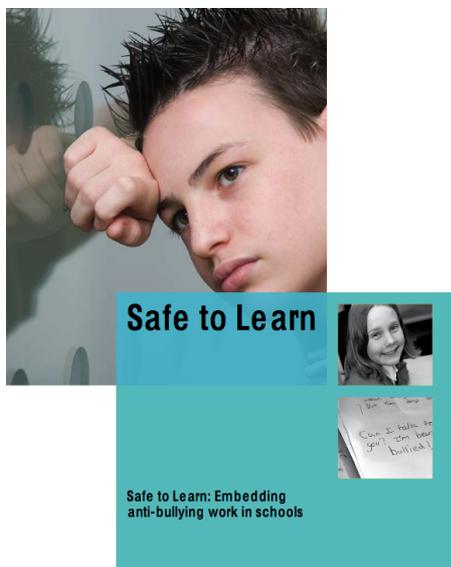
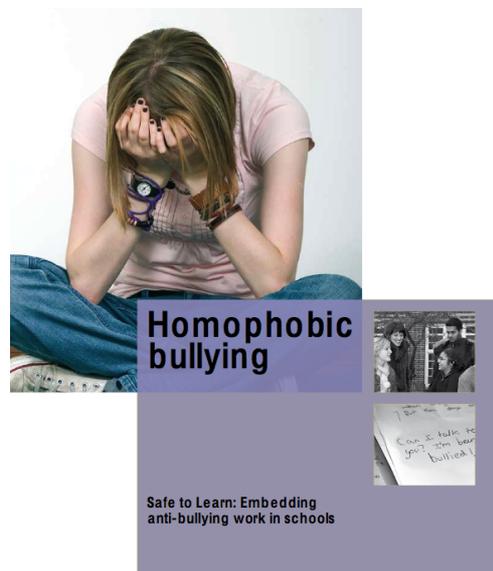


Figure 4.2 Peter Sterling, photograph of David Chickadel, *People Weekly* 28:5, 73 (3 August 1987) from Jan Zita Grover ‘Visible Lesions: Images of the PWA in America’ (in Miller 1992).



department for children, schools and families



department for children, schools and families

Figures 4.3 and 4.4 Safe to Learn: embedding anti-bullying work in schools by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) 2007.

Such visual tropes contribute to form a variety of attitudes, actions and

understandings of what it means to be LGBT.¹³ What seems evident in these examples (and specifically across a whole plethora of trans narratives within mainstream television documentaries) is a positioning of the trans person as victim and therefore in need of rescue. I turn next to portrayals of the health profession as it pertains to the lives of trans people, considering in particular the role of the surgeon and the theatre of surgery.

4.2 The Seriousness of Surgery

Surgical operations may be dramatic and those who perform them acquire a certain glamour. (*The Lancet*, 24 April 1999)¹⁴

The dramatic arc of the transsexual narrative, overcoming all the odds, peaks at the scene of ‘sex change’ surgery. Whilst the expression ‘sex change’ has become outdated and is critiqued in trans circles, many of the documentaries use the term in their very titles as well as in the voiceover throughout. In the TV screening of *A Change of Sex* the trans viewers discussed the emphasis on surgery. Mary not only remembered the initial broadcast of the documentary but also knew Julia Grant from being part of the same community and frequenting the same venues in London and Manchester in the 1970s and ‘80s. Mary said:

I think the trans community has changed – even the word ‘trans’. I mean we used to use the word ‘sex change’ about ourselves. And when I heard Julie use that term ‘sex change’, it reminded me of saying: ‘I’m a sex change,’ or ‘I’m going for a sex change.’ We used to talk like that. We didn’t say ‘transsexual’. We didn’t say ‘trans’. Now that term [sex change] jars with me.

Cecil responded, ‘It jars with me. I mean I remember people in school going, [in a mock gruff voice] “Oh you’re going to get a sex change then?” It’s not nice. There’s a lot of negative connotations.’

I added, ‘It still has some currency though doesn’t it? I mean people will understand it whereas they might not understand trans.’

Kris replied, ‘Yeah but they understand it almost in a sensationalised way.’

‘Sex change’, said Blue, ‘is the blunt headline. Whereas trans, transgendered, transsexual is [...] a bit less sensational and a bit more medical.’

Whilst the expression ‘sex change’ has come to be replaced with ‘gender reassignment’, certainly since 1999 with the amendments made to the Sex Discrimination Act, the term has not had such wide use in mainstream television.¹⁵ As transsexualism continues to be the dominant narrative around trans subjectivities, this no doubt is linked to the spectacle of surgery. Often watching documentaries about trans people offers a trans person the opportunity to reflect on their own identity and where they fit. However the persistent tropes in discourse about surgery may offer some trans people a red herring in terms of what it means to be trans, what happens to you if you are trans and whether surgery is something that you will go on to have. Sam stated:

The trouble is, though, that it’s so definite, like – this is what you’re going to have to do and these are the troubles that you’re going to encounter; this is how you feel and this is how you’ve got to prove yourself ultimately. I don’t think that’s really going to be that empowering. It’s saying that you have to have the surgery to be female and... for anyone who doesn’t feel the need to have surgery, they’re going to think ‘Well I’m not like that and so maybe I’m not [trans or female] at all.’

Cecil added, ‘The documentary was called *A Change of Sex* and it was about the sex change, and the rest of it didn’t matter. Whereas for me right now I’m going “hormones are good” and I’m not really bothered about anything else right now.’

Mary agreed with Cecil, saying, ‘Surgery isn’t the only focus.’

Carl said, ‘I must say I’m looking forward to the day when we have a documentary when it isn’t hormones, surgery etc ... I’ve watched so many trans documentaries and I’m actually starting to get a bit bored. I find the surgery boring, especially when you’ve seen the exact same image.’

Following this I asked the group, ‘Why is it such a strong visual trope?’

Sam responded, ‘Because it’s weird, because it’s like “Why would somebody want to be cut up?” [It’s] the extreme. If you want it so much that you want to be cut up then that means that you really are.’

With the subject performing a compulsion to undergo painful surgery the realness of the trans situation is enforced. Crucially it is *seeing* this pain that *makes* it real. The surgical spectacle of bodily mutilation, whether castration, double

mastectomy or surgically constructed genitalia, brings the gazing viewer tangibly into the trans narrative. The viewer experiences a sort of horrific pleasure towards, as well as a repulsion from, the trans subject as the pain is made most visible and visceral through the surgery scene and subsequent recovery. In the popular TV documentary we see knife insertions directly into genitalia, blood spurting, post-surgery bruising and swelling as well as weeping wounds and infections. Through such an emotional and bodily experience the viewer both comprehends and fails to comprehend such actions.

The surgical possibility of *reassigning* sex raises questions about the bodily signification and the primary assignment of sex at birth. As the technologies of surgical intervention produce gender signification, this works to upset and challenge notions of the real and authentic gendered selves (Elliot and Roen 1998; Prosser 1998a; Meyerowitz 2002). The trans narrative reveals how any gender politics (both conservative and radical) that rests on these primary bodily signifiers appears to be on shaky ground.

Historically, as feminists challenged the ‘natural order’ of gender as patriarchal, the distinction between sex (as natural) and gender (as cultural) allowed feminists to concentrate on the societal injustices of the lives of women in the various social roles of worker, wife and mother in the post-World War II era. Political work of this kind no doubt became troubling, as the biological sex that contributed to selfhood was integral to the project and female-born women took up the position of being ‘real’ in a way that transsexual women could never be.

In *Gender Trouble* Butler asks: ‘How is a feminist critic to assess the scientific discourses which purport to establish such “facts” for us?’ (Butler 1990, 10). Some feminist critics, most notably Janice Raymond, specifically attacked the ‘male to constructed female transsexual’, arguing that they were simply subscribing to the patriarchal systems of gender oppression by reinserting the female body as a fetishized object for ‘male’ gratification (Raymond 1980).

As such, Stryker tells us:

By altering the surface appearance of their bodies, such feminists contended, transsexuals alienated themselves from their own lived history, and placed themselves in an inauthentic position that misrepresented their ‘true selves’ to others. (Stryker 2006, 4)

The notions of construction and alteration are important here as the production of selfhood relies on technology that is embedded in the scientific and medical field. In *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technologies and the Idea of Gender*, Bernice Hausman looks at how medical science produces the transsexual, considering a number of case studies of people who changed their sex in the 1930s. She argues that the very possibility of *being* a transsexual required the development of scientific technologies for changing sex. Moreover she charts how the transsexual subject has capitalised on the social shifts in understanding gender as separate from sex, and has manipulated medical understandings of the intersex condition and ‘corrective’ surgery to meet their own phantasmatic ends.

The book is problematic in positing that trans people are duping scientists because it supports this with the idea that trans people consciously ‘choose to engineer themselves’ in a way that non-trans people do not. Nevertheless the transsexual’s relationship with the surgeon is certainly a reciprocal relationship that is caught up in bodily signification and subjectivity production (Doyle 2008, 11).

Feminist arguments that body modification is ‘mutilation’ working to meet heteronormative ends, are, however, losing the battle to an ever-growing market of beauty consumption. Within these discourses, the ideologies honour and preserve the body as ‘natural’; oppose or challenge continuing social pressures to ‘look good’; and refocus the emphasis on the socio-psychological which produces ‘poor’ senses of selves and ‘unhealthy’ attitudes, such as low self-esteem and low self-worth. Indeed the beauty industry has long since moved on from the purchase of clothes, haircuts and make-up to the production of bodily permutations and cosmetic surgery.

Cosmetic surgery is serious business. For instance, in *My Mum Is My Dad*, the son and the ex-wife of Stephanie Roberts criticise the emphasis that Stephanie places on her body and appearance, at the expense of spending time, and importantly money, on the nurturing of family kinships. They point to the costs of the various facial and breast surgical procedures Stephanie was prepared to spend money on, when her son was struggling financially. Stephanie, on the other hand, points out that her glamour-modelling career generated considerable income and she is proud of her success in this regard. This highlights how Stephanie’s womanhood is caught up in broader concerns around heteronormative notions of beauty, which involve hard work and money.

Other popular television programmes have also played their role in this. Shows such as *10 Years Younger*, *Designer Vaginas* and *Superbotox Me*, amongst a host of others, demonstrate how cosmetic surgery is becoming simply another consumer choice for wanting to look (and feel) good. Indeed notions of the ‘new me’ and the ‘post-surgery me’, speak across many popular documentaries, with visual narratives about trans people being only some of them.

Where once bodily signifiers such as sex attributes were perceived as fixed and natural, body modification now offers opportunities for such powerful codes of identity to be (re)appropriated, manipulated or (to use a Butlerian term) morphed. Arguably this gives agency to a self-defined identity production, where gender expressions and bodily signifiers (breasts, vaginas, penises, lips, nose, cheeks, Adam’s apples) as well as the performances of age (lines, wrinkles and sagging flesh), economic status (complexly visualised through codes of general well-being, health and beauty) and even race (skin colour, facial features and hair quality) are there for the taking. Such promissory selves are sold to us through sophisticated branding machines, which offer to produce ‘better’ – that is happier, more beautiful – future selves. Such branding is inevitably caught up in a regulation of body norms through the complex lens of desire and sexuality. In addition to this, prime television viewing becomes watching and witnessing the painful consequences of body augmentation, the success stories, the figures who take things a ‘bit too far’ and of course the devastating consequences when things go wrong.

Indeed, the trans body takes tragedy to a new level through the documentary narrative of the ‘botched job’. In *Return to Gender* a trans woman from the USA talks about the unsuccessful surgical procedures she underwent in Thailand. The still photographs shown make for spectacularly nauseating viewing. Four still shots of Cindi Harrington’s constructed vagina are shown one after the other, each zooming into the sore, oozing opening. Cindi describes her difficulty in not being able to urinate and goes on to talk about her resulting depression and suicidal feelings post-surgery after what she describes as being ‘turned into a female eunuch’ (see Figure 4.5). The shocking imagery and depressing narratives around botched jobs offer perverse and yet lucid ideas of what it means to be a trans. The focus on ‘things going wrong’ raises ethical concerns with responsibility within this entangled relationship between the trans person and the medical world. More importantly it

explicitly highlights the dangers and tragic consequences for transsexuals if they try to bypass or opt out of the highly regulated National Health Service.¹⁶



Figure 4.5 Cindi Harrington's post-Gender Reassignment Surgery results in *Return to Gender* (Julie-Pia Aberdein, UK, 2005, Channel 5).

From this, then, I turn my attention to discourses of 'the freak' in order to consider notions of being between or outside the gender binary of male and female.

4.3 The Freak Show, Gender Queer and Ideas of Regret

The freak is an object of simultaneous horror and fascination because... the freak is an ambiguous being whose existence imperils categories and oppositions dominant in social life. (Grosz 1996, 57)

In her journal article, 'Medical Documentary: Conjoined Twins as a Mediated Spectacle', José Van Dijck suggests that the voyeuristic nature of seeing the surgical separation of conjoined twins is made valid through its presentation as 'salvation by medical professionals' (Van Dijck 2002, 538). Van Dijck makes an interesting comparison of medical television documentaries in the latter part of the twentieth century with turn-of-the-twentieth-century freak shows, where displays of non-normative bodies are made ethically sound by the persona in the white coat. Such contextualising of the freak within scientific knowledge frameworks (and achievements) trumps any inclination of the audience member to feel guilty about their compulsive ogling.

In critical opposition to such mainstream exploits, the freak has become a celebratory figure within queer and crip theory discourse (McRuer 2006). Bearded lady Jennifer Miller, for example, has reclaimed the Victorian freak show within a feminist politics (*Juggling Gender*, 1992, Tami Gold, USA; *A Circus in New York*, 2002, Frederique Pressman France; Straayer 1996). By letting her facial hair grow and so no longer passing as a woman she troubles the gender borders and problematises the category of 'woman' itself. In (re)placing her work within the spectacular framing of the circus she looks to reconsider the freak and to think through the viewing of such bodies situated outside social norms and beyond categories of understanding.

Contemporary freak shows refocus the queer, disabled and non-normative body within discourses of the spectacle, by offering a self-conscious agency.¹⁷ Such spaces present a celebratory ethos towards all bodies and challenge body fascism and conventional aesthetics of health and beauty – a celebration which is absent from the more conventional displays of popular television documentaries.

In fact, in contrast to Miller, in mainstream documentaries the trans 'freak' is not concerned to muddy the distinctions between male and female, but instead to reinforce them. Indeed as the trans subjects featured make a one-way transition from male to female or vice versa, there is little, if any, reference to other queer or gender variant identities or bodies that positively or affirmatively fall between or outside the gender binary. Instead the journey from male to female or vice versa is pictured as fraught with difficulty. Embedded in this process are questions such as: 'How can you be sure?' and 'What if you regret it?'

In the documentary *Make Me a Man Again* (2004) we hear from Charles Kane, a millionaire from Baghdad, who transitioned from male to female and after seven years decided to transition back and live as a man. After having had extensive surgery on his face and electrolysis, the documentary follows Charles having his breast implants removed and a penis constructed.¹⁸ Similarly, in *Return to Gender*, we hear from protagonists Kieren Charles and Paula Rowe, who express regret about their gender transition. They are 'the sex swappers who want to swap back' and, as the voiceover explains, 'sometimes the drastic decision to change sex can be the wrong one'. This desire is contextualised with stories of numerous suicide attempts, mental breakdowns and general psychological confusion and depression. Consequently, what is described as a 'bad decision' is reconfigured within a medical

polemic of ‘bad practice’ and the dangers of misdiagnosis. This debate specifically brings up treatment from across public and private health systems.

Kieren, who went through the National Health Service for treatment but did not go through with his Gender Reassignment Surgery (the removal of the penis and the construction of the vagina), points out that if he had had the money at the time he would have had his operation six months into living as Clare. Comparatively Paula, who went private, was prescribed hormones on the first appointment. Paula points to the speed of her diagnoses by a private practitioner as part of the problem. She states, ‘The way I did it, by having it done so quickly was wrong and it’s really messed my life up.’ One and a half years later Paula had Gender Reassignment Surgery as well as breast implants – a decision she now regrets. Currently in the documentary she wishes to have her breasts removed so as not to ‘bring attention to herself’ and to relieve her from regular transphobic abuse. However Paula’s lower surgery is described as ‘irreversible’.

As the possibilities of being *neither one gender nor another* are opened up for the viewer through the very presence of Paula on screen; they are, it seems, immediately closed down. Paula’s in-betweenness and feelings of belonging nowhere are billed as quite literally disastrous. The narrative not only reinforces the trope of the lonely trans subject, but the very irreconcilability and sadness brought about by being an illegibly gendered person is made clear. Paula’s body, which is presented as neither *fully* male nor female, is used to reinforce the need for regulatory bodies to oversee good medical practice and alerts the viewer to the disastrous consequences when they are not in place. By her own admission, Paula does not *know fully* her own gender identity nor does she even consider her gender to be something particularly firmed up. Such a queer figure reveals for the viewer the possibility of gender non-normativity, although the lonely and devastating effect of being beyond or outside the gender binary is made clear enough.

Since the documentary *Return to Gender* identifies its key characters as *not* being transsexual, it is forced to discriminate a different way of being trans, namely transvestism. Consequently, the documentary lends attention to the performance of gender in the way other documentaries that feature trans people do not. Paula points to the labour and commitment involved in the maintenance and repetition of producing her gender identity as ‘woman’; as the voiceover states: ‘Playing out the role of a woman wasn’t so easy for Paula.’

Paula says, 'It's like being in a role that never ends. It's like being in a film or a stage play and it never finishes and you've got to keep acting all of the time. Acting, acting, acting.' This sense of performing her gender is not without a context though. Paula has been rejected by her family, she experiences daily abuse as a result of her illegible gender identity and she lives in solitude after the death of her lover/close friend. She says:

I had no reason to dress as a woman, because I had no one to dress for. So I resorted to dress the way I am, basically in a gender limbo situation. I stopped wearing make-up. I threw my female clothes away and I dressed to hide what female figure I had.

Her decision to 'return' to her male role is no doubt caught up in the guilt she feels over the negative effect that it has had on the rest of the family. In a rather puzzling scene she meets her brother, Clive, in a quaint English pub and, in front of an open fire, drinking a pint of beer, she tells him that she is going to have a double mastectomy. Paula says that she is going to be his brother again, to which the brother replies, 'Paul you have always been.' Clive states that it would not have been possible for her to see the children and to be called 'Aunty Paula', when only last year she had a beard. Paula understands that as a result of this gender non-normative behaviour she must be distanced from the family and this is part of her pain and – we might understand – part of her reasons for returning to being Paul.

In discussion after the screening of *Return to Gender*, once again it was noticed that the documentary made no reference to any sort of community or collective of trans or gender queer people who might work politically as well as socially to carve out a space that celebrates non-normative gendered subjectivities. Carl, Jordan and I embarked on a discussion around Paula's potential queer identity, and the seeming lack of choice or opportunity for her to recognise herself within this framework. Carl states:

Perhaps for Paula, it's quite clear to me that she's not 80 or 100% male or female, I think she's someone who feels comfortable in both. Now I think it's very unfortunate in her case that she had such appalling lack of support from her family and it was quite clear as well that the bloke that she was with, if he had have carried on living, she wouldn't have felt so much pressure to go back. That's a huge thing.

If you get recognition and support and people are really happy that you've changed your gender then you'll be happy, but unfortunately that wasn't the case with her.

Jordan added, 'There didn't seem to be any support for Paula or Paul to meet other people who have taken that middle road.'

Carl replied, 'You would think that Paula or Paul would be very happy in a very queer or gender variant environment, not that there are many that exist, but there are some...'

'Yeah, there are in London' added Jordan.

'Yeah there are in London, but not every day,' continued Carl. 'You still have to walk down the road and get your groceries, but there's the queer camp and he or she might really experience comfort there. Clearly Paula doesn't want to be totally male and personally I think had Paula had lots of support and recognition as a woman, she would have stayed as a woman.'

Let me recall some key points made in my Introduction to this thesis and how we might consider the knowledge produced from within mainstream media to be different to what can be known about being trans from within subcultural or alternative events such as trans and lesbian and gay film festivals, arts venues and club scenes. I argued that the trans figure is taken up by queer theory in order to open up debates and expose the machines of heteronormativity. However such discourses seem to be of little relevance or 'help' to the likes of Paula Rowe.

For me this flags up the limited reach of queer work, both from within academic and activist circles, which for the most part does not feature in popular culture. Queer so often locates itself within metropolitan and urban contexts and mostly within intellectual and socially elite circles – sites and places where Paula Rowe and other trans people like her seemingly do not circulate. Access to such knowledge is limited. Alternatively, watching mainstream TV documentaries about trans people is widely accessible and this kind of trans knowledge – simply seeing trans subjects on screen – can be fundamental, or at least important, to many trans people from across the UK. These knowledge products make them/us think about their/our own subjectivity. In straightforward terms they offer trans people out there – and particularly those who are figuring out who they are – a knowledge product; a point of reference that may influence their thinking and feelings about their

becoming (trans) selves. For instance, following the TV screening of *Lucy: Teen Transsexual* James told me:

I thought about how I hated trying to live as a girl, and one day I typed in 'sex change' into Google. That night there was a documentary called *Teen Transsexuals* and it was really good and it's quite amazing that that came on that night. *I just instantly knew* and then I came out to my family a couple of months later. (My italics)

Given that these TV documentaries are so far reaching it is not unreasonable to suggest that through them the most isolated trans person can engage with what it means to be trans. They can come to understand something of what it means to be trans and therefore come to understand something of themselves, and they can sanction any desire they may have to carry out future performances and expressions of being trans.

4.4 Emotions on Display: *Lucy: Teen Transsexual*

Mark Burnett, the reality TV super producer, is responsible for some of the most successful reality formats since 2000. An extreme sports producer, he took the adrenalin of competitive sports and transformed it into reality-based entertainment. According to Burnett, reality TV deals with '*contrived situations creating genuine emotions*'. (Hill 2007, 10; my italics)

Lucy: Teen Transsexual (2007) is an example of a documentary in which understandings of what it means to be trans are also framed through a particular emotional and affective lens. The programme situates its protagonist, 17-year-old Lucy, within a single-parent, working-class family in Middlesbrough. We see her growing up as a boy, coming out to her family and undergoing hormonal and surgical intervention. Many of the tropes already outlined are repeated here – the conventional transsexual story of gender essentialism, a history of school bullying, inner torment from a very early age, fears of rejection and suicidal feelings, as well as visits to psychiatrists, electrolysis and of course the spectacular imagery of Gender Reassignment Surgery.

What is distinctive about *Lucy: Teen Transsexual* is that it brings to the fore the tensions between the private and public worlds as the viewers are invited into her bedroom and we are offered access to her inner thoughts and feelings through the device of the video diary. Here Lucy can speak directly to camera, record her more intimate feelings and reveal her private teenage bedroom activities. Without large and numerous bits of equipment – and of course the crew required to operate them – the documentary maker obtains footage that appears emotional, intimate and personal.

Such raw footage has of course been returned to the filmmakers for them to construct its narrative and heighten the drama through an editing process.¹⁹ In addition to the video diary trope the film generally adopts a more personable, light-hearted tone. The intimacy of the diary allows the viewer to see a rather relaxed and comfortable Lucy, who is self-mocking as well as colluding with the viewer as she offers quick quips and flitting jibes behind the backs of other people in her life. She is also seen to have ‘strop’ teenage tantrums, and experiences the world with a certain frustration and dissatisfaction.

As part of my ethnographic study, in the discussion following the screening of this film, James said, ‘The video diary catches her personality’, showing her as more rounded and ‘not *just* a trans person’ (my italics).

The programme positions Lucy as a ‘typical teenage girl’. Obsessed with her shape and size, clothes, hair and make-up, Lucy performs all necessary codes of cultural femininity centred on the body. We see numerous heavily cut shots of Lucy trying on different clothes, doing her hair and putting on make-up. The tone is light and humorous as it plays to *knowing* clichés around such labours of femininity production. The voiceover states: ‘women think about their bodies every 15 minutes’ and ‘six out of ten women say their body makes them feel depressed’.

Lucy speaks to the camera saying: ‘I’ve just watched the video back of what I’ve just shot. My body looks disgusting. I’m going to start crying and I’ve just done all my make-up.’ In addition Lucy expresses tears of joy. After an appointment with a private surgeon, where Gender Reassignment Surgery is outlined to her (and to the viewers at home), she returns to her bedroom and switches on the video recorder. ‘No words can describe how happy being told that I can have the operation makes me,’ she speaks through tears. ‘It’s all I’ve ever wanted my whole life.’

Emotion also features as part of Lucy's emerging sexuality as a young person. Lucy tells us that she is proud to be a virgin, but has recently begun to explore a sexual interest. When Lucy returns from a night out, she switches her video diary on and we are given a drunken monologue of the night's events. A story unfolds when Lucy meets a man that she met on the Internet and she goes out on a date. She returns in floods of tears when, having kissed a man for the first time, she later receives a text message saying, 'I don't think it's going to work. Seriously are you a transsexual?'

There is a sense that much of the drama is typical teenage stuff, although as she confesses her experience to members of her family they worry about her personal safety, given that she is a transsexual and that some men can be violent. They draw on a seriousness that Lucy seems to refuse, instead making light of the situation and saying: 'Oh well it's in the past now. It all turned out alright in the end didn't it?'

The affective production throughout the programme is certainly ambivalent. It is not easy to identify any given scene as 'happy' or 'sad'. There are, for instance, many acts of affection in particular by the female members of Lucy's family, most specifically her mother, and yet they are tinted with a sort of mournfulness, or deep sorrow. As Lucy reaches her 18th birthday her family throw a party for her in the house. Her adulthood means that Lucy can now get the surgical intervention that she desires. After some shots of women dancing in the living room, the women sit down to wish Lucy a happy birthday. Lucy's mother gets emotional and despite the scene feeling somewhat contrived, the display of tears feels genuine. To lift the mood the music track 'Girls Just Want To Have Fun' starts and the dancing resumes. Lucy says, 'I felt overwhelmed with all the acceptance.'

Responses to the film, when it was screened at my house, centred on feelings.

James said, 'I like the way the [family are] sympathetic towards Lucy.'

'My impression is how hard it is for families,' said Jordan, 'we sweep our families along with us'.

I asked, 'Why do you think her mum was so emotional? We see her upset but she doesn't really articulate it.'

James replied, 'She was thinking about how Lucy must have felt. Perhaps there was a feeling of guilt'.

Jordan added, 'She's more afraid of the future. Is [Lucy] going to have a life?'

We also remarked on the absence of men throughout the film and speculated whether they were dead or if they did not wish to participate in the documentary.

James reflected on his own experience of coming out as trans to his family: 'Men are not the people that they talk to' he claimed, 'it seems like women are more for talking about your emotions and things. I talk to my mum about things. My Dad's not in tune with his emotions.'

Emotional displays challenge scientific approaches to knowledge production, as we can be reminded of how second wave feminism posited emotion, affect, subjectivity and the 'personal' as an equally valid way of *knowing*, investigating at the same time the various powers at play through conventional and patriarchal epistemological pursuits (Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo 1974; Carol Pateman 1989; Catherine MacKinnon 1987; Nancy Fraser 1992). Certainly affect has become increasingly central to current political and cultural bearings of epistemology (Ahmed 2004; Blackman 2001; Berlant 2008).

The politics of emotion have been widely debated within affect theory, trauma theory, attachment theory as well as in feminine and feminist discourse (Ahmed 2004; Berlant 2008). In Lauren Berlant's *The Female Complaint* (2008) she considers women, love and an 'intimate public'. Drawing on popular writing for women (so-called 'chick lit'), Berlant claims that this kind of literature discusses what it means to be a woman as well as embracing the fact that in being a woman there is something in common and something to share with other women, producing a particular intimacy and a particular revelation around lived experiences of womanhood. 'Affective knowledge', she states, 'more than truths of any ideology' sits at the heart of these 'sentimental' works (Berlant 2008, 2).²⁰ Berlant claims:

[The female complaint] argues that the unfinished business of sentimentality [...] collaborates with a sentimental account of the social world as an affective space where people ought to be legitimated *because they have feelings* and *because there is an intelligence in what they feel that knows something about the world that, if it were listened to, could make things better.* (Berlant 2008, 2; my italics)

Berlant shows us that through feeling something we can know something. What we might learn here is that the emotional performances that take place in *Lucy: Teen Transsexual* offer a notion that *being real* comes about through a performative affective encounter with the viewer. In another contrived scene inducing genuine emotion, we see the three women in Lucy's life – her mother, aunty and grandmother – sitting around the kitchen table with cups of tea recalling the moment when Lucy told them she was trans.

'It was fear that gripped me,' the grandmother uttered, 'fear for the future and fear of what people would say.'

Lucy's aunt begins to get upset and tearful: the camera zooms in for a close-up. 'All I wanted to do was get hold of her and make everything better,' she says.

The scene offers us an image of Berlant's intimate public, where emotion and feelings are foregrounded and within the performance of emotion a particular knowledge is produced. We can see how such emotions flowing through the documentary performed and produced a specific, affective knowledge for the women featured. This stands in contrast to any scientific underpinning of trans knowledge.

The viewer witnessing the 'fear that gripped' Lucy's grandmother and her consequent tears is offered a human interest angle (Van Dijck 2002, 549) which shows the viewer that being trans and being the family member of a trans person is to be sad and consequently in some sort of pain, which, I have already argued, has a bearing on being real.

Such affective work produces a set of meanings around the condition of being trans, which centres around overcoming adversity, accepting difficulties in ordinary life and gaining and reinforcing familial support, love and affection. Consequently the affective work of the knowledge product grants an acceptance and possibly a legitimacy to being trans because the story is a human story and reflects that non-uniqueness that Silverstone identified (Silverstone 1984).

Infotainment documentaries, then, perform a balancing act between scientific content and the personal and emotional storyline. In discussion in my TV screenings we would often approach their successfulness in these terms. For instance, after *Middlesex*, on the whole the group perceived it as quite science based and therefore 'good' but others felt that they had no emotional investment in the documentary because there was little 'human angle'.

In reflecting on *The Wrong Body* (as I have myself described at the start of this thesis), Daniel commented on his connection to it because of ‘the fact that it was a personal story.’ Likewise Kris stated that when he sources knowledge products around being trans he asks, ‘does this help me understand myself? and if it doesn’t I don’t connect with it very much.’

Connecting emotionally with a knowledge product is important then for trans viewers in order that they may engage with it and take on board any valuable concepts of what it means to be trans. The filmic language that produces effect, however, can easily fail in its emotional objective as it relies on more sophisticated and nuanced tactics. I turn then to consider some of the consequences of such failure.

4.5 Serious Failings

Television is the ‘command center of the new epistemology’ (78) that ‘directs not only our knowledge of the world, but our knowledge of ways of knowing as well’ (79), producing an attention deficit culture disinterested in complexity and/or nuance...where *serious discourse dissolves into giggles* (156). (Postman 1986, quoted in Gray 2008, 5; my italics)

As infotainment documentaries featuring trans people (as I have argued) fail to be serious in terms of their rigour, there is a sense of them compensating by positing instead the seriousness of theme and subject matter (death, pain, loneliness) through strategic uses of tone and performance (tragedy, sobriety). Many of the documentaries that I study here employ a godlike, solemn voiceover, as well as other devices taken from dramatic conventions such as heightened music, pace and narrative film structure that produce emotive scenes (for example, a mother’s testimony) and evocative sites/sights (for example, Gender Reassignment Surgery).

By exposing these codifications, styles and posturings as the ‘technology’ that produces the documentary’s ‘seriousness’, it is made clear that seriousness is a value effect, which is performatively produced. That is to say in order to be successfully serious it must be *bought into* by the various performers and producers partaking in the knowledge product, which includes the filmmaker, the TV networks, the subjects featured and the viewers themselves. With multiple modes of

seriousness at work, we might understand each performance to be taken seriously in some ways and not in others. Alternatively it may be important to note how each viewer might deem some aspects of the documentary performance as serious, but another viewer may not. In short, despite all attempts *to be* serious – since seriousness is always performed and produced through and out of the ways it is taken up – seriousness can fail.

Indeed maintaining sobriety is no mean feat. As the super-earnestness of the filmmaker is exposed or the visual codes employed to perform such seriousness fail, what emerges is a presentation that what we might call ‘over the top’. For example in reference to *Middlesex*, Kris said, ‘some of it was cheesy; it was overplayed, but it could have been worse.’

In particular, the reconstruction scene of the burial after the killing of the trans woman featured in *Middlesex* notably fails to be taken seriously. Linked to crime investigation documentaries and fact-based programmes the failure of the reconstruction crime scene often becomes apparent through the extremely unconvincing acting or the low budget set. One might argue that an over-gesticulated, heightened sensibility takes such seriousness into the realms of the melodramatic. There is something tacky at the heart of the reconstruction scene because being *too* serious is not serious at all. However, neither is it funny; nor can it be. After all, somebody has died.

Capturing actual death on television is of course taboo, and no doubt brings discomfort as well as asking moral and ethical questions.²¹ Death as the ultimate ‘real’ is outside representation and so the representation (if there is to be one) must bear its own impossibility. In this way representing death in documentary (unlike drama) must necessarily be *unrealistic*. The filmmaker must represent death *badly* and the reconstruction scene must perform failure within its representation because it must reveal its own artifice. Failing is pictured through a kind of tackiness, or an inevitable superficiality, suggesting then that the (dead) body of the other, in this case the trans person, becomes both serious and unserious at the same time. The viewer then, at once sympathetic to the narrative, equally recognises such visual codes as clichéd. Consequently, for the viewer there is a kind of double feeling towards the dead trans person, of being both close and involved, as well as alienated and distant.

If *being serious*, then, so consistently fails itself and if quests, to be *taken seriously*, legitimised or to be 'real', are so consequently unsuccessful, perhaps a rethinking is required. Perhaps we, as trans people, might mobilise the inevitable failure of such seriousness. Instead of failing to obtain the legitimacy offered by being taken seriously, perhaps we should *work* the perceived un-seriousness to positive effect; reinvent these failings as productive in forming different types of knowledge products that go on to produce and impact differently on trans subjectivities. As infotainment documentaries are a noted degraded and unrespectable form of documentary, perhaps they also obtain a perverse kind of trans knowledge where trans gets taken up by a 'lightness of being'. Corner states:

Documentary is no longer classifiable as a 'discourse of sobriety' to use Bill Nichols' much cited phrase (see Nichols 1991). It has become suffused with a new 'lightness of being' and it will need care and creativity to get the mix right in specific projects for specific audiences. The aesthetic instability and the reorientations around tone and content, also bears witness to a degree of instability in the factual programming market, an uncertainty and a risk about who wants to watch what and why. (Corner 2002, 264)

4.6 Concluding an (Un)bearable Lightness of Being

The documentary *Changing Sex* (2002) offers a historical perspective on *being* trans, allowing the viewer to 'look back' as a way of coming to know about what it means to be trans. It reflects mainly on how public opinion has moved on from old views of trans subjectivities as pathological, deviant and criminal to a more liberal open-minded acceptance. This is made most evident through the testimony of April Ashley, who had her gender reassignment surgery in 1960 in Casablanca.²²

As the documentary looks back to the 1960s, Ashley tells her story of receiving electroconvulsive treatment after she was declared insane because she 'wanted to become a woman'. The story comments on different life experiences dependent upon class and socio-economic backgrounds. Coming from a 'council estate in Liverpool', Ashley's experience stands in contrast to the narratives of Michael Dillon and Lucy Roberts, whose aristocratic background enabled them to escape the psychiatric world. Through a talking headshot, Ashley begins the narrative, speaking eloquently and charmingly in her recollection. There are

elements of humour and irony in her tone and she appears on the screen looking glamorous and camp.

As her story continues through the use of voiceover, the viewer is shown old black and white scratched and jumpy archive footage of electroconvulsive treatment in action. The music is quirky and comical and the situation strikes the viewer as both shocking and absurd. Doctors are cast as medieval and trans people as victims to their archaic understandings of sex identities and the practices of treating mental illness. It is dark stuff and yet the tone is light.

In infotainment documentaries scientific understandings of what it means to be trans are superseded by the various emotional displays of the subjects and their lived experiences. In many ways this marries those queer projects that have looked to upset or offer alternative approaches, to knowledge productions that have turned their attention towards the ‘unserious’, the stupid and the trashy (Butt 2004, 2006, 2008; Halberstam, 2005, 2011). Aesthetics associated with queer lives such as ‘camp’ have been (re)thought as a potentially productive way in which to *do* knowledge. In fact ‘Camp’ has become an important antidote challenging the ‘serious’ and indeed the ‘real’, as it relishes the parodic, the ironic and the artificial (Sontag 1992). Furthering this discourse, Gavin Butt’s concern is fruitful here as he uses camp to ask questions of the serious:

As recent theorists of camp have argued, to conflate camp with irony is to miss out on its wider potential for undermining the conditions of meaning.... Camp... can be understood as a *performative* technology of subjectivity and meaning which denaturalizes the very process through which *any* determinate meaning is produced. This does not mean, however, that ‘serious’ meaning is evacuated from camp discourse altogether, but rather that it is articulated as the object of a parodic pleasure which undermines its conventional signification. (Butt 1999, 114)

Butt asks: ‘what happens when we take queer approaches to so-called “serious” subjects and forms of attention’ (Butt 2008). Here he explores ‘improper’, unofficial and ‘unsolicited’ sources of knowledge which give rise to a crucial questioning of the very performative acts of constituting knowledge as scholarly, through various research methodologies that are deemed to be ‘serious’, sanctioned, legitimate and authoritative.

With regards then to depictions of trans people in television documentaries and their overt purchase of the serious, how might we implement a ‘queer seriousness’? This notion, which Butt describes as ‘oxymoronic’ or a ‘deviant kind of seriousness’, does not mean simply to relish the unserious or supersede the serious with the unserious. Instead, as with Camp, which does not evacuate meaning, a queer seriousness might have a double meaning as it thinks through the *productivity* of (in this instance) the trans subject working through and between the serious and the unserious. Once again this being between that typifies trans knowledge has its own affective production on the individual forming trans subject. This beingness is both bearable and unbearable, since being taken seriously is so heavily caught up in a legitimising process of selfhood.

As I draw to the end of this chapter, my final point is to stipulate that it is through a ‘lightness of being’ that we can see an opening up of possibilities for viewers (including trans people themselves) to come to understand what it means to be trans. That is that through taking being trans *less seriously* it can sanction a particular lightness of such being. The idea of a lighter, camper and more humorous position or attitude towards trans is no stranger in queer subcultural spaces, but, as I have argued, such spaces have limited access and demand a certain social and cultural capital. Consequently identifying this unseriousness as it appears on mainstream television offers a sensibility for those trans people who fall outside queer and trans networks.

Here, such lighter mainstream representations may likewise work to reduce the gravity, and hence the anxiety, associated with such beingness. Their potential is to relieve the burden of a trans person’s own perceived heaviness, sobriety and general doom and gloom and instead consider the consequences of (as Gray describes it) when an epistemology; a way of knowing ‘dissolves into giggles’. I turn now to continue my discussion of the ways in which science and scientific knowledge production is utilised to offer explanations of trans to a wide audience through trashy infotainment documentaries. Once again we can see how this duality of ‘proper’ knowledge being issued through such ‘trashy’ modes of production can work to compromise and upset normative systems of knowledge.

Notes to Chapter 4

¹ Interestingly, the title *My Mum is My Dad* places ‘Dad’ after the affirmative verb ‘is’, forcing the actuality of being onto the male parental role, rather than the female.

² We may think immediately of the films of Ken Loach, such as *Ladybird Ladybird* (Ken Loach 1994), that have been categorised as British Social Realism and often centre on issues of poverty and class, which are presented as painful, depressing and dark.

³ We are reminded of the famous scene in Buñuel’s *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) where a cloud passes over the moon and then cuts to a woman having her eye slit. The full moon is a common trope in suspense thriller narrative films.

⁴ For examples of policy and strategy see:

http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/r/6/transphobic_hate_crime_in_eu.pdf

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97849/action-plan.pdf

http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/fairerbritain/empowering_people_to_tackle_crime.pdf

⁵ See <http://www.transgenderdor.org/>

⁶ The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 and amendments made to the Criminal Justice Act 2003 have meant that, where any offence, including murder, is motivated by hatred or hostility towards transgender victims, sentences must be made more severe. See: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/10/part/3/enacted>

⁷ For examples of the various demonstrations and other events organised by the Transsexual Menace, see: <http://www.transsexualmenace.org/>

⁸ This work is carried out through our parent and family members support at Gendered Intelligence. See: genderedintelligence.co.uk

⁹ In Chapter 6, I will return to the new organisation Trans Media Watch, which has done much of this work over the past five years.

¹⁰ Similarly, in the screening of *Lucy: Teen Transsexual*, Jordan told James and me about his own experience of finding the trans community. He said: ‘I was really distressed in therapy for ages and started talking about my fantasies. In the group there was a woman from New Zealand who was 6 feet tall. I had come to terms with the fact that the fantasy me inside was me. I was feeling ultra dysfunctional. I remember my therapist said, “would you think about having a sex change?” and I said, “if I was as big as L_ I would”. And then I started looking around and saw that there were lots of guys my size and I had long hair then and was thinking about having a haircut and I Googled “boys haircuts for girls” and found this passing site in America. I found FTM London and, I don’t know if you remember, but I sent you an e-mail and you wrote back to me and you actually sent me a newsletter and it had a picture of you [Jay] and F_ at Pride, and that was really mind blowing actually. And that was what got me to that August meeting.’ I replied that I had never known that, that he had never told me. James added, ‘support groups are such a massive part. For me FTM London was like my second home for a long time. The people there made such a difference.’

¹¹ See: <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/tacklingbullying/safetolearn/>

¹² Daniel Monk’s paper was delivered as part of the Queer at Kings Seminars on 20th January 2009

¹³ See Padva 2008.

¹⁴ *The Lancet* editorial: ‘Surgery into the Future’. *The Lancet*, 353: 9162, 24 April 1999. Quoted in Doyle 2008, 9.

¹⁵ In addition, the term ‘transition’ is also used. Whilst this is mostly understood as ‘medical transition’, meaning hormone therapy or surgical intervention, it also opens itself up to include a social transition, for example

changing names, pronouns, clothes and hairstyles as well as opening up to the idea of taking all sorts of journeys involved when identifying as trans.

¹⁶ I expand on this in the next chapter where I consider more deeply the relationship with the psychiatric encounter of the health system and notions of responsibility.

¹⁷ At the Big Chill Festival in the UK, in August 2008, was the ‘Perverse Universe – Victorian Freak Show’ produced by Red Sarah (www.bigchill.net/story/2400/perverseuniversevictorianfreakshow.html)

¹⁸ See the *Daily Mail* article ‘A very peculiar engagement’ by Helen Weathers, on 7th December 2010. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1327554/Charles-Kane-sex-change--hated-Samantha-man-Now-hes-getting-married-So-fiancee-crazy.html>

¹⁹ Although if we are to think about the agency involved in appearing in a documentary that is produced by mainstream TV networks (for mainstream ends) it is interesting to note that by using video diaries (an increasingly common tool in contemporary popular documentaries) the individual is at liberty to delete footage filmed prior to handing over the camera at the end of the filming period.

²⁰ Berlant lists as examples popular books such as *The Bitch in the House*, *The Bride Stripped Bare* and *Are Men Necessary?*

²¹ This is also exemplified by the media storm over the terminal illness and death of reality TV star, 27-year-old Jade Goody, who was diagnosed with cancer. In an article by Stephen Moss in the Guardian dated Saturday 21st February 2009, Goody’s publicist Max Clifford is quoted as stating, “[after the wedding] she wants to do maybe a one-off with Piers [Morgan] for ITV.... There might be one or two other things and some charity work...”. The journalist continues, “But not more: reality TV can only take so much reality.”

²² Ashley’s life has drawn attention mostly on account of the annulment in 1970 of her marriage to Arthur Corbett, which was made on the grounds that she was assigned male at birth. See <http://www.pfc.org.uk/caselaw/Corbett%20v%20Corbett.pdf>

So Why Would You Do It? Explanations of Being Trans in Popular Documentaries

The compulsion to change sex must be huge because society doesn't 'sell' trans. So why would you do it? The biological argument is there. (Carl, in discussion after TV screening of *Return to Gender*)

5.1 The Performativity and Productivity of Causation

Debates on health issues in television documentaries offer a crucial space where the meanings of health are negotiated and the health systems and services that intervene at the site of ill health can be justified and validated. These debates relate not only to public expenditure, but also to furthering the aims of medical practice: to relieve pain and preserve life. In recent health documentaries, debates are often raised and judgements are made by the viewer, as the 'patient' is framed as *either* the victim of an illness *or* as the active producer of his or her circumstances.

For example, popular television documentaries that tackle issues such as obesity, alcoholism and anorexia, as well as transsexualism, not only ask questions about lifestyle and choice, but also bring in arguments around genetic disposition and natural disease. Identifying what constitutes ill health rather than chosen deviancy – in particular in relation to non-normative bodies – is an underlying ethical debate within such documentaries.

Importantly, as television documentaries often stipulate transsexualism as a medical condition, this places the transsexual as a 'victim' of their biological circumstances while at the same time ridding them of the label of deviant and relieving the burden of 'blame' for their 'improper' behaviour. Moreover, the understanding of transsexualism as a medical condition takes for granted the consequent justification of the processes of diagnosis, intervention and treatment. Importantly, this reasserts the power of the medical field by achieving consent from viewers through the passive act of television consumption.

This thesis is about trans knowledge. That is to say what it means to be trans, what being trans is and what we know about being trans. Much of our knowledge

about being trans comes from across popular culture and in particular through watching documentaries on television. So far in this thesis, I have contextualised the rising numbers of television documentaries in this area and placed them historically within the hybridisation of the infotainment genre. I have also focused on the particular tones, strategies, tropes and narratives that these knowledge products use in order to think through the complex ways in which they present trans subjects as both real, serious and grave, and also unreal, unserious and ‘light’. The etiology or causation of being trans is equally integral to trans knowledge: this will be the focus of my third chapter.

As I explore ideas of causation, I am specifically interested in how they are performed and what they achieve. As I have made clear, I ground my ideas of trans knowledge within a model of utility, productivity and performativity. Consequently, I am interested to know how trans viewers take up these ideas of causation and how they become productive in their own subject-formation.

As with my previous chapter, I draw in part on a textual analysis of the documentaries, as well as on my TV screenings. I have argued that the televised trans person is most often the ‘transsexual’ person as it performs essentialist notions of gender, fulfils stereotypical behaviours of male and female people and draws on wrong body discourse. Given this, in this chapter I investigate how explorations and explanations of what it means to be trans fall within a model of biological determinism.

Consequently, I wish to think through how such medically framed discourses of causality contribute to the production of a certain kind of trans knowledge and how this in turn effects or impacts upon trans people themselves. By noting the causal arguments laid out in the documentaries, and through observing the discussions of these aspects that were undertaken at my screenings, this chapter asks: What do causal arguments do? How might trans viewers *take on* these discourses? How do such explanations of selfhood relate to the endeavour of gaining a legitimacy and intelligibility of one’s self? Additionally, I wish to address the degree of simplicity required for the popular television documentary in order to render viewable and explicable what it means to be trans and how trans is brought about.

Specifically, this chapter navigates, in relation to authenticity and the problem of choice, the argument that being trans is biologically determined. I also aim to consider how ideas of responsibility and accountability are presented in

relation to actions that produce trans subjectivities. I will also consider the moral underpinnings of ‘grave’ acts such as gender reassignment, which demand explanation and justification in order to achieve social acceptance.

5.2 Causality in ‘Popular’ Television Documentaries

Like many other documentaries featuring trans people, *Middlesex* (2005) draws on biologically determined causes of being trans by focusing on the developing foetus in utero as the vital moment in the emerging ‘sexuality’ – a term the film maker uses to mean the sexed/gendered identity of one’s existence. Alongside the voiceover, we are offered images under the microscope of sperm swimming towards an egg, a fertilising embryo and a developing foetus. These concepts of ‘emerging sexualities’, introduced near the beginning of the film, follow an interview featuring trans women Calpernia Adams and Andrea James. Adams gives an account of how her lover was killed by his fellow soldiers when they found out his girlfriend was trans. The discussion goes on to reflect on the levels of extreme violence aimed at trans women and their lovers. From this, the voiceover asks:

But who are these people who blur the lines between man and woman? What are the forces that shape them, or shape any of us, sexually? The answers to these questions begin before we are born. In the early stages of life’s journey we all develop the same basic set of organs – male and female exactly alike. Six to seven weeks after conception we reach the first fork in the road. The route we take from here is largely determined by our chromosomes: male – xy; female – xx. We take the male direction when a protein on the y chromosome activates the testes, which produces the male hormone androgen. The female parts whither away. (*Middlesex*, 2005)

The film cuts to a headshot of US psychologist Professor James Pfaus, who offers details about sex organs and sex hormone activities in the body. Next the voiceover states: ‘There are other combinations xxy, xyy, xo that can send a developing child into territory in between, neither male nor female – intersex.’ By moving the focus from Calpernia Adams and Andrea James onto the intersex stories of Max and Tamara Beck and later athlete Professor Maria Patiño, the film blends

trans lives and intersex conditions together, conflating causation of both as biologically determined.

Following the section on intersex conditions, the film returns once more to the topic of trans, paying specific attention to brain sex theories. As the documentary returns to a shot of a foetus in the womb, the voiceover states:

Three months after conception and another fork in the road. Hormones have sculpted a body that is recognisable male or female. Over the next six months hormones will sculpt the brain 'male' or 'female', but the genitals can develop in one direction, the brain in another.

The scene then cuts to a child wearing a bandana dancing in a bedroom. These interior shots are then intercut with exterior shots of quiet, suburban streets. Here the viewer is introduced to eight-year-old Noah, who lives in a conservative town in Mid-West America. Noah's father, Richard, tells us about Noah's male-bodiedness and feminine behaviour. He ends this introduction with 'I do know one thing. He didn't choose to be like this.' The documentary then takes us to the Dutch Institute of Brain Research. The voiceover states:

Here they're looking for biological explanations for the behaviour of children like Noah. Work has focussed on the effects of hormones on brain development during the crucial six months before birth. Deep within the centre of the brain scientists found differences between 'male' and 'female', 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual'. The Dutch then turned their focus to the transsexual brain.

Professor Louis Gooren from the Free University Hospital in Amsterdam talks us through their findings, explaining how the brains of transsexuals have not developed in unison with their other physical characteristics – genetics, gonads, genitalia and hormones. To sum, up the voiceover states:

The Dutch research has made a huge contribution in securing the rights of transsexuals under European Law. To our western thinking, if it's choice then it's the wrong choice and should be corrected, but if it's biology it's fixed and must be respected.

This relationship between the biological causation of transsexualism and notions of ‘choice’ is especially important as it works towards ‘securing rights’. This juxtapositioning of these scenes in *Middlesex* pieces together a visual narrative that achieves both legibility and respectability. In the TV screenings of this documentary, I asked Neil, Sam, Kris, Daniel and Jordan: ‘What did you think about some of the arguments around why people are trans?’ Neil picked up on this first:

I think it’s good that it’s touched upon because most of the time they don’t. It’s just this person feels like [this] and it’s not explained why [...] They related it to intersex things didn’t they? Saying about development, that you could develop ambiguously or go one way and go the other way. I think it’s good because it makes it less ‘this person decided one day that they were a woman or a man. Isn’t that weird? Let’s watch what they do but not relate to on it in any kind of scientific way’. So that was kind of good.

I asked, ‘did you relate to those causes? Are they arguments that you believe?’ Neil replied:

I would say so yeah, because I get a bit irritated with the whole choice thing, and I feel like that’s what a lot of people feel and what comes across and I think it’s good that there’s a documentary that is showing that that’s not necessarily so.

Let me now turn to the relationship between causation and the notion of choice that Neil points to. Causation sets out a framework of explanatory features through a Modern model of cause and effect, where past events and states *causally determine* what will happen in the future. Biological determinism, specifically, is where past events or states caused biologically (what we are born with) which will go on to *affect* certain behaviours, actions and feelings (and we can think of feelings in part as a set of desires to act). The temporal dynamic to this is key, as we are to understand that the causal factors exist prior to the events themselves: there is something *already there, fixed and permanent*, which gives rise to these performances.

A model of biologically determined causation relies on an authentic essential self that is stable and constant. Moreover, because changing gender (specifically gender reassignment surgeries or hormone therapy) is – as the voiceover in *Return to*

Gender describes it – ‘a major decision’, to think of being trans as determined means to think that gender reassignment is the only possible action or outcome. Hence, the two components – gender reassignment surgery (the effects or acts) and the biological condition that one is born with (the cause) – distinguish transsexuality from other ways of *being* or *doing* trans.

If transsexual acts are the only acts possible (again because they are deemed so grave), then they are to be understood as being without ‘choice’; as having no connection to free will and hence no allocation of blame. In exchange for these medically sanctioned acts, the transsexual is exonerated from responsibility for their own behaviours (behaviours and actions that are historically steeped in notions of ‘deviancy’, and continue to be understood as ‘deviant’). Such a framework of gender identity formation permits the actions of medical intervention and absolves the individual trans person of responsibility for being trans, or rather for performing trans actions, particularly ones that are deemed ‘grave’ and irreversible.

Neil thinks that it is ‘good’ that trans is paralleled with intersex conditions, as this makes it clear that *being trans*, like being intersexed, is not a decision or a choice, and this idea is useful to him. Certainly, biological determinism offers some explanation about the strength of feeling and sense of compulsion one has in being trans, such as the feeling of lack of choice in carrying out actions that perform such *beingness*, in particular in the face of heteronormative adversity.

Being trans, or rather feeling compelled to carry out trans acts, *feels* as if it is not a choice. This is why echoes of the well-versed phraseology of being ‘trapped in the wrong body’ continue throughout common understandings of being trans and are also adopted by trans people themselves. Prosser picks up on this point when he states: ‘My contention is that transsexuals continue to deploy the image of wrong embodiment because being trapped in the wrong body is simply what transsexuality *feels like*’ (Prosser 1998a, 69; my italics).

Indeed, identifying actions that will set out to achieve one’s own becoming means also to explore the compulsion behind such actions and to make oneself intelligible. Trans people may wish to pursue a rationale around these compulsions in order for their actions to be justified within a heteronormative framework. To understand the actions taken by transsexuals as biologically predetermined lends them a certain permissiveness where they might otherwise have been deemed ‘weird’ (to use Neil’s word). That is to say, to actively and consciously *choose*

gender reassignment surgery (if we are to name that as the most ‘grave’ act) is unfathomable due to its being socially understood as deviant (outside ‘normal’ and indeed ‘sane’ behaviour).

However, in the documentary *Middlesex*, in which Noah wears a bandana and dances in his/her bedroom, we hear from his father, Richard, that Noah has ‘no choice’ but to carry out such actions. The documentary’s logic is that Noah has no choice when (s)he dances with scarves because, as a three-month-old foetus, the brain developed as ‘female’ whilst the genitals, hormones and chromosomal make-up developed as ‘male’. Where a viewer might have once thought such actions were ‘weird’ (that a male bodied person will perform feminine acts – dancing and wearing a bandana), now the viewer might think that (s)he is biologically determined to act this way. To take this view leads us to a number of problems, which I wish to pursue next. I will return to the discussion of the TV screening of *Middlesex*, but I also wish to introduce another discussion, which equally draws on causality as a key part of its narrative.

5.3 Transsexual versus Transvestite

The documentary *Return to Gender*, unlike other television documentaries that feature trans people, explicitly marks the distinction between being a transsexual and being a transvestite, significantly through the trope of ‘regret’. As transsexualism colonises biological causal factors to gain its particular definition, crossdressing or transvestism does not tend to be discussed in the same way on television. The voiceover states:

Both Kieran and Paula wanted to escape the problems of their lives. Cross-dressing had always provided some comfort and both mistakenly thought that the answer to their problems lay in changing gender. They were both transvestites and not transsexuals.

Interviewee Stephanie Lloyd, from the Albany Clinic, adds:

Transvestites and transsexuals are similar basically only because of the words sound very similar. Transsexual is nothing to do with the cross-dressing aspect of it at all

and transsexuals can be male or female. They are people basically, in the simplistic form, born with the body of one gender and the brain of another. So the brain sex isn't profiled with their physical sex. As you can't change the brain, the only thing you can do is realign the body.¹

As distinctions are made between the identity categories of transsexual and transvestite, the causal arguments of essentialism are more firmly taken up in the transsexual identity.² Although these distinctions take place on television, trans people themselves will commonly move between and around community spaces, collectives and scenes and across these identity distinctions. Therefore, marking the distinction between the transsexual and the transvestite, as Lloyd does, splits trans knowledge, and trans subjects watching these documentaries find themselves somewhere between these stipulations of what it means to be trans. The trans viewer is confronted with a multiplicity of possibilities for being trans as well as a multiplicity of possibilities for understanding themselves, including one's causation as trans. However, we recall Silverstone's (1984) article, drawn on earlier in Chapter 3, in which he tells us that television is not a neutral platform. It is no coincidence that the transsexual is given more air time because it is linked so heavily to the authoritative and 'proper' knowledge fields of the science world. At the TV screening of *Return to Gender*, Carl, Jordan and myself discussed the function of this distinction. Carl stated:

I can see why people want to draw that distinction [between transvestites and transsexuals], but there is also a lot of crossover between the two and a lot of people, before they realise they're transsexual, they dress in the opposite clothes and it's just not that straightforward.

In the viewing of *A Change of Sex*, Carl also stated:

Drag can be about exploring how you feel about gender. I myself did a drag king act and I realised 'wow this is really me' and I was really disappointed that I didn't win (it was a competition thing.) I remember there was quite a lot of excitement when all that drag king thing started happening. So I do think it is relevant as well.

At the same time as recognising the way that people move between different distinctions of being trans – namely transsexualism and transvestism – Carl also

challenged this distinction over causality, by asking: ‘Isn’t transvestism biological?’ He continued: ‘I think so, because I believe that a lot of your personality is hereditary as well.’ For Carl, biologically determined arguments are not only restricted to transsexual narratives, or even those acts related to gender identity, but they also play a part in producing many aspects of selfhood.

The discussion around personality or character as biologically determined echoes a host of popular documentaries, which emphasise the genome project as a route through which to know our predetermined characteristics. If personality is hereditary, and there is no agency to shape one’s personhood by being in the world, this ontological picture proves to be rather fatalistic. Equally, to consider acts of transvestism as biologically determined could lead us into tricky gender politics. Indeed, the consciousness-raising slogan from second wave feminism that ‘biology is not destiny’ worked to challenge the ‘naturalness’ and predetermined ideas of gender roles and behaviours and place an emphasis on the patriarchal powers that abound within social constructivism.

If we are to think that wearing clothes of the ‘opposite’ sex (or the desire to do so) is biologically determined, then it must follow that, although it is a normative act, the desire to wear clothes of the ‘same’ sex must also be biologically determined and so it follows that all gender expression is biologically determined. To perceive a desire to wear any type of clothes at all as pre-determined is to undo the sociocultural significations that deem some clothes as ‘women’s’/‘feminine’ and others as ‘men’s’/‘masculine’. On the other hand, as Carl’s argument allocates *all* acts as being genetically brought about, this attempts to make all models of being coherent and brings all explanations for trans acts under one causal roof, as it were. As Carl states:

The compulsion to change sex must be huge because society doesn’t ‘sell’ trans. So why would you do it? The biological argument is there.

5.4 Simple versus Complex Knowledge Products

This correlation between biological causation and not choosing to be trans is productive in terms of other people’s understandings and attitudes towards trans

subjects. However, the conflation or reduction of one's lack of agency (having no choice) and biological determinism are often, as Butler tells us, all too simply put. She states:

There is a tendency to think that sexuality is either constructed or determined; to think that if it is constructed, it is in some sense free, and if it is determined, it is in some sense fixed. These oppositions *do not describe the complexity* of what is at stake in any effort to take account of the conditions under which sex and sexuality are assumed. (Butler 1993, 94; my italics)

In order to unpack this binding of determinism with fixedness and constructivism with free will or agency, Butler calls for us to consider the complexity of this topic. However, if infotaining documentaries are to maintain their popularity with the mainstream, any knowledge they generate or present *must* be simply put. Indeed, the argument that states that subjects are *either* genetically brought about *or* produced through environmental influences is commonly discussed across a host of mainstream television documentaries. Many infotainment documentaries that explore topics of selfhood posit deterministic arguments such as the genome project as the key reason for our behaviours.

In their book *Gene Worship*, Kaplan and Rogers state: 'Today the genetic and inflexible model for human behaviour seems to be heard more often and widely, especially in the media' (Kaplan and Rogers 2003, 5). Indeed, a current political and powerful 'spin' of genetic determinism and a 'current climate of opinion that is favourable to reductionist thinking' (Kaplan and Rogers 2003, 11) has become a dominant voice across popular public culture. Kaplan and Rogers state:

As a particularly poor application of deterministic thinking, the search for causality has led to a reduction of possible causes (or interplay of various elements) to one single alleged cause: hence the term reductionism. Invariably, this way of arguing is guilty of reducing complex phenomena to a singular cause, thus resulting in distorted or even misleading concepts, ideas, and statements that are then offered up as truth. (Kaplan and Rogers 2003, 29)

The critique that I take, then, is not around the provability that being trans is biologically brought about, or indeed any particular deterministic epistemological

frameworks of knowing selfhood, but rather I ask: What might we make of the simple application of what we see televised? These versions not only flow through hybrid infotaining documentaries, but across mainstream media and through other platforms of ‘popular’ culture. Kaplan and Rogers continue:

It might seem surprising... that the hypothesized genetic explanations for human behaviour put forward by evolutionary psychologists receive such attention and popularity, but we seem to be partial to simple, and rigid, explanations for our behaviour. At least, we grasp hold of them blindly and use them for social gain, ignorant of their lack of scientific evidence (Kaplan and Rogers 2003, 7).

It is this notion of simplicity, in relation to the ‘social gain’, that interests me here. Kaplan and Rogers assert:

The complexities of such interactions are all too readily overlooked because there is a tradition, especially in the lay media, to foster little vignettes of supposed truths. This preference comes from a long positivistic intellectual tradition and from human impatience (if not hunger) for simple and polarized explanations. (Kaplan and Rogers 2003, 13)

What is important is how such simple models of trans knowledge, including reductionist arguments around causality, seem to be far more available and more widely spread than any discourse that may take account of the sort of complexity that Butler speaks of. The conclusion one might make is that simple models of trans knowledge, although they are problematic, nonetheless have a particular productivity, whereas Butler’s description of the ‘complexity’ of the fixedness and voluntarism of gender does not seem to have cascaded so freely across popular discourse (1993, 94). Indeed, to take this further, I return to the TV screening of *Middlesex* drawn on earlier in this chapter. Neil stated:

When I say that I believe in the biological argument, I don’t need that argument to justify who I am to myself. I like to have that there because it backs me up with other people. I don’t need to think to myself, ‘Oh I’m male because this happened in my brain.’ It doesn’t really matter to me, because I’m still going to live my life how I do. I guess it’s helpful to me when I’m trying to explain because it’s quite a complex situation for other people to understand. It’s good to have something

definitive that can back me up and not sound like I've just made it up, because I obviously haven't... It's useful but it's not like I sit there analysing my identity. When people ask me how I identify I find it a bit ridiculous. Because you don't ask people who aren't trans 'how do you identify?' ... I'm just me. I'm just a guy.

In viewing these documentaries, it is not simply that trans people understand being trans as biologically determined in order to justify themselves to themselves, but these simple discourses of biological determinism have also been taken up by trans people in order to offer strategic tools in which to explain to others why they have taken or wish to take the actions that they have and to live the lives that they are living or that they want to live.

When trying to explain something about one's trans identity or feelings, there is a need to keep it simple, because it is thought that gender identity formation is confusing. What the general public (and the people around trans people in everyday life) know about being trans will impact on their behaviours and attitudes to them. This argument of biological determinism offers trans people an intelligibility to others, and being rendered intelligible by others is useful to trans people. These scripts of explanation become useful, especially when the documentaries frame trans knowledge within what *appears and is deemed to be* an 'authoritative' knowledge system – medical science. These scientific explanations hold a validity and therefore a purchase. We might say that if the knowledge product is too 'complex', it may be less productive: its consumers – the general public – will not engage and are not prepared to do the work needed in order to understand gender identity formation in any given complexity.³

5.5 Mind versus Brain: Causality and Treatment in the Psychiatric Encounter

So far, I have argued that the act of situating explanations of transsexualism within current medical practice and presenting it as biologically determined is useful in that it enables being a transsexual to be understood as legitimate and intelligible.

Indeed, there has been a general shift which has taken some mental health disorders out of psychosocial frameworks and re-attributed them as neurological and biochemical imbalances.⁴ In addition, recent scientific discourses on transsexuality

have identified experiments on transsexual brains as crucial for understanding the neurological causes of transsexuality. 'Sex in the Brain', published by Frank P. M. Kruijver in 2004, contemplates sex and sexual orientation in relation to the behaviours of sex hormone receptors and neuroendocrinology in the brain.⁵ The published research follows on from an important publication in 1995: 'A Sex Difference in the Human Brain and its Relation to Transsexuality' by J. N. Zhou, M. A. Hofman, L. J. Gooren and D. F. Swaab, which has been the chief body of research that posits transsexualism as a product of neuroendocrinology. In short, transsexualism (and therefore all sex) is in the brain rather than in the mind. Here the sex, as 'male' or 'female', which is found on or in the (dead) brain trumps all other sex signifiers such as genitalia, endocrines and chromosomes and explains non-normative gendered behaviour as well as any set of desires and feelings to be the 'opposite' sex.

It is noted, however, that there has only been slim scientific research contemplating sex (indeed as well as sexual orientation) in relation to the behaviour of sex hormone receptors and neuroendocrinology in the brain. Claire McNab, in her paper 'The Life and Times of the Sliced Transsexual Brain', points to a thin primary source (Zhou *et al.* 1995), but notes how an immense number of papers and articles have been produced which rely on these studies (Playdon 2000; Diamond 1999).⁶ Furthermore, she tells us how the secondary literature goes far beyond the original author's claim that: 'our study supports the hypothesis that gender identity alterations may develop as a result of an altered interaction between the development of the brain and sex hormones' (Zhou *et al.* 1995).

Despite the absence of further substantive primary research, secondary literature converts the hypothesis to firm assertions, such as 'transsexualism is a neuro-developmental condition of the brain' (Playdon 2000) and 'transsexualism is a form of intersex' (Diamond 1999). Certainly, most of the television documentaries that I am studying here adopt this rhetoric. Popular television documentaries use these neuro-biological explanations to create grand universal arguments for the causes of transsexuality, whilst playing down the role of psychological, environmental and sociocultural experiences.

A significant number of the articles, papers, journalism and television documentaries produced that rely on these studies circulate in the public sphere. As such, they come to have a performative effect on the ways trans subjects construct

themselves and the ways trans subjects come to *know* themselves. Indeed within the growing industry of neuroscience and projects which aim to map the brain, physiologically allocating a part of the brain as specifically ‘male’ or ‘female’ has cultural consequences for the ways in which we understand transsexual – indeed all sexed – beings.

Central to this shift from understanding trans as ‘psychosis’ to understanding it as a ‘medical condition’ that is ‘biologically brought about’ is the shift in the medical treatment that is carried out. The understanding of transsexualism as predetermined, and therefore irreversible or incurable, represented a turn in the history of trans knowledge. Instead, understandings of being trans now state that it cannot be cured, it can only be ‘treated’. Reparative treatments to cease transsexual acts, tendencies and thoughts through the use of psychiatric drugs, hypnosis, electric shock therapy and psychotherapy (as in the case of homosexuality) have proved ineffective.⁷

Indeed, the current reluctance to posit explanations that being trans is socio-psychologically brought about may be related to the crude hand that the medical world has historically taken with those who are deemed to be ‘deviants’, and its attempts to enforce gender normativity. In addition, it logically follows that it is not that the medical world has ‘failed’ in its quest to curb gender deviance, but that ‘curing’ being trans is simply not possible. If being trans is innate, it could never have been any different and, as with the model of causation, there is no alternative to that which is realised.

5.6 ‘Careful Selection’: The Authentic ‘Real’ Transsexual

In *Changing Sex* (2002), part of its historicising approach to transsexualism tells us how ‘scientific research shows that transsexualism is a medical condition and not a state of mind’. It refers to studies in Holland that were carried out on the brains of transsexuals, which ‘gave credence to the idea that trans is a condition that people are born with’. In the same documentary, clinical psychiatrist Russell Reid talks of the surge of hormones in utero; Dr Leah Schaefer, a psychologist, says that a baby who is assigned male or female at birth may not be male or female respectively; and, similarly, psychiatrist Richard Green, from Charing Cross Gender Identity Clinic,

states that ‘sex is nature, gender is largely nurture, but it is also nature... gender is not purely learned’. He offers this rationale:

If a female baby is exposed to a high level of testosterone hormones in-utero, when the baby is born and grows up she may like rough and tumble play. This story allows for an innate masculinity, biologically brought about.

It is important to note that, despite this knowledge having been produced through and from the fields of endocrinology, neurology and obstetrics, in television documentaries it is the psychiatrists and psychologists who relate these findings. Although the causes of being trans are seen as being *located* in the materiality of the body, the medical interchange with trans people continues to be with psychiatry and psychology – those who work in the field of the ‘mind’. It is the psychiatrists who assess and diagnose ‘Gender Dysphoria’ and ‘transsexualism’, and it is they who are asked to explain what it means to be trans on TV.

The experiments and observations carried out on the brains of dead transsexuals bear little use in deducing whether a trans person who is alive has a brain of the ‘opposite’ sex or whether they were exposed to various hormones in-utero. Instead, those trans people who wish to gain medical intervention must convince their psychiatrists through conveying their trans experiences and expressing their trans feelings. In short, being a transsexual is determined through performance, and it is the believability of those performances that deems the trans person to be authentic and ‘real’.

In *Changing Sex*, psychiatrist Richard Green tells us how he and his colleagues ‘carefully select... them [trans people] for sex reassignment’ in order to ‘prevent... suicides and salvage lives’. He states:

[In] listening to these people... how from the first years that they can remember and throughout their adult life that they have been tortured and tormented by being in the wrong body...

Green reinforces the dominant transsexual narrative in terms of having always felt this way, feeling suicidal and of course being in the wrong body. Yet, what might we make of this notion of ‘careful selection’ that Green refers to? In the same documentary, Green says, ‘You need to prove it to yourself and to us’. But what

exactly does one prove? Which performance and which narrative will swing it? And how do these performances relate to gender normativity and to understanding one's (trans)gender identity as innate? Speaking critically of the field of psychiatry, Hird asserts, 'Psychological analyses of transsexualism focus on the issue of authenticity because the discipline remains wedded to sex and gender as coherent, stable and 'real' concepts' (Hird 2002a, 578). From this, Hird states that the field of sociology is better placed to focus on this subject. She argues:

Highly stereotyped behavioural cues, long criticized by sociologists as providing social rather than individual expectations of gender, remain central in the diagnosis of children suspected of 'potential' transsexualism. At a recent Atypical Gender Identity Conference (2000), clinicians reviewed cases in which transsexualism was diagnosed as early as three years of age, based on a male child's interest in wearing nail polish, dressing in 'flowery' clothing, and preference for urinating in a sitting position. (Hird 2002a, 582)

The understanding of liking 'rough and tumble play' as an expression of 'innate masculinity', or the statement that gender is 'largely nurture, but also nature', as Green stipulates in *Changing Sex*, frames being trans as authentic. Despite the work that has taken to task such notions of innate gendered behaviour, not least in the history of feminism, specifically those feminists and queer theorists who have engaged with the natural sciences (Hird 2004; Giffney and Hird, 2008; Haraway 1988; Fausto-Sterling 2000; Weeks and Holland 1996, among others), Green (and indeed the Gender Dysphoria criteria) does not share these views or these projects.

Hird also states:

Concern with the authenticity of transsexualism reflects upon the possibility of changing sex. Society relies on sex as a stable and unchangeable indicator of sexual difference, upon which hierarchies of power then produce divisions of labour. As such, society is most familiar with arguments relating to transsexual people's supposed declarations of 'being' the 'opposite' sex to their bodies. The notion of authenticity rests upon three inter-related assumptions: that sex and gender exist; that sex and gender constitute measurable traits; and that the 'normal' population adheres to the first two assumptions. (Hird 2002a, 581)

5.7 Active Consumer versus Passive Patient

Recent research has described the demise of the 'passive patient' (who 'unquestioningly complies' with medical instructions) and the rise of the 'active consumer' (who 'shops around' and is at times critical of medicine). (Hodgetts and Chamberlain 1999, 319)

It's been a really powerful way of feeling that I'm in control of my own body, that it's like saying: my body belongs to me and I'm going to do with it as I choose... I have the right or the ability to exercise complete control over this flesh. I live here. I don't rent, I'm not borrowing it from someone. I didn't have to pay a damage deposit. It's mine. To do with it as I see fit. And if I wreck it or ruin it somehow then that's my responsibility. (Monika Treut 1980 – interview with Susan Stryker)

Part way through the documentary *A Change of Sex*, we see feisty Julia move from 'passive patient' to 'active consumer' (Hodgetts and Chamberlain 1999). Despondent with the NHS system, she decides to pay a private cosmetic surgeon for breast augmentation surgery. The surgeon, who chooses not to be pictured on screen, states: 'I think it's very important that anybody should look the way they want to look. I think they should be able to have it on the NHS.' As Julia updates her NHS psychiatrist, he responds with vehement disapproval: 'It's primarily a psychiatric matter and I take exception to you doing that... it's a medical matter. It's not a personal choice... see once again you're over stepping the mark and I don't like it one bit.' Later he states: 'We like to do it our way' and 'I warn you any attempt to manipulate it will result in my discharging you as a patient from my clinic... Your need is not paramount. It needs to be done properly and ethically.'⁸

Outside of the psychiatrist's office, Julia talks to the filmmaker about her response to how she is treated. She states: 'I've only stepped out of line when I felt that I need to achieve something [*sic*]... I've waited a long time for this and once you've accepted what you want no-one can stop you.' She also says, 'He thinks he is being ethical. I think he's being very unethical in his ways. I am not an animal and I am being treated like an animal... At 16 I can fight for my country but at 25 I can't make a decision over my own body and it is my body.'

As Julia demonstrates her agency we see her as proactive, savvy and determined. Through these acts, she challenges the medical establishment, and the

off-screen psychiatrist specifically. No doubt, Julia's NHS psychiatric treatment will have been very specific, as it was in 1979 and both medical treatment and general understandings of what it means to be trans have developed over the years. Nonetheless, Julia's character expresses a sense of autonomy.

At the TV screening of *A Change of Sex*, the group discussed the portrayal of the psychiatric encounter. Daniel said:

There was an interesting power thing going on because it's a documentary and this psychiatrist agreed to be in it, but under his own terms. He can't be seen. He wants to be shown demonstrating his power but not giving anyone the opportunity to answer back. The weird thing is that the editors had the overall power and actually portrayed him in a very bad way.

Cecil responded:

I like the fact that they give her time to talk about what she feels about the way that she's been treated on the NHS, because she's been made powerless by the system but whoever has made that documentary is empowering, giving her power back.

As the agency and autonomy of personhood are sidelined within models of determinism, feelings of choice and the exercise of free will are consequently closed down. As I have already laid out, making clear to a general public that being trans is not a choice has been productive in terms of legitimising being trans, as well as edging towards general social and cultural shifts of accepting that there are trans people in the world. The debate around choice, however, is consequently affected as trans people navigating health services become passive to the treatment of their 'medical condition'. A politics of health plays out here, where being a consumer of treatment most likely means undergoing private health care, which no doubt is costly. This alludes to an idea that to exercise choice and regain autonomy will not be available to everyone. I wish now to turn to the question of responsibility, and its role within explanations of what it means to be trans.

5.8 On Responsibility

I think the assumption still is that you can't make this decision. It's weird to me that someone should have the power [over me] to [say] what I'm going to do with my life, if I am a perfectly competent adult. (Kris in TV screening of *A Change of Sex*)

They're still tied up with the legal responsibility thing aren't they and they don't want to be sued. It's to do with that I think. (Carl in TV screening of *A Change of Sex*)

In the documentary *Changing Sex*, we see a short clip featuring travel writer Jan Morris on the Robin Day TV Show (1961). She meets with some significant hostility from Dr Leo Abse, MP, who says that she is 'arrogant to defy biology'. In response, she replies: 'But it isn't my fault.' This relationship between 'biology' and 'not being at fault' is key to my exploration of the work of causal arguments. The notion of 'defying biology' or 'going against nature' gives rise to the 'invisibilising' work of normativity and placing norms as natural and prior to *being in the world* (Butler 1991, 1993).

Morris's statement demonstrates the link between non-normativity and responsibility, in that it is not her fault that she *is the way that she is*. To return, then, to our problem around engaging with causal arguments, it is important to establish the relationship between the notion that you cannot help who you are and the notion that you have responsibility and accountability in taking actions that produce you as who you are. If transsexualism is a medical condition that one is born with, it is not so much a case of 'defying biology' – rather, it *is* biology. In this case, the transsexual bears no responsibility and so cannot be 'blamed' for her/his/their transsexual actions. Blame involves someone being criticised for a fault or wrongdoing and taking responsibility for those actions. To take responsibility for one's actions means that one has the power to determine things for one's self. A person is free to perform actions and to refrain from performing actions but they are not free if their actions have been determined for them by prior causes. The question from this then is: If a predetermined state means that responsibility for certain actions does not lie with the individual, then who is responsible for actions that are taken?

The documentary *Return to Gender* (2005) considers most fully the responsibility of the medical practitioners who treat Gender Dysphoria within both public and private health systems, as it contemplates the ‘danger of misdiagnosis’. In the previous chapter, I considered these notions of regret in terms of gender identities that fall outside being ‘male’ or ‘female’, but here I consider this discourse in the context of responsibility. The documentary features Paula Rowe and Kieren Charles, both of whom ‘regret’ changing gender and undergoing sex change surgery (Paula) and hormone therapy (both Kieren and Paula). Consequently, according to the documentary, they now desire to ‘switch back to their original gender’. For Paula, the grounds for her regret in part were due to poor treatment in the private sector. ‘The way it was done,’ Paula says, ‘was too quick’ and ‘once you get on the train you can’t get off’.

After viewing this screening, Carl, Jordan and myself subsequently began talking about the trial at the General Medical Council with private practitioner Dr Russell Reid.⁹ Jordan speculated on whether the documentary might have been made in response to the build up to this court case. From this, a discussion followed that focused on the idea of responsibility and how it involves complex negotiation between the individual and medical practice. I stated:

There was an argument about responsibility wasn’t there? That was one of the points it was trying to make. How do you know whether to have a ‘sex change’ and if you do regret it can we allocate responsibility to a misdiagnosis?

Jordan responded initially. He said:

But nobody can force you to inject hormones and have your breasts removed. So there’s a bit of me that’s saying ‘Come on here you’re adults. This is your body.’ At that point that was what you wanted to do – take responsibility... You know he [the psychiatrist] is a facilitator, he’s assuming that... you are a responsible adult making a decision that you are wanting to make. The doctor has to assume that you’re in the right mind and Paula is saying that she wishes somebody told her to think about it more. Well that’s not anyone’s fault but hers really is it?

Carl responded:

I think there is a role for people you go and see to help you with your problems, and not to assume that you've got it all worked out, but to help you and work with your thoughts and things... I do think there is a role for psychotherapy, because it is quite a difficult thing. It's a big thing to change gender and there are lots of issues to work around... I'm not saying it necessarily helps you decide, but helps you separate out issues. For example, Paula feels guilty because her mum didn't have a daughter and you can't change gender for anybody else except for yourself at the end of the day.

In the documentary, Stephen Whittle OBE, from Press for Change, a lobbying organisation campaigning for the rights of transsexual people in the UK, makes this point:

The problem with the private route way is that it does not have the sort of regulation or the regulatory frameworks that the NHS does, ensuring that the right sort of second opinions are given the right amount of time in taking decisions... there is no body to oversee those things.

The regulation for the medical treatment of trans people, which Stephen Whittle is calling for, is valid. Indeed, the treatment across the public and private healthcare of trans people is highly significant to ensure trans people are getting adequate healthcare. In the discussion, I brought up this idea of 'passive patient' verses 'active consumer':

What I find difficult is the idea of responsibility. Whittle talked about being regulated, and we need to make sure that people are making the right decision... [but] I worry that that takes autonomy away from myself. I am responsible for my own choices. And the whole thing about buying private practice, private surgery [at least] is that it gives you that customer autonomy.

Carl responded:

Well it's interesting what words you use, because if you were to say... 'I think the private and public sector should have the same safeguards', you might think differently. Because it's about protecting people, making sure that they're: (a) not ripped off [and] (b) fully informed. There's a lot of different information about NHS services and I still find people who are paying £200 so that they can get hormones and I think that should be the last resort.

Feeling constrained (to use a Butlerian term), fixed or trapped, is caught up in the sense of choice that trans people have around which actions may be taken, regaining a sense of control and of moving forward in one's life. An experience of free will regains a sense of control over our own lives. The fact that a trans person has choice over their future actions offers an agency of sorts. However, any choice offered is a constrained choice, and the degree of these constraints comes according by the degree of responsibilities shared between the various roles of medical, governmental institutes, public platforms and trans people.

The political questions that Carl points to are:

- *How might we ensure that people are making the right decisions (for themselves)?*
- *How do we ensure that people are offered all information in order to aid their decisions?*
- *What is the sociopolitical 'attitude' encountered by those involved in or affected by such decisions?*
- *How do various capitals (social, cultural, economic) affect autonomy and agency for each trans person?*
- *What is it possible to be within a framework of public responsibility (and, we might add, public spend)?*

Such discussions that occur across trans publics around health care are common and, no doubt, the presence of popular television documentaries that adopt any particular view around health care will ignite further debate. This discussion around responsibility and safeguarding is not uncommon across trans publics, not least in the TV screenings that I have evidenced. Thinking about the issues of responsibility allows the trans viewer to consider a politic of health, accountability and responsibility, including from the governing medical institutes, the states that oversee them and the individual self.

The trans publics generated through my TV screenings produced an opportunity for the trans people present to consider these perspectives and some of the ethical conundrums that are attached to medical procedures, not least within psychiatry. The TV screenings that I carried out as part of this thesis were able to

provide an opportunity to reflect, discuss and record these debates with people who otherwise would not ordinarily have come together. I turn now to consider the effects of these different views around health provision in the contexts of causalities.

5.9 Navigating Multiple Causes

I wish to draw a bit more on the TV screenings here, to consider the ways each person absorbed or took on the explanations for their own trans identity. Coming towards the end of the recorded discussion after watching *Middlesex*, I asked the group, ‘Can I just get a consensus around the biological determinism, the idea of the brain arguments [...] that when we’re born, as trans people, our genitalia and chromosomes and hormones are assigned female[/male], but we have male[/female] brains?’

Neil initially responded:

I personally agree with it, in terms of my own circumstances and of people I would label as transsexual men or woman, but I realise that there’s a spectrum. I don’t necessarily believe that all people who identify as trans have that same thing happen. I think there is a spectrum and variation in regards to that, but I would say that that is a valid argument when discussing transsexual people.

For Neil, and those who perceive themselves as transsexual, the ‘brain argument’ is entirely valid as being transsexual fits within a gender normative framework of being ‘male’ or ‘female’. As Neil also recognises a range of trans identities that are not only ‘male’ or ‘female’, he identifies a range of explanations around what may lead to there being trans people who are not transsexual. He understands that the argument is one he ‘personally agree[s] with’ as it is useful to him and how he perceives and produces himself. The explanation that he applies to himself, however, cannot necessarily apply to all trans people if he is to see trans as involving a spectrum of gender identities.

In the discussion that followed the screening of *Return to Gender*, Jordan offered other idea of a more integrative model of genetic and environmental causation. He stated:

My feeling is that, from doing this genetics course, I think that feeling about your own gender is really multi-factorial. I mean a bit like heart disease it involves a lot of different genes, it also involves a lot of environmental factors as well. So if you have a genetic make-up which might give you that and then you have a family background that pushes you in that direction as well, then you're much more likely to go that way. Whereas even if you had the genetic make-up but had very different gender role models in your family then you might be fine by not changing gender. Because just by talking to so many trans people you can see the family influences that have had something to do with them deciding to change their gender, but that's not all of it, because their brothers and sisters didn't decide to do that and they came out of the same family, so there must be some other thing going on there as well. It's not just family. You don't have whole families of transsexuals.

These thoughts prompted some self-reflections of Jordan's and Carl's own gender identity and familial upbringing. Jordan said:

Just looking at me, I had a therapy session today and so it's still fresh in my mind, and my therapist was talking about the me that he knew before I realised that I was transsexual and he thought that I was quite male even before trans had ever crossed his mind and he thought it was because of the relationship that I had with my mother and that my father was a much easier role model. And so that was why. And I agree that that was an influence in my family but that alone wouldn't have meant that I did transition, so it wasn't just that... but why am I different from my sister? It is so multi-factorial and it's like the throw of the dice. And also it's about who you meet. My passage into trans was so by mistake almost, just finding out about it and the people that I met early on had a big impact on that.

Carl responded:

I think the biological has a huge influence. Multifactorial almost gives the biological an equal element and I'm very, very doubtful about that. I had a lot of freedom when I was brought up so if anything that delayed [my transition]... I didn't have pressure to be a girl or a boy. If I had been brought up by my Dad then I would have been really rigidly forced to wear frilly knickers and I probably would have transitioned a lot earlier because I wouldn't have been able to cope with all of that. But I knew that you didn't have to be like that to be a woman, because of the way that I was brought up by my Mum and my Step-Dad who were 'hippy dippy' and

they didn't mind me calling myself Daniel. Nobody batted an eyelid. I didn't have particularly good role models [laughter].

As the trans viewers at my TV screenings explored different explanations for being trans, in some cases they drew on their own childhood and familial upbringing. For Carl, as he had so much freedom to perform all sorts of gendered acts regardless of his sex assignment at birth, he is reconciled with a biologically determined model that places him as essentially male. For Jordan, a more hybrid model suits, as he calls on aspects of both genes and his environment growing up to offer himself explanations around his own trans identity and feelings. Whilst he acknowledges environmental factors of psychological identity formations through his parents, he thinks that these factors alone would not reconcile him to being trans. For him, biological causation can fill in the gaps.

In another discussion after watching *Middlesex*, Sam stated:

I think it's relative to how you view yourself. Because to say that there is a specific male brain and a female brain is to say that it's always going to be the same each time. I think you could have a brain that somebody might consider female and then think of yourself as male and that's totally irrelevant. It's all about self-definition rather than you must think this, this or this, and when you cut up your brain it has to look like this.

Here, Sam suggests that there is no investment to be had in considering any of these arguments to have a particular truth, but rather it is about how one appropriates a certain argument (or series of arguments) in ways that become productive in the formation of one's own selfhood. Thinking about one's own transness is part of a quest to gain an intelligibility of one's self, to one's self and indeed to others (all of which are inextricably linked).

The relationship between becoming intelligible and gaining legitimacy is unique for each trans subject. It is about whichever 'bits' of knowledge work for the individual in order for them to become a 'self' or to live a liveable life. What works for one trans person may not work for another and so consequently forces us to think about how trans subjects can co-exist as collectives while such multiple and contradictory understandings for being trans sit side by side. How, though, does this

effect trans collectives when the validation of one's own sense of self works to undermine another trans person's sense of self?

The coexistence of various contradictory knowledge products is what leads me towards the next chapter, as I consider the productivity of this 'messy' world and 'rowdy' trans public. In addition, this juxtapositioning of selves that contradict one another in their self-understandings mirrors the inter-disciplinary knowledge fields found in Transgender Studies, where different explanatory paradigms cross over into various terrains. The exchanges featured here from Sam, Neil, Jordan and Carl typify the inter- and multi-disciplinary nature of this field that I wish to describe.

5.10 Conclusion

It seems clear that there is a social need to explain behaviours, acts or performances of selfhood: particularly if these behaviours go against social norms. Certainly, the documentary genre is well-placed to do some of this work. In addition, as many of the mainstream documentaries that feature trans people centre their depictions around gender reassignment surgery, it is no coincidence that these 'irreversible' and 'grave' acts are attached to discourses of biological causation.

In this chapter, I have explored how theories of causation in being trans are framed within the documentaries, specifically in relation to those interactions with the medical establishment, which now sees being trans as a condition that requires a process of assessments, selections and treatment. As gender reassignment surgery constitutes acts that are carried out and regulated by medical practitioners, the knowledge field of medicine and health must also be curious about the causes or aetiology of being trans.

Here I have paid particular attention to the various arguments and visual narratives that posit certain causes to the condition of being trans – namely the frameworks of selfhood that derive from biological determinism, authenticity and essentialism. I have described how the various performances of medical experts, edited by the documentary makers, establish understandings of what it means to be trans and how trans is caused that are specifically palatable for a mainstream audience. As trans people form part of that audience, I have pieced together through

my ethnographic encounters how these grand narratives of what it means to be trans get taken up by those subjects.

For instance, Neil believes that his own gender is biologically determined, but accepts that for others it may be different. Alternatively Carl believes that the reason we are the way we are (including our personalities) is biologically determined. Sam, on the other hand, thinks it is about using the ‘bits’ that work for each person, regardless of whether or not any of it has been scientifically proven. The subjects do not agree with each other, but each is mindful that they can continue to be amongst one another as a collective and contribute to discourse. These versions of selfhood are not coalescent, but nonetheless come together as a collective, or a series of collectives – what I am calling trans publics.

Next I will go on to consider more fully the trans public sphere of discourse produced through and from popular television documentaries. I will also explore more fully the ideas of value that are attributed to these infotainment documentaries as they play out across these trans publics. Here, I think through the various classed distinctions in discourses of popular television documentaries and discuss how these problematise trans publics and the various political agendas within them.

Notes to Chapter 5

¹ The Albany Clinic offers a range of medical treatments and counselling for transvestites and transsexuals. See: <http://www.albany-gender-clinic.com/>

² Causation around transvestism is more nuanced and multiple, but where linked to a project of legitimacy usually also draws on essentialist arguments to ‘excuse’ the feelings, behaviours and being of trans and to stipulate that doing these acts of cross-dressing is not a choice.

³ We can be reminded of the journalists articles that I have cited in Chapter 3, where journalists quite readily confess to their confusion.

⁴ To explore this area further look at the recent works of Nicholas Rose on mind-altering drugs and the pharmaceutical trade within psychiatry. Rose tells us, ‘We have become a neurochemical self’ and he tracks how, for example, ‘sadness’ is located as a malfunction of the brain and pharmaceutical drugs are consumed with a view to a promissory future ‘happier’ self. (LSE Lecture: State of Mind lectures Pleasure and Profit, 2007)

⁵ Also, in ‘Dermatoglyphic Analysis of Total Finger Ridge Count in Female Monozygotic Twins Discordant for Sexual Orientation’, Lynn S. Hall looks at prenatal development and environments which impact on the developing sexual orientation of the subject (Lynn Hall 2000). Among other conditions, the twins ‘had to meet certain criteria for establishing sexual orientation. They had to be predominantly heterosexual or predominantly homosexual based on Kinsey Scale and Klein Grid categorization’ (Hall 2000) thus producing the fixity of the orientation again through a dichotomy. In order to find sexual orientation on the body (in this case finger prints) it had to be presupposed by a prior psychological testing – i.e. that sexual orientation is something before it is found.

⁶ The 6th International Congress on Sex and Gender Diversity: Reflecting Genders. Held at the School of Law, Manchester Metropolitan University, 10th – 12th September 2004.

⁷ Although there are still some medical practitioners that continue to advocate this practice. As recently as August 2008 at the Royal Society of Medicine, Dr Kenneth Zucker – famous for his reparative therapies (for example Zucker and Bradley 1995) – was invited to speak on the topic. This was met with petitions and protests by members of the trans community from across the UK and beyond (see www.ipetitions.com/petition/zucker/signatures?page=4).

⁸ You can watch short clips of this scene on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aeBwniFDDK4>

Additionally he wants to know how much it cost and how she got that type of money. The subtext here is that if Julia is earning money from sex work, or from her drag performances, this will also be a bone of contention. Furthermore one of the problems Julia encounters is that although she may be able to afford breast surgery, Gender Reassignment Surgery (genital surgery) is significantly more expensive and being dismissed from the NHS clinic would mean that it would be financially more difficult to gain this surgical procedure.

⁹ Reid was accused of serious professional misconduct following complaints brought by four doctors from the main NHS Gender Identity Clinic at Charing Cross Hospital in West London. More specifically, the accusation of malpractice centred on a series of trans clients who regretted having gender reassignment and thus raised questions about healthcare protocol. The main crux of the debate was the question of how long it should be before a person diagnosed with Gender Identity Disorder (as it was named at the time) should go on to receive hormones and have surgical interventions. Both Carl and Jordan were involved and followed the court case closely. Many people from across trans support groups were keen to defend Reid, as he represented an alternative choice for many people who were unhappy with the NHS system. The panel determined that he could continue to practice, as ‘it would be... in the public interest’. However, Reid soon retired shortly after. See: <http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Guardian/documents/2007/05/25/reid.PDF>

There's No Such Thing as 'Bad' Publicity:
Taste Cultures and Value in Popular Documentaries
that Feature Trans People

The 'popularity' designated to the term 'popular culture' should not be reduced to the commonplace definition of this word, which denotes merely widespread enthusiasm for something. Following Stuart Hall, I understand the popularisation as a 'class-cultural formation' that encompasses the cultures of the socially subordinated, oppressed, excluded, and marginalized – in short, cultures that are 'of the people'. (Glynn 2000, 8)¹

Wherever the cultural tastes and practices of some people disgust and offend others, there can be little doubt that we are in the presence of the political. We shall see that tabloid media produce nearly as much disgust and offense as pleasure. The production of disgust, offense, and popular pleasures is of primary significance for cultural theory because it is central to the general process whereby the meanings we make of ourselves and of the social world are organized and reorganized. (Glynn 2000, 9)

Generally, I watch lots of Channel 4 [documentaries that feature trans people]... I want to see if they actually start to make them better, as in make them a bit more acceptable because *they're a bit bad most of the time*... At the same time, *I kind of enjoy the scandal of going round and talking to people afterwards*. (Sam in discussion following the screening of *A Change of Sex*; my italics)

6.1 Introducing the 'Bad' Knowledge Product

Popular television documentaries are dominant products in which people (including trans people themselves) come to know about being trans. As I have been arguing, this thesis looks to question why – despite a noted increase in the number of documentaries featuring trans people appearing across mainstream UK television over the past three decades – so little critical attention has been given to them. As I look more closely, in this chapter, at notions of the 'popular' in relation to television documentaries that feature trans people, I will pay particular attention to how

systems of value – and in particular those that are distinctly classed – become involved with and play through trans knowledge.

In addition, I wish to draw out the significance of any actions, discourse and sociability that occurs through this sort of knowledge production. In short, this chapter charts how trans publics – that is the spaces or series of platforms where some sort of action is taken and some sort of discourse occurs – come into effect, specifically in relation to popular television documentaries. Once again, I will partly draw on my ethnographic findings in order to underline how systems of taste played out amongst the groups as we set about to attribute a certain value or indeed lack of value to popular documentaries that feature trans people. I will then go on to explore some theoretical underpinnings, specifically around theories of trash culture and public spheres.

I hope to have made the point by now that I do not wish to simply reclaim or recuperate infotainment documentaries that feature trans people. Rather, my project aims to work through the productive tension between such knowledge products and their trans viewers and to offer insight into how they dynamically form and contribute to trans publics. Firstly, I wish to interrogate this on-going relationship between trans subjects and ‘low’ trashy and valueless products; to question this historical and on-going relationship between themes of sexual and gender deviance and trashy, ‘low’ tabloid products; and indeed to mark a class politics within it (Glynn 2000).

So far I have described how trans people draw on multiple and conflicting narratives and various explanatory paradigms in order to come to *know* themselves. In this chapter, I expand further on the way trans knowledge circulates and is trafficked through trans publics. As I continue to picture the forming trans subject as *between* different knowledge products, I also identify the trans subject as *amongst* and *within* a circularity of discourse and – to borrow Michael Warner’s word (2005) – ‘sociability’.

Here I position the trans person within a collective life that abounds with ideas and feelings, and experiences of belonging to something, producing a selfhood that is formed in relation to publics. I include in this public the group discussions generated at my TV screenings. These group discussions, despite being artificially constructed, echo and contribute to other discussions that are already taking place across the various circuits of on-line social networks, blogs, vlogs, community events

and support groups, as well as informal discussions amongst friends and colleagues in pubs, clubs and cafes. These discourses are also reflected in academic contexts and contribute to the inter-disciplinarity of Transgender Studies and this idea of trans knowledge that I am putting forward.

At each of my TV screenings, after watching a documentary, conversation would usually begin by offering value judgements to the product. Together, we would decide whether we thought the programme was ‘good’ or ‘bad’, or more specifically we would consider the documentaries on a spectrum of ‘badness’, given that, as Sam states at the beginning of this chapter, they are ‘a bit bad most of the time’. Acknowledgments were made by the group that ‘bad’ documentaries featuring trans people sit within a decline in standards across television documentary practice more broadly. Moreover, this ‘badness’ is no doubt read through the various contemporary strategies that construct documentaries in order to sensationalise, emote and affect any given audience for more popular gain, rather than pitch the documentary more conventionally within an informational, scientific, educational remit. Neil said, ‘I find it disturbing that [*Middlesex*] is significantly older than some of the recent ones, yet it’s so much better.’ Daniel also stated:

I have always avidly watched documentaries. Th[e] style or standard [in *Middlesex*], that’s how they used to be... 20 years ago. It wasn’t any sensationalist rubbish, where you’ve got the cameras following you around and reconstruction – stuff that they do now. You know there’s actually some intelligence behind it. It’s following some story; it’s making some argument. That’s really missing from telly in general... The most recent things I’ve seen or started to see are so... I’ve just had to turn them off. I don’t really want to watch them and I don’t like the idea that other people are watching them. I thought this was okay. That could be useful. That could teach them something.

Immediate values are formed in relation to their scientific and educational remit and the ways in which their arguments are performed through the tropes of the serious and the authoritative. For instance, at the screening of *Middlesex*, Neil said, ‘I thought it was quite good, because... not only did it show the scientific side of it, which again is quite rare, especially in the Channel 4-esque ones, but also they showed how it is in different parts of the world.’

However, deeming the knowledge product as scientific and therefore ‘good’ is not straightforward. Sam laughed and said, ‘The format reminded me of a science programme’, implying that the knowledge product had a particular ‘tackiness’.

Neil replied, ‘I think it’s better doing it that way though because the way it usually comes across is really sensationalist and this was a bit more factual and less kind of ridiculous.’

The scientific presence appeals to Neil, as other ‘sensationalist’ documentaries position trans as ‘ridiculous’. However, as I have already set out in my second chapter, whilst positioning scientific knowledge in a documentary might be integral to achieving its value and status, it is more relevant whether the scientific performances themselves were deemed ‘successful’, in terms of whether they were perceived by their audience to be persuasive or believable. For instance, the failure of *Middlesex* to achieve such believability is, for me, why Sam laughs.

Certainly, I have already stipulated that legitimising being trans comes about when the documentary is deemed ‘high’ and ‘strong’ – that is to say ‘intelligent’, ‘serious’, ‘informative’, ‘factual’ and ‘scientific’. Alternatively if the documentary is said to be ‘low’, ‘entertaining’, ‘affective’, ‘stupid’ and ‘ridiculous’, then the legitimacy of being trans itself is compromised. As we identify what makes a ‘bad’ documentary, this chapter sets out to consider what happens across trans publics when trans viewers attribute low value to a popular television documentary that features trans subjects.

6.2 That’s Entertainment! Introducing Taste Cultures

Taste classifies and it classifies the classifier. (Bourdieu 1984, 6)

Entertainment, in many ways, is the name we give to the fantasies of difference that erupt on the screen only to give way to the reproduction of sameness (Halberstam, 2005, 84)

Let me turn next to the concept and genre of entertainment. Gray argues that entertainment is under-scrutinised within academic discourse, and that there is more need for ‘pan-entertainment discussion given that it is far and away the most

successful category, drawing more production dollars and more viewers more of the time' (Gray 2008, 4).

By locating popular television documentaries within a desire to entertain and to reach more viewers, I wish to respond to how the values attributed to these documentaries by trans viewers are also caught up with the entertaining and affective aspect of this new hybrid genre. For instance, the responses of trans viewers might adopt a sort of tragic yearning where *if only* the documentaries were *more* informative and *less* entertaining then social legitimacy *might* be gained. In this way, documentaries that feature trans people nearly always *fail to be 'good'*. Consequently, trans viewers feel invalidated, dissatisfied and without legitimacy. Nonetheless, the productivity of these yearnings interests me, as they offer and inspire a necessary politic by trans people, organisations, collectives and trans publics.

Later in this chapter, I will go on to mark the pleasures and repulsions (and indeed a whole host of other emotions) within and from these 'bad' products, and to consider how the 'scandal' – as Sam was quoted as saying at the beginning of this chapter – is generated and plays out across a network of political discourse and activism within a global field of 'virtual' on line and other 'live' trans publics. To do this, it is first necessary to interrogate class distinctions in order to present a fuller picture of how trans viewers might attribute value to the knowledge products of infotainment documentaries that feature trans people.

In his chapter 'Postscript: Towards a 'Vulgar' Critique of "Pure" Critiques', Bourdieu critiques Kant's principles of taste. Bourdieu states:

[Kant's] theory of pure taste is grounded in an empirical social relation, as is shown by the opposition it makes between the agreeable (which 'does not cultivate' and is only an enjoyment – p. 165) and culture, or its allusions to the teaching and educability of taste. The antithesis between culture and bodily pleasure (or nature) is rooted in the opposition between the cultivated bourgeoisie and the people, the imaginary site of uncultivated nature, barbarously wallowing in pure enjoyment. (Bourdieu 1984, 490)

Distinguishing a television product as either 'informational' or 'entertaining' plays across a societal distinction between the 'cultivated' middle-class, bourgeois values and the 'uncultivated' mass populace. As entertainment sits in contrast to

information, it enforces other binaries such as ‘civic duty and selfish desires; importance and frivolity’ (Gray 2008, 12). This forms a direct relationship to the work/play divide of capitalist agendas (Lefebvre 1991). Whilst entertainment can be ‘good’, based on the notion of play, fun and non-labour, through a Bourdieu-ian framing, entertainment is ‘bad’ in that it is mindless, non-educative, unimportant, and a waste of time and of human potential. Where middle-class culture privileges learned tastes, the value placed on popular documentaries as ‘low’ and vulgar is done so through a middle-class systematising of taste culture. Trans and non-trans viewers alike no doubt can articulate these attributions.

As trans subjects pervade popular television documentaries (and indeed a host of other knowledge products within popular culture) I have demonstrated in this thesis how these products share a privileging of personal testimonies over data and statistics; the ‘ordinary’ person over the expert; emotional, close-up and dramatic performances over other performances that are deemed distanced, respectable, professional and objective (Gray 2008). As Bourdieu states:

Culturally legitimate bodies reflect the bourgeois aesthetic that privileges restraining, control, distance and discipline over excess, impulse, and sensuality, and certain bodies. (Bourdieu 1984, 193)

As part of this classed distinction within these television products, there is a fundamental emphasis around bodily and emotional displays. Indeed emotions are not only performed by trans subjectivities and their families and friends, appearing in the television documentaries, but are foregrounded through the filmic constructs themselves. In addition to this, these constructs look to produce or evoke a whole array of affects and emotions within the viewers. Moreover, emotions are used to work tensions of private/public boundaries that we know are distinctly classed (Warner 2005).

In his journal article ‘Publicity Traps: Television Talk Shows and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Visibility,’ Joshua Gamson formulates his findings brought about through interviews and focus groups with a cross-section of American society. His article looks at how LGBT people appear in talk shows and to what avail. His argument is threefold. Firstly he wishes to identify a class politic across LGBT visibility, specifically around discourses of assimilation and difference, and of

legitimacy and illegitimacy. He states: 'Talk shows mess up our thinking about the difficulties and delights of becoming visible' as they 'make heavier a class division' (Gamson 1998, 13).

Certainly, as trash producers recruit from disenfranchised, poor socio-economic communities, there are questions around exploitation, yet this offers a visibility to the diversity of class, race and gendered expression of LGBT people. This, Gamson claims, can 'infuriat[e] many middle-class activists' who, whilst making headway in equality and civil rights campaigns, feel undermined by 'rowdy, exhibitionist, not-great-to-look-at poor and working class guests' on talk shows.²

Gamson's second point is that factions are made where lesbian and gay people divorce themselves from the seemingly more complex, less understood, less normative acts and identities such as bisexuality and transgenderism, in order to access legitimacy more easily for themselves.³ Talk shows, on the other hand, along with other trash products, have seemingly embraced the more visually spectacular performances of sissies, queens, butches and other gender variant and gender non-conforming people.⁴ Thirdly, Gamson focuses on the concerns raised by participants (both conservative and liberal) in his focus group around the importance of distinguishing the realm of the public from the private and the allocation of social behaviours in those two distinct 'worlds'.

In his focus group, a 54-year-old African American human resources director says 'Distasteful. Distasteful... it's just very distasteful for people to get on national TV and just tell all of their business' (Gamson 1998, 27). Lynn, 34-year-old white saleswoman says, 'It's not anybody else's business. If you want to be gay, you know, stay in your house with your partner and do what you have to do. But to have to like parade down the street and show everybody, I don't like that' (Gamson 1998, 31). As Grindstaff tells us:

The taste-class nexus is, in turn, connected to the separation of public from private space.... When private matters spill out into public discourse – it is perceived as a moral breach. (Grindstaff 2002)

It is not, however, the taste cultures of the 'general public' that interest me in my project, but rather to think about the ways in which a 'trans public' performs tastes and produces trans knowledge in relation to class. I turn now to the work of

Skeggs, Thumin and Wood, 'Making Class and the Self through Televised Ethical Scenarios' research project (Skeggs *et al.* 2002). This piece of research looks to work through class identity formation and performances through Reality TV consumption. For this piece of research, and indeed mine too, it is noted that viewers are not understood simply as classed prior to their consumption of cultural items, but rather that they become classed through them. Skeggs *et al.* point out that the consumption of Reality TV plays its part in producing selves as distinctly classed through the ways in which viewers affectively and reflexively respond – that is, through a performance of taste.

6.3 A Class Distinct Viewing

In an article “‘Oh Goodness, I Am Watching Reality TV’: How Methods Make Class in Audience Research’, Skeggs *et al.* speak critically of the notion that ‘with the rise of the reflexive self, traditional categories such as class and race have declined in significance’ (Skeggs *et al.* 2002, 5-6). Their project looks to ‘research the media’s role in changing identity formations’ (Skeggs *et al.* 2002, 6) and to ‘highlight how the politics of research – of calling research subjects to account for themselves through the methods available to us – dovetails into the ways in which class is currently being reconfigured’ (Skeggs *et al.* 2002, 6).⁵ Specifically, the project explores how 40 women from both middle-class and working-class backgrounds, all living in South London, England, and covering a range of ethnic backgrounds, watch Reality TV.

In this article, participant Ann, a middle-class woman from Forest Hill, initially states that she does not watch Reality TV, but then finds that *Supernanny* is classed as such.⁶ From this, she states – and so the article is titled – ‘Oh my goodness, yes I love *Supernanny*, I even bought the book... Oh goodness I *am* watching Reality TV’. Ann reveals (or has revealed to her) the contradictory nature of consuming Reality TV. Skeggs *et al.* write: ‘She even notes the irony in her own positions as being engaged in something that she previously stressed has absolutely no value’ (Skeggs *et al.* 2002, 10). Also highlighted is the way Ann’s consumption comes, in part, from its educational remit, where she can learn and get tips about child rearing. This is evidenced through her buying the book. Individuals who view Reality TV assume a

working-class identity but the Skeggs' *et al.* article demonstrates how middle-class viewers also consume trashy television items. However, in doing so they also undergo various performances that work to reinstate their middle-class status. In reference to Ann, Skeggs *et al.* state:

Her surprise at her own viewing choice and its conversion into a cultural asset that is both told and performed (as reason and irony) enables Ann to use reflexivity as a form of cultural capital to maintain her critical distance and moral value position in relation to 'reality' television. Ann therefore offers a post-hoc justification for her viewing that is a reflexive research 'performance'. Her viewing is in fact very un-reflexive – she is surprised by the fact she has watched the programme. But it would be impossible for her to have a reflexive viewing position, for then she would have to admit that she watches that which she derides and condemns, and which, in the hierarchy of television taste cultures, appears very close to the bottom. (Skeggs *et al.* 2002, 10)

Certainly, in not realising her Reality TV consumption, Anne's position highlights the astuteness and sophistication of television producers managing the various classed performances that individual viewers carry out to and for themselves. In *Supernanny*, this is carried out through a balancing act of entertaining narratives with useful and educational titbits. What comes through within this article is a kind of self-delusional or self-deceptive aspect to the middle class consumption of Reality TV. The idea is that they (the middle class viewers) are *kidding themselves* as they find reasons or justifications (at least to tell the academic researchers) as to why they have watched these programmes. The examples that are given are that they 'slump... in front of the television', on those days 'when they had worked really hard' and/or 'want to know what was going on in popular culture' (Skeggs *et al.* 2002, 10). Instead of confessing an 'immediate pleasure' and enjoyment, the middle-class viewer 'need[s] to show not only cultural detachment, but also cultural superiority to the bad object' (Skeggs *et al.* 2002, 11).

Likewise, then, the cultural superiority of the trans viewer who watches television documentaries that feature trans people can also be understood as distinctly classed. Trans viewers might also form a sense of 'superiority to the bad object' through the class distinction that Skeggs *et al.* describe. In addition, any desire for legitimacy may too come from a classed ideology and (like Gamson's

middle-class activists) deem trashy ‘bad’ products as not welcome for the cause. It may also be that the critical distance that the trans viewer may take comes from an ability *to be critical* and reflexive – something else that Skeggs *et al.* claim is classed.

How then can we distinguish between the sort of moral performances of Ann and those of many of the trans viewers at my TV screenings? What are the various desires (and motives) of trans viewers in devaluing or invalidating the television programmes? What does *being* superior to the ‘bad’ documentary achieve for trans viewers and indeed across trans publics? How is the low value that is attributed to a documentary linked to its knowledge production and what happens when trans viewers critique and ‘trash’ infotaining documentaries?

6.4 *Stop Taking the Piss: Moral Performances across ‘Trans Publics’*

Quite simply we want them to stop taking the piss (in conversation with Paris Lees, board member of Trans Media Watch 2011)

In July 2011, as part of my work with Gendered Intelligence, I convened our Trans Community Conference, with a focus on ‘Trans in the Media – *Broadcast, Journalist, Screen and Social Media*’. Contributors included *Guardian* blogger, Juliet Jacques; Acting Head of Diversity at the BBC, Amanda Rice; *Hollyoaks* actress, Victoria Atkin;⁷ trans activist and musician, C. N. Lester; human rights lawyer David Allen as well as a host of other academics and trans activists. The conference served as a platform for debate across trans and other publics. Approximately 100 delegates gathered – many of whom were trans themselves and all from a variety of professional and academic fields, including journalism.

The conference was carried out in association with the charity Trans Media Watch and was co-convened with board member, Paris Lees. Trans Media Watch is an ‘organisation that aims to combat prejudiced, sensationalist and inaccurate depictions of transgendered people in the media’.⁸ It offers journalists who are wishing to feature trans people in their written articles or documentaries some good practice guidance around the appropriate uses of language and tackling common misconceptions and common debates that position trans people in a negative light.⁹

In a survey carried out by the organisation, it was found that, of the 256 trans people surveyed: ‘78% felt that the media portrayals they saw were either inaccurate or highly inaccurate... 55% would like to see representations of trans people more often [and] 95% of respondents felt that the media do not care what transgender people think of items like these.’ One respondent to the survey states:

What troubles me is how common it is to see almost throwaway references to trans people that are so cruel and damaging no one would consider saying it about anyone else or group [...] And what is even scarier is how commonplace and accepted it is. There are weeks when I will see several examples, especially in sitcoms or discussion programmes or films that will simply reference how freaky, disgusting or hilarious trans people can be. Sitcoms especially seem to have picked this group recently... and more and more I see cheap bad jokes made at the expense of trans people.¹⁰

There are certainly distinct genres, platforms, spheres and discourses where trans subjects are more visible. Comedic products that position trans as ridiculous form a particular politic, and consequently lead to much discourse across trans publics. Broadcast comedy is flagged up as particularly problematic, not least by Trans Media Watch, as correlations are made between such television items and rising hate crimes, and it is understood that hate crimes evidence a culture of prejudice.

Elsewhere in their report, Trans Media Watch state: ‘21% of respondents had experienced verbal abuse that they believed was associated with representations of transgender people in the media on at least one occasion’ and ‘19 respondents (8%) reported that they had received physical abuse that they believed was connected to an item or items in the media.’ Another said that colleagues laughed at and mocked transgender people and the results of gender reassignment surgery ‘due to seeing comedy shows and poor quality documentaries on TV’.¹¹

A highly contentious site of the ‘ridiculous’ has been *Little Britain*’s ‘I’m a laydee, Emily’. A sketch show running on the BBC from 2001, *Little Britain* is the creation of David Walliams and Matt Lucas.¹² With an emphasis on catchphrases as part of its comedic formula, viewers would re-enact the script or state the catchphrase within their everyday settings.¹³ This no doubt contributed to its

popularity and success, but also to harassments and discrimination. Trans Media Watch showed that:

The most common form of verbal abuse clearly associated with television referred to the 'Laydee' characters in Little Britain ('Emily Howard' and 'Florence'), with eight people reporting that this had been shouted at them in the street and one having experienced it being shouted at their partner [...] The verbal abuse reported by respondents was often described as being aggressive, with the implication that some of the respondents felt they might be in physical danger from their abusers.¹⁴

In response, and to challenge these television performances and consequential public actions, the work of lobbying, campaigning, writing letters of complaint to television networks and regulatory bodies such as Ofcom, constitute the 'moral' performances carried out by trans organisations, activists and individuals. Likewise, a host of bloggers, social networkers and other on-line activity observe and respond to such television programmes that feature trans narratives.¹⁵ Certainly, it is often the work of grass roots and voluntary sector organisations, representing minority groups, who challenge the tropes of the ridiculous. Consequently, they can be deemed humourless and 'politically correct' (Lockyer 2010). Indeed there are tensions between the various ways in which ideas of the ridiculous are linked to LGBT minorities.¹⁶

Trans viewers have their motives for critiquing and challenging such presentations, but the call to close down and do away with them altogether takes us into more shady territory. In the TV screening of *Middlesex*, Daniel stated:

I wouldn't particularly choose to watch a trans documentary but because I'm forced to watch this here tonight... [laughter] it's a challenge... But I've got this feeling that 'yes I approve of that. It's okay for other people to watch that'. I don't need to watch it or care about what it is they're talking about, as long as it's okay for other people... I should be vetting these things for people. But I can't imagine that would happen – like a censorship thing.

The vetting and censoring that Daniel remarks on is a well-rehearsed argument within the industries of media and culture, in particular in the realm of comedy. If trans collectives call to censor, there are consequential concerns with a class politics such as I have already described. For instance, this raises important

questions such as: Who censors what for whom? Whose judgments count when it is decided what is and is not appropriate to air on public television?¹⁷ My interests, then, do not lie in the debate on censorship, but rather I wish to shift this focus by considering the productivity of the debates themselves and indeed to think through the achievements of such negative value judgments. I will next consider the perverse pleasures of trans viewers in the displaying of disgust and outrage that are performed across and through trans publics.

6.5 The Benefits of Disgust

That they are embarrassing, lowly and lacking in ethics and values draws on both a viewer's own moral performance and also a compelling curiosity and excited disgust... Disgust is the paradoxical experience of enjoyment extorted by violence, an enjoyment which arouses horror. (Bourdieu, postscript to Bourdieu 1984, 488)

I have watched quite a few [documentaries that feature trans people], more than a lot of people, but I pretty much watch any documentary like that, like all the awful Channel 4 ones about really fat people [laughter]. I tend to watch things like that, so it's not just a trans thing. Sometimes I get really annoyed with them [documentaries that feature trans people], because they are really awful and it's something that I know more about. (Neil in TV screening of *Middlesex*)

To attribute value to any given object is also to consider the effect that those products have on a given subjectivity. Naming something as 'good' or 'bad' is formed through and from any sets of feelings that are attached to them. As Ahmed states:

We do not love and hate because objects are good or bad, but rather because they seem 'beneficial' or 'harmful' (Descartes 1985, 350). Whether I perceive something as beneficial or harmful clearly depends upon how I am affected by something. This dependence opens up a gap in the determination of feeling whether something is beneficial or harmful as it involves thought and evaluation, at the same time that it is 'felt' by the body. (Ahmed 2004, 5–6)

It is this combination of thinking and feeling in relation to their productivity that a trans viewer attributes value to the knowledge product. For Neil, and others

like him, consuming trash television such as popular documentaries, in particularly those featuring trans people, offers its own affective complexity – part pleasure, part outrage, part guilt, part righteousness, part superiority. Indeed, part of Neil’s irresistible consumption of the ‘awful’ documentaries does not exempt him from articulating an abhorrence and distaste for the trashy documentaries that feature trans people. On the contrary, part of the pleasure that Bordieu talks of is also found in taking the moral high ground and performing abhorrence to the ‘bad’ object. This pleasure of displeasure has its own kind of productivity, as the trans viewer’s outrage can both be articulated to oneself and across networks, collectives and trans publics, and certainly here at the TV screenings and through Neil’s testimony.

6.6 ‘I’m Worried I Might Start Laughing’

The book *Reading Little Britain* (Lockyer 2010) offers various chapters that focus on specific identity categories (disability, race, class as well as gender). The chapter ‘The Only Feminist Critic in the Village?: Figuring Gender and Sexuality in *Little Britain*’ by Deborah Finding claims that there is a cruelty to the humour adopted in *Little Britain* and argues ‘that the majority of the characters are stereotypes produced through disgust at class, sexuality, race or gender’ (Finding in Lockyer 2010, 128). She disregards any claims of irony, stating that this only justifies what is actually ‘hatred-based humour’ (Finding in Lockyer 2010, 130).

In another chapter, however, “‘I’m Anti-Little Britain, and I’m Worried I Might Start Laughing’: Audience Responses to *Little Britain*’, Brett Mills centres his thinking around findings taken from a focus group that consists of undergraduate film studies students at the University of East Anglia. It is noted that:

The recurring mismatch between the representational issues that many participants had with the programme, and the *obvious pleasures it gave others and themselves*; and as one of the participants said before viewing the chosen episode, ‘I’m anti-Little Britain, and I’m worried I might start laughing’. As a statement before viewing, this is a valuable indication of the reflexive and active approach taken by many viewers towards the activity of watching comedy. (Mills in Lockyer 2010, 149; my italics)

This example notes the contradictory nature of audience response and the complexity of taste formations and moral performances. Although infotainment documentaries can be deemed as ‘bad’, they are also seductively entertaining. To return again to Neil’s excerpt, the acknowledgement he makes that he regularly views documentaries that are ‘awful’ – in terms of their style and aesthetics, as well as their ethical and moral dubiousness – points out a vital contradiction not only in himself but across the viewership of infotainment documentaries. Part of the irresistibility of viewing infotainment documentaries is the acknowledgement that they are also somewhat *off-key*. There is a knowledge that such programs are trashy, in that they are embarrassing and even exploitative, but they continue to be highly consumable nonetheless. Gray tells us:

Freud’s seminal account of humor and jokes (1960) noted that many jokes perform a momentary act of aggression directed towards that which has power over us, whether a person, an idea, or an institution, for in that moment we free ourselves from that power. (Gray 2008, 149)

In Freud’s terms, then, the compulsion to laugh provides release because the regimes of normativity are so heavily bounded. The desire for transcendence or transgression through the act of ridiculing is achieved, albeit momentarily. Trans subjects that feature in documentaries provide this release as, through their comic and horrific forms, they both undo and redo the entrapments of gender normativity. Gray argues that such acts of ridiculing and the consequential pleasures that are produced in the viewer rupture and expose the powers of norms. These exposures that form part of our visual and popular culture offer a way in to understand the work of normativity and indeed to challenge it. Productivity comes from the tensions generated in these moments where discourse, meanings and performances cross public spheres. Gray also points to a ‘strategy of “camp” reading’ as something that can disempower. He states:

Laughter and ridicule can be two of our more powerful weapons, and the camp act of relishing television shows with, for instance, offensive caricatures, saccharine, schmaltzy morals, and poor production values, can allow us to step back from the unreal, render it as spectacle, and in doing so, look to reality through ironic reflection (see Gross 2001; Sontag 1964). The humor of camp frequently arises

from the distance between reality and the painfully constructed televisual edifice, and hence, albeit tangentially, when we appreciate a program for its camp value, we are reflecting upon the real. (Gray 2008, 129)

The power that documentary typically holds on to through its own established relation to truth and the real is compromised in moments when the documentary becomes ridiculous and trashy. These documentaries perform an unreality and an unbelievability through their own mechanisms. Indeed, Sam and Kris's laughter at the 'cheesyness' of *Middlesex* implies a camp reading, as does Neil's own tendency to watch 'awful' documentaries. This very laughter and camp reading upsets its realness as camp rests on artifice for meaning (Sontag 1992). This in turn affects any knowledge produced, as poor aesthetic and moral values stipulated in an infotainment documentary force its viewership to question and suspect any trans knowledge generated. A viewer might know something about being trans through viewing these documentaries but may also know that this knowledge is of the *messed up* kind and consequently become suspicious as to whether these products bear any particular truth or relation to the lives of trans people.

6.7 Productivity in Trans Knowledge

As Neil admits enjoying the entertaining spectacles of differently bodied and freakish television subjects, he also understands his own contradiction when he is 'annoyed' by those documentaries that feature trans subjects, as this is something he *knows* more about.¹⁸ Through this sense of annoyance, he positions himself as 'superior' in his knowledge of the subject matter that is posited in the televised product. For trans viewers, then, the pleasure in consuming popular television documentaries that feature trans subjects comes about when – despite making us feel bad because of what they are saying about trans people and the messages they are sending to the wider public – ultimately it is the documentary that is bad as that is cast as a ridiculous object.

A kind of transference of value takes place where a self-value or self-worth in being trans is attributed to the trans viewer through their accumulated trans knowledge, obtained through their being *between* a host of knowledge products,

whilst any value attributed to the documentaries (a conventionally respectable object) gets lost through their lack of trans knowledge. In short: ‘bad’ documentaries make us *feel* good. They make us feel better about ourselves because we know more about being trans.

To take this point about the productivity of ‘bad’ documentaries further, I turn to Sam’s comment at the very beginning of this chapter. Sam claims to watch documentaries about trans people in the hope that they will not be ‘bad’, but equally admits ‘enjoying the scandal of going around and talking about it afterwards’. The Oxford English Dictionary states that a scandal is ‘an action or event regarded as morally or legally wrong and causing public outrage’.¹⁹ This scandal, achieved by these infotainment documentaries that Sam refers to, is the outrage caused and performed by trans publics. The sheer ‘badness’ of the documentaries is ammunition, as they ignite hot debate throughout the various on-line communities of blogs, vlogs and social networking sites across the globe.

This scandal produces an effervescence of citizenship which – along with aforementioned righteousness and a calling for a moral order – produces a desire to form thoughts, converse and form trans knowledge. Energy and a desire to challenge the ‘bad’ knowledge product is generative in a way that a ‘good’ knowledge product simply cannot be. Anger, abhorrence and upset produce and articulate impassioned responses *against* the knowledge product. As trans publics are becoming increasingly mobilised, established and organised, it is in part the ‘bad’ objects found in the infotainment industry that work to bring coherence to this disparate group, form allegiances and produce a trans public that looks to think critically of these ‘trashy’, ‘negative’ and ‘degraded’ knowledge products. Taking action – in whatever form – gives a trans subject validity, purpose and a sense of importance; in short it gives us power. ‘A crucial dimension of power’, Eliasoph tells us, ‘is the power to create the contexts of public life itself. This is the power to create the public itself’ (Eliasoph 1998, 17). Importantly, such actions do not always take the form of writing complaints, or lobbying government, but also carve out new spaces and platforms that respond creatively and subversively to mainstream culture and general public thinking. These actions may remain within the minority and counter cultures, bearing an ethos that is anti-establishment, pro-outsider and queer. I now turn to explore these queer subversions.

6.8 Queer Subversions

At the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in 2008, I co-moderated a panel discussion around trans representation in film. Panellist Jason Barker, co-founder of Transfabulous, an arts festival for trans people in the UK, described his own experience of being invited to be the subject of a documentary.

I was asked to be in a documentary for the telly and in the script I was shown it said:
Final Scene - Jason sits on his own on a park bench and I thought ‘you know, I’ve got friends’. [laughter] (LGFF 2008)

Barker’s comment and audience response tells us of the familiarity of such lonely representations across the queer and trans public domain. Indeed, for trans viewers, the highly repetitive tropes of the serious trans person that abounds across television documentaries – namely suicidal, lonely, bullied and harassed – produces a very two-dimensional picture of what it means to be trans. Consequently, trans viewers, certainly those who are immersed in trans collectives and culture, quite quickly see these images as clichéd and out of sync with their own experiences. Likewise, we have seen the various visual tropes that emerge from mainstream documentaries taken up and subverted by some independent trans filmmakers themselves.

Gwen Haworth’s autobiographical documentary *She’s A Boy I Knew* (Haworth, US, 2008) screened at London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in 2008. In it, she pictures herself transitioning from male to female putting on make-up and combing her hair, only to later picture a sort of second transition as she negotiates her lesbian identity and a female masculinity. Here we see her putting on Dr Martens boots and boyish clothes and styling a more cropped haircut. As she revisits these tropes, she repeats them knowingly to an equally knowing audience.

Such an acknowledgement within trans subcultures reveals a kind of perverse value in the clichéd depictions and gender stereotyping that take place on television documentaries featuring trans people. Through the subversion and parodying that takes place across trans publics, these ‘in jokes’ work to bind trans collectives together through this distinction of who is ‘in the know’ and who is not.

As a third example of queer subversions, I wish to draw briefly on a filmmaking project carried out by members of the Gendered Intelligence youth group. In Spring 2012, Gendered Intelligence was approached by an organisation called BoldFace Productions. BoldFace Productions is part of CTVC, which is a major British Media company producing television, radio and new media content on social, religious, educational and ethical issues. The company trains young people from a range of backgrounds to make films about issues that they care about. Their mission is to ‘develop the life and employability skills of young people using contemporary media’.²⁰

A group of ten young people who identified themselves as trans, gender queer or were questioning their gender identity gathered to generate a three minute short film to be made in 3-D. In July 2012, through a series of facilitated workshops totalling 20 hours, the group developed ideas, generated a script, filmed and edited the film they went on to call *Young Sex-Changed and Lonely: Our Bodies Are Our Prisoners*. The workshops ensured that every participant gained hands-on experience with filmmaking equipment.

Through discussion, the group decided that they wanted their film to challenge the ways in which the media represents trans people. They also wanted to make something that would be positive and have a sense of fun. Consequently they came up with an idea to do a mockumentary where the director becomes the focus of humour while the three trans interviewees go about their normal, daily life. The mockumentary drew on many of the clichés depicted throughout this thesis, as the title of the piece implies.

The film starts with images of people doing arm curls with dumbbells, administering mascara and shaving legs. The voiceover begins: ‘One in 28 people is transsexual or transgender and of those 15.9% might be your grandmother and at least three could be you.’ The director, called Cornelius Archilles III $\frac{1}{4}$, talks to the viewer at home about their desire to ‘make a documentary about being lonely and depressed and about being confused about who you are’. We are then introduced to three trans subjects who speak in turn: ‘I am a man trapped in a woman’s body’, ‘I’ve always known I was different since I was conceived’ and ‘I was neglected by the whole family... even the goldfish... that hurt the most.’

The logic of the documentary then is broken when one of the trans subjects speaks to the director: ‘Conceived? That doesn’t even make any sense.’ A discussion

is had around how young a person is supposed to be when they realise that they are trans. The insinuation being that being trans is innate. Next we cut to the ‘goldfish’ scene. The director shouts from off screen, ‘Cry. You’re supposed to be alone.’ The trans person responds, ‘I used to be but I’ve got lots of friends now.’ The director intervenes, ‘Stop deluding yourself and cry when you see the goldfish.’ We see a hand appearing from behind the wall holding an onion to help with the crying. In the final scene the trans people meet and walk off together laughing and chatting. The director rushes on, saying, ‘You’re supposed to be lonely.’ He is distraught as his script papers fly around him and the group of trans people walk off into the distance.²¹

These examples of queer subversions make clear how ‘popular’ knowledge becomes reappropriated in trans and queer circles to achieve a critical and counter discourse to the mainstream. Such performances that subvert mainstream tropes for their own political ends are familiar displays from ‘counter-publics’ and queer happenings (Warner 2005). Here, entertainment and acts of ridiculing have potent uses that undermine and challenge normativity. These approaches differ from the lobbyists and campaigners who look to gain respectability and legitimacy through changes in the Law and recognition within the public domain. These performances consider that there is a productive potential to be achieved through laughter, which works to bind a subcultural collective and position it as outside and indeed against the mainstream. Consequently, these new and reappropriated knowledge products contribute to trans publics through affecting and influencing perceptions around what it means to be trans. This trans knowledge is superior in the sense that it is *us who really know* what it means to be trans whilst that which is posited on television is far from the truth.

6.9 Conclusion

To lobby for more serious documentaries, more adequate scientific methods and more respectable journalistic rigour in the generating of television documentaries is a project that redeems normative systems of knowledge and disciplines that historically and systemically bear significant power. To do this is to miss the point. Halberstam draws on Foucault as he calls for an end to ‘all encompassing and global

theories’ in favour of ‘something resembling a sort of autonomous and non-centralised theoretical production, or in other words a theoretical production that does not need a visa from some common regime to establish its validity’ (Halberstam 2011, 10).

Queer academics critique notions of the ‘proper’, positing it as a bourgeois project and exposing the hierarchies and distinctions of classed performances. In infotainment documentaries, the ridiculous, the shocking and the spectacular take centre stage over modes that could be described as authoritative and serious. Whilst casting a nod to scientific-based knowledge, infotainment documentaries de-privilege and undermine these scientific and medical knowledge fields, instead placing human and lived experiences at the forefront. Consequently, infotainment documentaries (as part pleasure, part political; part informative, part entertaining) are necessarily complex and contradictory as they draw on both cognitive and bodily responses to what it means to be trans.

This array of emotion produced by and in the trans viewer consequently plays a part in the generation of discourse and activism across trans publics. Trans publics, like all publics, are the ‘noisy, unruly and rowdy marketplace of complaints and demands’ that Bauman talks of *In Search of Politics* (Bauman 1999, 94). They are the spaces where people ‘engage in struggles’ (Warner 2005, 12), forming themselves as citizens who must *do* something (van Zoonen 2005, 123). Trans publics produce a culture of trans. Trans publics are political as they generate trans citizenship. This citizenship is achieved by partaking in global discourses, which work to challenge meanings across a host of knowledge products. Storey states:

Culture is a terrain on which there takes place a continual struggle over meaning(s) in which subordinate groups attempt to resist the imposition of meanings that bear the interests of dominant groups. As Tony Bennett (1996) explains, cultural studies is committed ‘to examining cultural practices from the point of view of their intrication with, and within, relations of power (307). (Storey 2009, xvi).

It is with noted irony to consider the productive trans citizen emerging from popular and trashy television documentaries. If we think that the work of the documentary genre – in its ‘harder’ programming and more conventional mode – ostensibly aims to achieve an ‘effect on attitudes, possibly leading to action’ (Ellis

and McLane 2006, 3), one might in the first instance assume this has been lost through this changing shift and hybrid formats. On the contrary, it is through the entertaining and ‘bad’ popular documentaries that the vibrancy of trans publics is generated. The Latin origin of the word ‘entertainment’ is *inter* – to be among, to gather – and *teneō* – to hold, to keep. This ‘amongness’ locates the importance of public life as framed in particular in terms of its sociability, to hold (albeit momentarily) the attention of these collectives and to ‘articulate meaning’ in these very performances of knowledge production.

I now come to the conclusion of this thesis, where I consolidate what I have achieved. I take here my final opportunity to present concisely my argument around trans knowledge and how knowing what it means to be trans is depicted visually through popular television documentary items. I also take stock of my own epistemological aims and indeed reflect on my own subject formation in relation to the knowledge product that I have produced here in this thesis.

Notes to Chapter 6

¹ Glynn 2000 footnotes Stuart Hall's 'Notes on Deconstructing "The Popular"' in *People's History and Socialist Theory* (Samuel 1981, 238).

² Gamson later adds: 'Mainstreaming activists are rightly concerned that talk shows provide a distorted image of gay life – but then again, the image, although more socially acceptable, was no less distorted when it was only white, middle class, gay movement movers and shakers'. (Gamson 1998, 19)

³ This is certainly an argument made against organisations such as Stonewall, but it can also be located within legislation such as the Civil Partnership Act 2004 and the Gender Recognition Act 2004: in the former, same sex relationships echo the norm of monogamous heterosexual marriage, and in the latter, the law allows transsexual people who feel themselves to be the 'opposite sex', to assimilate a heteronormative social existence, whilst those who challenge the binary of gender norms are not legally recognised in the same way.

⁴ See also: Glynn 2000 and Grindstaff 2002.

⁵ Skeggs et al. (2002) focus on the idea that self-reflexivity as a resource is classed, gendered and raced.

⁶ *Supernanny* is a series on Channel 4 first aired in 2004, in which nanny Jo Frost visits the homes and families of those that need help with their parenting and child rearing. Often children are out of control and *Supernanny* instils strategies such as enforcing clear boundaries, implementing discipline, using motivation charts, as well as promoting family time, all in order to 'repair' the dysfunctional home life.

⁷ *Hollyoaks* is a British soap, shown daily on Channel 4. Victoria Atkin plays Jason Costello, the first transgendered teen to appear in a British soap.

⁸ See: www.transmediawatch.org

⁹ Examples stated on their website (www.transmediawatch.org) are: trans is a burden to the taxpayer, or being trans is a lifestyle choice or some sort of delusional mental illness.

¹⁰

See:

<http://www.transmediawatch.org/Documents/How%20Transgender%20People%20Experience%20the%20Media.pdf>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² *Little Britain* began as a sketch show on Radio 4, then went onto BBC Three's digital channel in 2003, where it gathered its cult following. Owing to its high ratings the show was moved to BBC1, where a third series was also broadcast in 2005. *Little Britain* became a household name as merchandise was sold across a host of retail stores and the franchise was also exported to the USA as well as other countries.

¹³ We may also think here about how such popular cultural items form publics through this circularity of discourse and sociability. (Warner 2002)

¹⁴ The Trans Media Watch report continues: 'Others had been called Barbara (in reference to *The League of Gentlemen*), Hayley (in reference to *Coronation Street*) or Nadia (in reference to an actual trans woman who appeared on *Big Brother*). Three received abuse relating to Thomas Beatie (a trans man who became famous for his pregnancies) and associated this with negative or ill-informed representations of Mr Beatie in the media. One reported frequently being asked aggressive questions of a sexual nature which related to items about Mr Beatie.'

¹⁵ Juliet Jacque's blog post in the *New Statesman*, makes reference to *Little Britain* as well as other outcries such as Russell Howard's comedy sketch show *Good News*. In the latter, Howard riffs on a story in the news about a Thai airline that is recruiting trans people or Kathoey as airline stewards. Howard imagines a low-cost British version in which bearded men get hopelessly drunk and flash their genitalia. <http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/cultural-capital/2011/06/alternative-comedy-trans>. This is also blogged by Christine Burns at <http://blog.plain-sense.co.uk/2011/06/russell-howard-signs-of-flawed.html> and Paris Less at <http://lastofthecleanbohemians.wordpress.com/2011/06/11/bad-news-russell-howard/>

Trans Media Watch produced a press release about the incident
<http://www.transmediawatch.org/Documents/Press%20Release%2020110414.pdf>

In addition, this created heated debate across social networks such as Twitter and Facebook across trans publics.

¹⁶ Edgecomb, Sean F. *History of the Ridiculous, 1960-1987*, published in *The Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide*, Tuesday, May 1, 2007.

¹⁷ It is important to note that Trans Media Watch maintains that it does not subscribe to censorship per se, but wishes to offer guidance to journalists that are featuring trans people in their work.

¹⁸ Other current examples of Channel 4 documentaries are: *Meet the Elephant Man* 2011, Channel 4; *Relentless Growth* 2011, Channel 4, from the 'Body Shock' series; *Born to be Different* Anna Stickland 2011, Channel 4; and *Seven Dwarves* 2011.

¹⁹ Oxford English Dictionary

²⁰ See: www.boldfaceproductions.co.uk Boldface folded soon after the project and the team established their own company called Videoecho. See: <http://www.vivideocho.co.uk/>

²¹ *Young, Sex-Changed and Lonely* was originally screened in 3D as part of the BFI Visionaries - Youth in 3D event and again at the London Lesbian and Gay film festival in 2013. Following the screenings, Gendered Intelligence has been invited to screen the short at a host of different queer film festivals across the globe. These include: Barcelona International LGBTIB Festival, Side by Side Festival in St.Petersberg, Russia and MIX NYC, in New York, USA.

Conclusion:

Trans knowledge in ‘popular’ television documentaries

As a primary means by which we experience the world around us, television entertainment also holds considerable power and potential to politicise or depoliticise us. What we know of the world, what we feel needs changing or saying and how we think our various communities should operate are all informed by television, and all determine our political beliefs, values, and convictions. (Gray 2008, 14)

7.1 My Transsexual Endgame

It felt like a game changer. (C. N. Lester 2011)¹

In November 2011, as my doctoral research was beginning to draw to an end, the four-part documentary series *My Transsexual Summer* was aired on Channel 4 in the UK. For various reasons, the series was deemed by many (trans viewers and non-trans viewers alike) as significantly different to other television documentaries that had gone before it – ‘a game changer’, as C. N. Lester states. 1.5 million viewers tuned in for the first show, which was an 8.2% share of the 10pm audience.²

Indeed, the tone, approach and strategies employed in the making of the series *felt* different. Where previous documentaries that feature trans people have conventionally situated those subjects as isolated, lonely and sad individuals, *My Transsexual Summer* brought together seven trans people with big personalities to form in effect an on-screen trans collective. It exposed a trans public in the sense that trans subjects gathered, enacted and debated what it means to be trans. The programme took the form of a ‘retreat’ where the group was brought together and placed in a big luxurious house. This concept no doubt was taken from the ultimate Reality TV show *Big Brother*, and similarly from other infotaining documentary series such as the *Seven Dwarves*.³

As part of this conclusive chapter, *My Transsexual Summer* marks my own endgame as I consider what this shift in style and approach is and where it might lead

us with regards to trans knowledge. This thesis has concentrated on television documentaries from 1979 up to 2010. As the next decade of the twenty-first century gets underway, it is certain that popular items such as infotainment documentaries are not static entities, as they reflect and produce ever-shifting cultural meanings from across the popular landscape and, specifically for me here, around what it means to be trans. Indeed, popular culture moves quickly and any scholarly attention, with its rigorous and its consequentially lengthy processes, often evokes an image of the exasperated academic scurrying behind the latest trend trying to catch up. Yet interrogating any phenomenon that is considered popular is important and useful.

I take the opportunity, as part of my conclusion, to consider the knowledge that I have attained within this thesis. Certainly, any collation of television documentaries about trans people spanning some 30 years is the first of its kind. However, I also wish to take stock of where we currently are in the debates around the visibility of trans subjects in the realm of the popular, and what is productive from the knowledge obtained here. I also consider the politics and activism that such knowledge products produce and the ways these play out across trans publics. I will then capture and describe the tropes that we have become familiar with and which are repeated in *My Transsexual Summer*, but I will also consider how this new documentary most notably departs from these and consequently take us into new terrain.

In this thesis, I have demonstrated the ways in which knowing something about being trans in the face of ‘trashy’ popular TV documentaries contribute to producing trans subjects in particular ways. I have also stipulated how these forming selves play out across trans publics. In this conclusion, I wish to underline more substantially a politics of knowledge production, specifically in the highly contested and problematic realm of popular culture. To consider the politics of knowledge is to consider the relationship between knowledge and power. As Lyotard states, ‘knowledge and power are simply two sides of the same question. Who decides what knowledge is and who knows what needs to be decided’ (Lyotard 1984, 9). In this conclusion, I consolidate my project within these debates and also consider my own knowledge project, in the light of this concept of trans knowledge that I am claiming.

As part of the introductory montage of *My Transsexual Summer*, we see the various gender normative acts conveyed by many documentaries that have gone before it. Drew puts on her make-up, Lewis shaves, Karen is putting on tights and

Fox puts his prosthetic penis into his pants. (Actually, the prosthetic penis is a first.) The tempo is upbeat and the voiceover sets the scene. The documentary makers frame the 'retreat' as a 'safe haven' – a place for those seven participants to support each other.⁴

What is suggested is that the television producers are altruistically rescuing the trans subjects from being isolated and lonely by giving these seven members an opportunity that they would not ordinarily have had.⁵ The seven cast members of *My Transsexual Summer* come from a variety of backgrounds, are at different 'stages' of transition and each have different self-understandings of what it means to be trans. Sarah and Fox are described as early on in their transition and have yet to access medical intervention. Max has had chest surgery in Thailand and is administering hormone therapy, whilst Lewis, having been injecting testosterone hormones for over two years, is looking to gain chest surgery throughout the course of the series. Drew is saving up for breast augmentation and Karen undergoes Gender Reassignment Surgery in between the weekend retreats. Donna and Drew are not currently considering lower surgery, but both are administering hormones. Max and Donna speak positively about the term 'trans' and use it to describe their gender identity, whilst Sarah and Lewis describe themselves as 'just a woman' or 'just a man' respectively.

Throughout *My Transsexual Summer*, dominant narratives of the essential and gender normative 'transsexual' abound. Nonetheless, peppered throughout the series are some rather humorous running commentaries around a trans person's relationship to these said gender normative performances that 'queer' and question such norms. For instance, as the cast gets ready to go out, Donna says: 'the men can shave and the women can... shave'. Whilst Donna expresses that she is 'the best looking woman in the series', and identifies as 'straight', she also makes clear that she has no intention of having gender reassignment surgery.

In a talking heads interview Donna asks, 'Am I man? Am I a woman? I'm not going to make it easy for you.' In addition, whilst tropes such as discrimination, hate crime, suicide and surgery are repeated on *My Transsexual Summer*, these moments are brought back to the 'retreat' to share. This creates some rich and entertaining discussion between the group, which is uniquely captured on camera. Experiences such as being denied a job were not only filmed, but also become a source of ridicule

and laughter as incredulity at other people's subterranean prejudices is relayed over dinner.⁶

It may have been the idea of the producers to bring a group of trans people together as a twist to another television documentary that features trans people, but they could never have anticipated what would be discussed and how. Indeed, instead of the singular trans person talking directly to the camera, here were seven trans people who would be talking to each other, either at the dinner table with a glass of wine, on the sofa, in the bedrooms or over tea or at breakfast. For the first time, the viewer saw the types of discourse generated *between* trans people. By airing trans people talking to each other, relaying events or exchanges that had happened to them opened up an added layer to what could be known about being trans. Moreover, a noted rapport and empathy achieved across the group breathed humour and a particular lightness to the series.

For instance, as we follow Sarah's story, we learn that she is uprooting from Jersey and moving to the Brighton area. The cameras follow her into various homes where she might wish to lodge. The scene of interaction (looking at the room, engaging in conversation) is intercut with an independent interview with both Sarah and the landladies who reflect on the meeting. Sarah remarks on her increased confidence now living as a woman, whilst the landlady says: 'I must admit, to be honest I was a bit shocked. It wasn't quite what I was expecting, but she seemed a very nice person. So you shouldn't judge people.'

In a follow-up scene, we see the landlady again ask Sarah about her experiences of discrimination on the street. 'It's for me to worry about my safety,' says Sarah. Also worried for herself, her family and her property, the landlady asks 'My concern was also whether people knowing that you live with us, whether they might throw bricks through the window.'

Sarah replies: 'I think the world is a lot nicer than people give it credit for.' Later, Sarah reflects feeling a bit shocked that the landlady had said this. 'It just seems a very extreme thought,' she says.

Back at the retreat, Sarah reads out a text message from the landlady to Fox. It says: 'you seem to be such a lovely person but we are still concerned for your safety and ours because of the society we live in, after all this is the south of England and not Wales'.

Fox asks: 'What does that mean? Are people more open-minded in Wales?'

Sarah says, 'Yeah she seems to think it's the Bronx or something.'

Fox and Sarah laugh and then Fox says, 'You're not a freak. You're not a weirdo. You're just a person trying to get by.'

Sarah says, 'Just because I'm trans, why should I feel that I should only go into certain places...'

Fox interrupts: 'For your safety. Like come on! Well you can always come and kip on my floor.'

Sarah replies, 'Yeah, move on. Forget her,' and throws her phone on the bed and once again the two laugh.

Such a scene captures brilliantly the complexity of people's own prejudices and the insidious and hypocritical ways that it gets played out. What is of note, however, is the convivial interchange between Fox and Sarah that understands the landlady's behaviour as nonsensical and consequently something to ridicule.

Of course, the spectacle of surgery is not missed in *My Transsexual Summer* either, as Karen and Lewis are both depicted as particularly keen to have surgery in the near future. The production company sources a trans man in Scotland who is about to have chest surgery and Lewis goes to visit him. We see them talking and the cameras are also invited into the surgery theatre to film his operation. In addition, another man, who prefers not to have his face filmed, is invited into the retreat to talk about (and reveal) his phalloplasty to some of the cast members.⁷ The comic music and shocked faces of some of the cast are pictured before the viewers at home are also offered a full frontal close-up.

Gearing up for her Gender Reassignment Surgery, Karen talks about her surgery with the rest of the group. Max makes a joke about her returning to the house, not only with a new vagina, but also with a vajazzle. A vajazzle is a makeover with crystals to the female genitals. This term became more widely known through the reality TV show, *The Only Way Is Essex*, broadcast on ITV in 2010. Such a joke shared across its mass viewership (including trans people) brings a noted lightness to what is so often posited as the 'gravest' act.

Moreover, juxtaposing the sociocultural phenomena of Gender Reassignment Surgery with vajazzles produces its own kind of 'insider' Reality TV/ infotainment joke. This works to bring in the trans subject closer to the mass audience viewership as the cast's own 'ordinariness' is produced, demonstrating that they are *of* the

culture, both as consumers and performers, and that they bear knowledge about the various popular culture colloquialisms that are generated.

The fundamental point to make about *My Transsexual Summer*, however, is that being trans is not contextualised, pictured or framed in medicalised terms. There is no psychologist or psychiatrist featured throughout the series and consequently discourses of causality are not considered, discussed or explored. As previous documentaries have stipulated explanations of what it means to be trans by drawing on scientific understandings, *My Transsexual Summer* does none of this. As I have argued, where being trans is assumed to be deviant, this in turn demands explanation. Often, supplying these explanations is typically about gaining official recognition within authoritative disciplines of knowledge.

In *My Transsexual Summer*, discourses of being trans as a medical condition that one is born with have simply dissipated and become unimportant. The medical expert is cast to one side. Instead, it is the seven dynamic characters and large personalities of Max, Fox, Sarah, Drew, Lewis, Donna and Karen who are given centre stage, and together as a group joke around, have fun, get drunk and cause all sorts of excitement and rowdiness at a village pub with the locals. The documentary series *My Transsexual Summer* is neither a vehicle to explain nor a performance of authoritative and ‘proper’ knowledge. Consequently, the absence of these things loosens the hold on the tropes of the serious and the grave in which being trans has typically looked to achieve.

On 22 February 2012, I organised a question and answer (Q&A) event with all seven cast members of *My Transsexual Summer* at Goldsmiths College, University of London. It was the first time the group had come back together following the broadcasting of the series. Members of the audience included people from the trans community, young people and their parents, students and fans of the show. In our discussion, we touched on the topic of the motivators for being in a documentary. On the whole, this seemed to be twofold: to educate the general public about what it means to be trans; and to offer a reference point – and hopefully an inspirational one – to trans people on the verge of ‘coming out’ or who may be isolated.

Sarah said that her desires were to ‘move’ someone in the same way as she had been moved when she watched a television documentary that featured trans people. In addition, Max said another motivator was to ‘[attempt] to subvert the

gender binary that we get from TV' He stated, 'I don't know if I was entirely successful but there are a few seconds where, we, as a group were... a femme gay trans man or a slightly butch femme trans woman. Those things were very exciting for me.'

The discussion at the Q&A event did mark, nonetheless, the continuation of repeated narratives and tropes, including loneliness, sadness, discrimination, hate crime and surgery. Such repetitions form a 'meta' understanding of what it means to be trans as they are played out across mainstream settings. Drew, a white working-class young trans woman from the northern town of Wakefield, was given more airtime as she became a prime candidate to fulfil some of these themes. In the Q&A event, she stated, 'They made me look like literally a recluse. I did have a job. I thought I came across really well but I thought I was seen as a bit of a loner.'⁸

Some of the cast commented that the producers did not seem to be interested in the fact that many of them had interesting, creative and fulfilling jobs and lives. Drew reflected on what they chose to focus on and what the stories were. She stated:

With certain people, they focused on them more because there was more of a story. With Lewis, he wanted to have surgery. He raised the money and got it done. Sarah went in there with [...] no confidence. She got confidence and came out to her mum. I went in there to get confidence, look for a job and I got one...

Max interrupted:

That was what was so frustrating. I don't have a sob story. I am a three-time university graduate. I am full-time employed. I run my own transgender charity. I work really hard. And I am fighting really hard for trans people to be included in my faith community and there is no footage of me that's used outside of the house because it's just not heart-warming enough.

The stories that made the final edit were the ones that continue to fulfil the narrative structures of conflict, crisis and drama as described in the Silverstone (1984) article drawn on in Chapter 3. In this sense, little has changed. Indeed, the work of hybrid infotainment documentaries, as with other trashy programmes such as talk shows and daytime television, is to 'convince people to tell their stories on

television and then package those stories in ways that enhance their dramatic, unusual, or spectacular effect' (Grindstaff 2002, 248).

The Q&A discussion went onto focus on the process, experience and relationship with the production company Twenty Twenty and the tactics used in order to elicit the characters' performances, and what Grindstaff terms the balancing act of 'scriptedness and spontaneity' (Grindstaff 2002, 244). The cast laughed at the amount of alcohol that was freely available and how beautiful the house and surroundings were, all of which worked to make the cast feel 'special' or part of something 'special' and to free them up for their spontaneous performances.

Opinions across the cast were varied about the extent to which the relationship with the production team was, on the one hand collaborative and respectful, and on the other manipulative and exploitative. Donna stated that a lot of the footage generated came from a productive dialogue between the group as they talked to each other, but also as they engaged with the production team offering their own ideas around what to film, what to discuss and what it was 'actually like' to be trans. The production team offered some structure and had ideas as to where and what they were going to film, but Donna noted an agency of sorts around how it was going to play out and how they, as individuals, were going to continue to achieve their own goals that had made them decide to be on the programme.⁹

Max confessed that he was the most cynical and challenging member of the group, in terms of not complying to the requests and desires of the production team. He said:

Out of everyone I was probably the least co-operative for the entirety of the filming of the documentary. They would use a lot of leverage and pressure to put us into different situations... I didn't do anything that I didn't want to do... The pressure that we were put under to do it was enormous. The producer coming out that 'you're going to ruin the show'.

Max also set this pressure in the context of having built up a rather intense friendship with the producers. Max stated:

It was a very volatile relationship. There were highs when we were best friends. I remember going to one of the producer's church and meeting their family.

Max's testimony echoes much of what Grindstaff stipulates in the final chapter 'Trash, Class and Cultural Hierarchy' of her book *The Money Shot: Trash, Class, and the Making of TV Talk Shows*. Here, Grindstaff draws on Hochschild (1983), who considers the 'commodification of emotion' (Grindstaff 2002, 244). She states:

In effect, producers are buying the emotional performances of guests with their own commodified displays of sympathy and friendship, in combination with more tangible rewards like television exposure and free vacations. (Grindstaff 2002, 244)

Producers, Hochschild tells us, are required to 'speed up' building relations by 'mak[ing] personal human contact at an inhuman speed' (Hochschild 1983, 126). Max offers this testimony:

For me, I went into the process very cynical. I read lots of Chomsky beforehand. So I was ready to fight with the media [laughter]. But it was kind of like a romance where you start falling for someone... We bonded with each other and with the production company so intensely that I actually started to believe in it, even though I'd gone in [with] the most cynicism possible. I did eventually believe that they had our best interests at heart. When I watched the final product [...] I went through even more than a heartbreak because I'd fallen in love with the process against all odds.

Grindstaff considers the problematics of considering trashy daytime talk shows as exploitative. She states, 'Even when guests have no specific complaints about their experience, there is a larger question about the nature of their representation and how that representation is received by others... I still worry, for the issues involved are complicated and, to my thinking, not easily resolved.' She asks, 'is it possible to separate a concern with exploitation from middle-class notions of appropriate conduct and good taste?' (Grindstaff 2002, 247).

Certainly, representations of trans people are most commonly found in popular and often 'trashy' products – aimed at the masses, shaped and screened for the purposes to entertain and to garner ratings. These objectives on the part of the producers and broadcasters are not going to go away. Likewise, debates around the extent to which regulators step in to restrict and govern those market forces that speaks the barometer for 'giving the people what the people want' will also continue.

Specifically, these debates in relation to trans publics have become increasingly more visible in the last five years.

7.2 'Are We There Yet?'

It is certain that the mainstream media has been and continues to be under enormous scrutiny. In the UK, the Leveson Inquiry has reported on the culture and ethics of the press. Red top newspaper *News of the World* is no more. The suicide of Lucy Meadows after being hounded by the local and national press provoked the well-publicised 'shame on you' utterance by her coroner.¹⁰ The Press Complaints Commission is carrying out a set of guidance when representing trans people and their stories. Trans people are gathering more and more to protest, lobby and demonstrate against the ways in which the press report on trans people's lives. Trans Media Watch is establishing itself as a purposeful charity that engages with the media and All About Trans has become a substantial project, aiming:

to improve media professionals' understanding of trans people, encouraging them to find out more and to create more sensitive portrayals of trans people in their work.¹¹

As part of the 26th London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in 2012 at the BFI, Jason Barker and I convened a panel discussion called 'Are We There Yet?' It aimed to reflect back over the last five years, when another panel discussion that I also convened had taken place called 'Recasting Gender'.¹² Similarly, 'Are We There Yet' considered trans representations across mainstream and alternative platforms. In addition, some discussion gave attention to the ways in which trans people and artists are choosing to engage (or not) with video diaries and vlogging on YouTube and other social networking platforms. On the panel were Raphael Fox from *My Transsexual Summer*, Paris Lees from Trans Media Watch and academic and photographer Valentino Vecchietti.

In relation to working within mainstream settings, Paris Lees stated, 'It's so tricky. We [Trans Media Watch] started off being quite reactive, saying we don't like this. We want to stop this. We want to ban this. But ultimately that's not going to change anything and the only way to improve transgender representation is to engage

with the media and some of that involves doing a bit of a deal with the devil unfortunately.’

In relation and in contrast to this, another part of the discussion considered why the numbers of submissions to the London Lesbian and Gay film festival are getting fewer. Questions were asked around whether there continues to be a need and desire to have an ‘alternative’ and focused space for queer discourse in film, video and digital media. Barker asked: ‘Where are the trans producers and the trans documentary makers?’ if they are not submitting work to queer film festivals, neither are they making work that is broadcast on television.¹³ Whilst Barker felt that there was a need for queer films to be made by queers for queers and indeed to be watched in a space among fellow queers, Lee regarded this as an inward-looking exercise. She stated:

We should be getting in those mainstream spaces more often because that’s what’s really going to move the game along and a lot of trans people who struggle with their transition, what are they struggling with? It’s other people’s reactions and the way to change that is by doing more *My Transsexual Summer* stuff really [...] It’s frustrating sometimes to see people feeding the lions, but I don’t know how we can get around that. Some of the stuff that we see and we think that ‘Oh no not another trans person story,’ it can actually be quite positive in the sense that we exist and it’s creating a dialogue. It may not be the dialogue that we want but a dialogue is there.... It’s not always as bad as it looks once we deconstruct it as it were [...] Trans people are finally starting to say ‘Hello. We’re here. We exist and actually that’s not right and we’re going to start telling our own stories from now on’.

7.3 The Revolution is Being Televised!

Defining the authors of the stories that are told in popular television documentaries that feature trans people is not a straightforward matter. What makes the cut will always suit the interests of the programme makers. Nonetheless, infotainment documentaries give increasingly more airtime to the ‘ordinary’ person’s testimony over and above the expert’s. Infotainment documentaries (and indeed other tabloids cultural items, such as gossip magazines, newspapers and daytime television) are antidotes to a privileging of the scientific, political and academic knowledge fields

that platform grand universal laws and sets out arguments and values through authoritative, serious and convincing performances.

The realm of the popular is indeed far more ‘messy’ and ‘frenzied’ and consequently challenges any monolithic understanding of what it means to be trans. Infotainment documentaries operate an alternative way of knowing because their desire to entertain supersedes all else. Infotainment documentaries love emotion and drama. Whilst this project has set about marking the dubious, exploitative and trashy nature of infotainment documentaries, it has mostly been about the productivity of what these achieve.

Most significantly for me, popular television documentaries force us to consider how systems of value – and indeed class distinctions – become involved in the production of trans knowledge. Whilst any value attributed by a trans public marries a desire for legitimacy, we have to ask ourselves whether we are falling into an aspirational bourgeois trap. If we wish to get rid of these popular and more ‘trashy’ knowledge products, we must ask: *In doing this are we redeeming normative systems of knowledge disciplines that have historically deemed being trans as deviant?* This thesis has been around considering the purchase that these popular items have.

In straightforward terms, the existence of these products can offer trans people *out there* – and particularly those who are *figuring out who they are* – a point of reference that can work to influence their thinking and feelings about their trans self-hood. These knowledge products can teach and visually show a trans person – even, or especially, the most isolated individual – something about what it means to be trans. They produce trans knowledge in the emerging trans subject.

In addition, it can feel important and helpful for the trans viewer to think that – as a result of watching the television documentary – members of the general public will have some understanding of what it means to be trans, and the fact that the non-trans viewer obtains this trans knowledge will consequently grant any trans person a more liveable life: this understanding will shift behaviours towards tolerance, acceptance and intelligibility. Through these documentaries, being trans becomes an entity, something legible and ‘of the world’.

I have also laid out in this thesis that the very ‘badness’ of television documentaries that feature trans people has a particular usefulness. The various emotional responses of outrage, anger, frustration and despair experienced by trans

viewers, and the postulating and verbalising of such amongst trans publics, leads to actions of citizenship. Such actions that come out of these responses range from demonstrating on the streets, satirising and subverting them in a subcultural setting, conversations in pubs and contributions to Twitter feeds. Indeed, in the time that I have taken to write this thesis, trans publics have become ever more mobilised mainly thanks to the emergence and cultural developments of online social platforms.

Trans people, viewers, collectives, artists, performers, writers, cultural commentators and social media-ites, among others, produce a circularity of knowledge, discourse and importantly a ‘sociability’ through virtual spaces. Indeed, we might reflect on how digital media and on-line networks have significantly shifted acts of citizenship as Couldry tells us a ‘changing digital media landscape will in practice (not in the abstract) generate resources for more effective engagement with the political process’ (Couldry *et al.* 2010, xvii).

Liotard states:

A self does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before. Young or old, man or woman, rich or poor, a person is always located at ‘nodal points’ of specific communication circuits, however tiny these may be. Or better: one is always located at a post through which various kinds of messages pass. No one, not even the least privileged among us, is ever entirely powerless over the messages that traverse and position him at the post of sender, addressee or referent (Lyotard 1984, 15)

Even the most disaffected and isolated trans person watching a television documentary about being trans is playing their part in a trans public. By entering some choice words into Google, or finding their way to support groups or making other in-roads to trans collectives and trans knowledge, they are being trans in relation to a wider discourse and ‘sociability’ (Warner 2005).

Sarah Savage, who appeared in the documentary series in *My Transsexual Summer*, is a case in point. In the documentary, she is depicted as someone early in her transition. She did not know any trans people and claimed to ‘lack confidence’. At the Q&A event that I convened, she commented on her desire to influence other trans people, in the way that she too had been influenced and inspired to move forward with her trans identity. This exemplifies a particular circularity of

knowledge production between on-screen trans subjects and any trans viewership. It ‘conjures into being’ a trans public by virtue of simple addressing the trans viewer (Warner 2005).

Such an exchange is neither one that is particularly recognised nor part of the ambition of the television producers, but it is highly productive for the purposes of forming trans subjects and evolving trans knowledge. Moreover, for Savage, her contribution and involvement in the sociability of trans life did not stop here. With thousands of Twitter followers, making other television appearances as well as being booked for other charity, corporate and business promotions, she continues to work the kudos of ‘celebrity’, as well as becoming more involved in local trans activism in the Brighton and Hove area.

7.4 Gendered Intelligence

In the introduction to this thesis, I situated my argument as being between the heteronormative visual narratives featured in television documentaries and the radical queer visual narratives in the DIY film productions screened at the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals. My thesis has considered this idea of being between as part of what constitutes the trans subject. I have also discussed the sense of being between popular culture and scholarly practice, the heteronormative and the queer, the private and the public, between knowledge and subjectivity.

Over the past decade, I have spent much of my time carrying out my interests in both the academic arena of Transgender Studies and working with trans people and collectives, mainly in the fields of community arts and voluntary sector services. Consequently, I could describe my own life as sitting between the discursive texts that debate trans identities, and what can be described as ‘the real lives of trans people’. In both of these arenas, the meanings and experiences of knowledge have been central.

In 2007, I co-founded Gendered Intelligence, an arts-based company that works within young people’s settings to deliver workshops and projects that create debate about gender.¹⁴ The logic for our company name came from thinking through Howard Gardner’s notion of ‘Multiple Intelligence’, which argues that intelligence is

not linear, but rather people can be intelligent in multiple ways – he specifically argues seven different ways (Gardner 2006).

After completing our first arts-based project, ‘Sci:identity – What’s the science of sex and gender?’, it was extremely noteworthy how, on the whole, the young trans people we worked with each had an extraordinarily high level of intelligence when it came to thinking about gender.¹⁵ The 18 young participants had the opportunity to interview various ‘experts’ in the field of medical science, within sex and gender specialisms. These were Dr Andrew Levy, endocrinologist; Dr Richard Curtis, specialist of Gender Identity Disorder, and Terry Reed, co-founder of the Gender Identity Research and Education Society.

In many ways, the *need* of these young trans people for trans knowledge gave these ‘experts’ a run for their money. Furthermore, what became clear to the young people *searching* for knowledge around being trans was that, as endocrinologist Dr Andrew Levy put it, ‘there isn’t any’ and ‘no-one really knows’.¹⁶ It was not so much, then, a project that pursued the knowledge that is *out there in the field*, but a project that wished to place at its centre an application of intelligence when it came to thinking about gender and to produce its own knowledge products through such performances and scenes.

Later in the project, we delivered workshops to Year 10–13 students in secondary schools (ages 15–17). Here, some students admitted that they had ‘never thought about this kind of thing before’ and questions around what it means to be a gendered being or further what it means to challenge gender norms (specifically through a trans identity) were found to be rather complicated. In addition, this was also felt by the various teachers, youth workers and professional staff that we came across, confirming for me how unconfident they felt, not only in thinking about the lives of trans people, but also in becoming mindful of their own heterosexism and behaviours when it came to regulating other people’s gender identities as normative.

We need to query the various fields of trans knowledge and the places and products where trans subjects feature. It is also important to think through the various tools, methodologies, processes and approaches for obtaining knowledge. This means thinking through the relationship between knowledge and intelligence, and specifically the relationship between what I call trans knowledge and this idea of gendered intelligence.

Intelligence is about an aptitude; it demands application and therefore labour around processing and thinking. Intelligence can be a process of learning, but it can also be an un-learning of the norms that are so deeply embedded (Halberstam 2011; Butt 2009). Thinking is an act and a practice. This thinking takes place in and around knowledge products that together form discourse and publics. Consequently, knowledge is the fruit of thinking. Knowledge is the stuff that is generated – a product that forms as and when thinking is articulated through various medias. The circulation of knowledge, the exposure to knowledge products, and the authority with which knowledge is regulated and deemed ‘proper’, contributes to the generation of that knowledge as it comes to bear power and significance.

This thesis has also aimed to build a political picture about access to the various knowledge products, the possibilities of learning and developing an intelligence, producing knowledge and generating discourse in and around a given product. Gardner’s argument posits that everyone can become more intelligent in the different ways or types that he sets out. Similarly, anyone can be intelligent about gender. However, access to a variety of knowledge products leads to important political debates around privilege and power.

For instance, whilst most school students are not exposed to knowledge products that engage discourses of sexualities and gender identity to any large degree, many undergraduate programmes will explore these within the areas of postmodernism, poststructuralism, gender studies, queer theory and postcolonialism, among others, within many various academic degree programmes. Of course not all school students go onto higher education and not all professionals will be taught such things in their training programmes. The opportunities to become intelligent about gender through formal educational and professional development pathways are limited.

It is not within these educational and learning endeavours then, but in popular (and specifically visual) culture, where most people come to know something about being trans and to think about gender formation in more complex ways. This prompts the question: what is the *desire* to be intelligent about gender? Experiencing the world as a person who visibly appears to be outside of gender norms requires great thought. Trans people are intelligent about gender because they need to be.

7.5 The Privilege of Unintelligence

Stupidity does not allow itself to be opposed to knowledge in any simple way, nor is it the other of thought. It does not stand in the way of wisdom, for the disguise of the wise is to avow unknowing. At this time I can say only that the question of stupidity is not satisfied with the discovery of the negative limit of knowledge; it consists, rather, in the absence of a relation to knowing. (Ronell 2003, 5)

After the screening of *Middlesex* in my ethnographic study, when discussion was well underway, I noticed that Daniel had become rather quiet, so I asked him ‘What do you think, Daniel?’ He exclaimed:

Oh, I don’t know any more. I never ever think about this any more. It’s funny to be thrown back in. I don’t think about biology, or what I think I am. You just are where you’re at and I’m just aware that at one point I was a mess and didn’t know where I was at and now I’m okay, so don’t think about it. And so it’s kind of funny to be asked ‘what do you think about it?’, when I don’t think about it. So I feel detached from it from the point of view that it’s supposed to be about me. It’s no more about me than it is about anyone else.

I replied, ‘But I could ask anyone in the world if they believe in biological determinism’. Daniel said:

You could and it would be the same – most people never think about that, and I don’t think about it, so it’s not something you [can] even answer. I could probably have given you a really good answer 10 years ago, but I just don’t think about it any more. So I don’t actually know what I think about it any more... You just get to this point where it’s not... *when you’re this dumb consumer of stupid documentaries [this] is maybe where it’s at.* (My italics)

As Daniel considers himself to be the ‘dumb consumer of stupid documentaries’, we might mark stupidity as notably privileged in its relationship with normativity. To *not think* and to have *no need to think* is a privilege in the sense that your lived experience has not demanded it. Living a normative life means bearing some sort of embodied power, which is expressed through a kind of being at ease with oneself and consequently an un-knowing, or a not thinking. When a person is not struggling with a sense of self in relation to being in the world, one does not

have to think too much about *being* that self. Knowledge is framed through and because of the needs around those forming subjectivities. Likewise, subjectivities are formed out of and through any trans knowledge that is sought (and indeed can be sought). Becoming trans demands its own kind of soul-searching; a labour of thinking about oneself and one's becoming. As trans people engage in these actions they draw from a range of knowledge products that surround them. In response to Daniel, Kris stated:

I think this is really interesting, because I'm quite young here. I'm in a very different place from [Daniel] and I think about my identity a lot. That's part of my daily life and... I hope that in the future... that's not going to consume me so much as I know it does now. And personally going back to the biological thing, for me it's enough to deal with socially and day to day. I think I make a point [that] *I don't think* about what could have made me the way that I was (biology or otherwise) because there are just so many things, genetics affect so many things, but if we dissected everything we were because of genetics we'd drive ourselves crazy. Strategically after a while you have to make *peace with yourself* and there's only so much you can work on your identity based on outside factors, absorbing all this information. After a while you have to decide '*I'm not going to think about this any more, I'm okay with what I have*'. (My italics)

Kris suggests that there is a limit to what a person can take on, absorb and embody: there is a certain labour involved in thinking and it is possible to 'drive yourself crazy' (as Kris says here) in working through the 'mess' (as Daniel describes his past). This journey of self-discovery is why we draw on knowledge, which perhaps leads us to the 'peace' that Kris talks about. Knowledge produced and performed in the TV screenings demonstrated an emotional relationship to the acts of thinking and not thinking. Whilst there were pleasures in interrogating knowledge products that stipulate or reference one's own selfhood or what it means to be trans, the process of reflecting those products back onto one's self, critiquing them and judging them as 'good' or 'bad' in relation to their efficacy from the point of view one's own being trans requires a particular set of efforts.

Where there may be happiness and pride in one's own achievements in such thinking and knowledge-forming in relation to the television programme, equally there can be a sense of being overwhelmed and exhausted. There can be a final point where one accepts the knowledge that one has and consequently the self that one is. I

turn now to the thought of Henry Frankfurt in order to consolidate our discussion of this relationship between knowledge and selfhood.

7.6 Taking Ourselves Seriously

In part, this thesis has concerned itself with causality and asked questions around the ‘why’ of being trans. I have argued that such concerns are taken up by the general public in order to gain understanding around why a person would choose to undertake such ‘drastic’ and ‘shocking’ actions, in particular to undergo Gender Reassignment Surgery. I have also suggested that trans people themselves ask questions about why they feel the way that they feel in order to work through their own sense of being trapped or feeling constrained and to make sense of their own desires to be or behave in ways that deviate from social norms. Moreover, knowledge forms an integral part of this process.

In *Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting it Right*, a question Frankfurt asks is whether we cause ourselves: whether, as Aristotle argues, we produce our personality by our behaviour – voluntarily (Frankfurt 2006, 7). This book has been useful for me, as Frankfurt asserts that we cause ourselves by taking responsibility for our character production. That is, we are who we are as we navigate being between ‘the psychic raw materials with which nature and circumstance have provided us’ (Frankfurt 2006, 7) and reflecting on such. By conflating ‘nature’ and ‘circumstance’, his focus is around how we intervene with ourselves. He states:

If we are to amount to more than just biologically qualified members of a certain animal species, we cannot remain passively indifferent to these materials. Developing high order attitudes and responses to oneself is fundamental to achieving the status of a responsible person. (Frankfurt 2006, 6)

Frankfurt goes on to tell us that to be a ‘person’ is to reflect and intervene on ourselves ‘just as we come.’ These queries around selfhood are in themselves acts, which legitimise our humanness. ‘To remain wantonly unreflective’, he states, ‘is the way of nonhuman animals and of small children.’ When trans people consider their own identity formation, as we pursue knowledge of what it means to be trans, we are

reflecting on our 'psychic raw material', the 'just as we come', and we are posing questions about the condition of being trans. In Frankfurt's terms, to do this means to take one's self seriously. Frankfurt's 'seriousness' constitutes part of the human condition. It is about being reflective, investing a certain labour of thinking. It fulfils a desire *to know* and to reflect knowledge back into one's sense of self. It is the application of intelligence that shifts and shapes both knowledge and selfhood.

One of the challenges for trans people is that being trans, or the behaviours of 'transness', are not easily self sanctioned within heteronormative culture. Consequently to self-sanction being trans in a culture that deems such being as perverse and deviant means that it is also difficult to take responsibility (in Frankfurt's sense) for our behaviours, actions and performances. Frankfurt asks: 'When does a fact give us a reason for performing an action?' (Frankfurt 2006, 11). As trans subjects perform actions, we do so out of the trans knowledge that allow us to intervene and govern the 'raw psychic material' of our selves; our desires and compulsions and 'the fact that we have adopted and sanctioned [these actions]', whether they are framed with queer or heteronormative systems, 'makes them intentional and legitimate' (Frankfurt 2006, 8).

Whether this question is answered through grand universal arguments or from finding stories that are specifically meaningful to the individual, whether such knowledge products are vague or succinct, whether they come from 'proper' or 'trashy' means, a trans person can pick and choose that which is going to be most useful and meaningful in terms of taking themselves seriously, in terms of sanctioning their actions and making 'peace' with themselves. Knowledge informs the specificity of any forming self. In this way, making one's self readable, understandable and intelligible to oneself is a process of self-validation. This is achieved through drawing on an array of narratives, images, visual sequences, and utterances.

7.7 My Knowledge Project

In *Archive of Feeling*, Cvetkovich states:

Intellectual life has been one of my survival strategies, and I frequently find solace in theoretical concepts and debates that situate my own experiences in a larger context... trauma discourse has allowed me to ask about the connection between girls like me feeling bad and world historical events. (Cvetkovich 2003, 2–3)

I identify with the sentiment of Cvetkovich in connecting one's own emerging or becoming self to others and to other worldly events and performances. This offers oneself a validity and one can feel empowered by such processes. 'Who are we that we may know something?' asks Nichols (Nichols 1991, 31). Perhaps it is through a yearning to *be* someone that one quests to know at all.

However, in my thesis I ask: 'What is known so that we may become someone?' This question foregrounds a politic of knowledge. To locate trans knowledge in order to become a trans subject (and to remain always in the becoming) is to think one's own intelligibility. This is about a survival; it is to live a liveable life. Indeed it is because of my own trans life that I have pursued critical thinking and scholarly practice, or perhaps it has pursued me. Finding and connecting with the sort of scholarly writing that resonates with my sense of self, with my forming politics, around notions of self-hood and specifically in terms of gender and sexuality, has had a fundamental bearing on my existence and on being able to imagine a future for myself.

In addition, to reflect on the importance, pertinence and value of a popular culture and to adopt intelligent processes with which to articulate their significance is important to me. As Hall tells us, popular culture allows us to think in terms of the 'self' and I, like other trans people, have engaged in popular television documentaries as a useful and important 'nodal point' – to recall Lyotard's term – for knowing my self as trans.

In an interview with Les Back, Stuart Hall tells us that it is crucial to 'accept your own voice' and to 'write like you write'.¹⁷ In addition, David Scott wrote of Hall, 'thinking for Stuart is a way of changing himself'.¹⁸ Likewise, my own intellectual pursuits in this thesis have been a process of coming to terms with my

own sense of self. Consequently, my thesis has been formed entirely out of and because of who I am. My own experiences through my work at Gendered Intelligence and elsewhere link me firmly within the trans collectives, discourses and publics that are not only pertinent to this project, but also to much of my future. Also, as Hall maintains, this process of ‘thinking’ and ‘changing’ one’s self is a kind of transformation that is always sociable; a collective activity that happens in dialogue with others forming part of a larger conversation that also transforms those around him.

It is for these reasons that I have framed my thinking autoethnographically in order to think through the scene of trans subject production in the face of popular knowledge products. This methodological approach sits in contrast to an empirical scientific approach to a studied subject: this is, of course, entirely purposeful. The knowledge brought about through my project has been achieved through informal exchanges, conversations and anecdotes. It has come about through a ‘talking things through’ and trying ideas out; it has been about sharing thoughts and reflections.

My writing has been peppered with stories, anecdotes and captured moments with the aim of offering a sense of the relationship between trans knowledge and the subject formation processes of becoming a self. Hegel states that a subject is ‘actual only insofar as it is the movement of positing itself, or the mediation between a self and its development into something different’.¹⁹ The trans subject has been a useful entity for the purposes of describing a becoming self. Prosser tells us ‘I read transsexual narratives to consider how transition may be the very route to identity and bodily integrity.’ In this sense, trans knowledge is not just about being trans, but exposes the relationship between subject production and knowledge and privileges this notion of being between.

This thesis has generated the opportunity for me to work the ontological mismatch of multiple frameworks and to consider their achievements across the different knowledge disciplines, as well as public spheres and collectives. The point I have made is around how my own being trans comes about in relation to and through these various knowledge products. When I started this project, I wanted to expose and pinpoint this sense of how trans people draw on various knowledge products in order to produce their own sense of ‘selves’. It soon became clear that the interdisciplinary field of transgender studies is equally characterised as inter and

trans disciplinary – overlapping and contradicting frameworks and fields of knowledge.

In addition, writing about trashy products through scholarly practice is a difficult and strange thing to do. There is also a notable irony, where the academic stipulations are to consolidate my thinking and write with precision about a subject matter that is in itself ‘messy’, ‘muddy’ and ‘frenzied’. By positioning infotainment documentaries as ‘worthy’ of scholarly attention, I may seem to be positioning these knowledge products on a par with other more credible disciplines. But that is not my intention. Many academics have sought to query and undermine normative modes of knowledge production. Butt asks us to question the ‘serious modes’ of certain knowledge products that perform an authority that bears its own productive power (Butt 2006b, 2008). Halberstam states that we have to ‘untrain ourselves so that we can read the struggles and debates back into questions that seem settled and resolved’ (Halberstam 2011, 11). To me, this is about not simply pursuing projects that seek ‘positive’ and ‘respectable’ trans knowledge across our visual cultures. Neither is it about doing away with the negative ones. Instead, it is about thinking through the productive potentials of the ‘negative’, the ‘bad’, the ‘weak’, the ‘stupid’, the ‘failed’ and the ‘light’.

Trans people are notably hidden from everyday lives, but nonetheless constitute a staple topic for popular television documentaries. This thesis has offered an original and extensive scholarly exploration of popular UK television documentaries that feature trans subjects. This project has been carried out in order to collate and archive these important knowledge products that are familiar to and viewed by many trans and non-trans people living in the UK and beyond. It has been the purpose of my thesis to stipulate that it is through viewing these knowledge products that people (including trans people themselves) come to know about being trans.

Most significantly, this thesis has been about the productivity of these knowledge products and about the affective displays and the consequential actions played out across its forming publics. Popular television documentaries that feature trans subjects are an integral fabric of trans life, trans culture and trans publics, even – or rather especially – when they evoke provocation, antagonism and anger. These documentaries play a crucial part in shaping thoughts, focusing debates and inspiring action, including producing new counter- and subversive performances that

constitute an ever-increasing intertextual network of knowledge products across trans publics.

Notes to Chapter 7

¹ See the blog by C N Lester, a gentleman and a scholar: <http://cnlester.wordpress.com/2011/11/09/my-thoughts-on-my-transsexual-summer/>

² See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2011/nov/09/itv1-the-jury-loses-viewers>

³ Aired on Channel 4 in September 2011, this observational documentary series followed the lives of seven dwarf actors as they live together and perform in a production of ‘Snow White’

⁴ The production company’s website states:

Each of the seven is trying to live in a society that routinely misunderstands them, regularly mocks them, and all too frequently assaults them – just because they are different. For five weekends spread over four months, this group of mostly twenty-somethings will come to a retreat – a safe haven away from the pressures of the world around them – where they can support each other, understand each other, and guide one another through the next critical stages of their journey to becoming the men and women they have always wanted to be.

See: http://www.twentytwenty.tv/program/My-Transsexual-Summer_595.aspx

⁵ Again, this works to delete any ideas that there are trans communities, collectives and cultural events where trans people gather across regions. In addition the size and décor of the house and its beautiful surroundings play a part in lifting the participants out of their ‘ordinary’ and ‘working class’ lives and into a more grand and luxurious existence, even living (albeit momentarily) the life of a celebrity (Grindstaff 2002).

⁶ We can see the similarities in the depiction of such treatment with that of Julia Grant in *A Change of Sex*.

⁷ A phalloplasty is the surgical name for the construction of a penis.

⁸ The documentary series focused on her looking for work and alluded to the fact that she didn’t currently have a job, when in fact Drew was working in a nightclub.

⁹ It is worth noting here how over more recent years participating in TV programmes has also, in part, become a route to developing a career with the media or to warrant a platform to further opportunities elsewhere (for example the club scene). For the cast members of *My Transsexual Summer* they have also used the opportunity as a way to move their careers forward – with Lewis and Fox making films themselves, Drew whose purpose to go on the documentary was to get a job, and Sarah, Max and Fox have become important social mediates and very much involved in trans activism. Following the show a tour was organised where they were booked to attend schools, charities and networking events as well as appear on club scenes and other circuits to raise their profile, broadcast their message and – it could be argued – generate their emerging celebrity status. This raises interesting points around contemporary consciousness raising exercises, that – whilst different in tone (in particular an earnestness) – nevertheless bears parallels to second wave feminism practices which lauded that the ‘personal is political’.

¹⁰ Teacher and trans woman Lucy Meadows killed herself after a substantial period of being door stepped and harassed by local and national press. A particular article in the *Daily Mail* written by Richard Littlejohn caused outrage amongst trans people and the wider general public. See: <http://www.transmediawatch.org/Documents/Press%20Release%2020130528.pdf>

¹¹ <http://www.allabouttrans.org.uk/about/>

¹² Recasting Gender: Reflections on Transgender Representations was part of the 22nd London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in 2008 and featured Calpernia Adams, Jason Barker, Gwen Harworth and Kam Wai Kui.

¹³ Interestingly the documentary makers who broadcast their work on TV and were trans identified were Kristiene Clarke’s *Sexchange Shock Horror Probe* in 1989 and Pamela Jane Hunt’s *Thanks a lot Lord Ormrod* in 1996

¹⁴ See www.genderedintelligence.co.uk

¹⁵ Funded by the Wellcome Trust in 2006, undertaken by project manager Catherine McNamara from Central School of Speech and Drama, Jay Stewart as a freelance artist and documentary maker and evaluator Dr. Alison Rooke of Goldsmiths College, University of London. See www.scidentity.com for more information including the evaluation report of this four-phased project. A documentary was also produced and is screened as part of our dissemination or training opportunities at Gendered Intelligence.

¹⁶ This striking utterance formed part of the documentary made to capture this phase of the project, which was then disseminated to others who were keen to find out about young trans people's lives.

¹⁷ David Scott 'Stuart Hall's ethics', *Small Axe* 9.1 (2005), 1-16. See also: http://www.darkmatter101.org/site/2010/11/28/stuart-hall-in-conversation-with-les-back-audio/#foot_2

¹⁸ [ibid]

¹⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) translated [from the German] by A.V.Miller 1977; with analysis of the text and foreword by J.N.Findlay. Oxford: Clarendon Press p10

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Appendix 1

Filmography

1. *A Change of Sex*

Country: UK
Transmission: BBC2, UK, 1979, 1980, 1994, 1999
Producer: David Pearson
Production company: Inside Story
Duration: 200 minutes
BFI archive: <http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/series/6193>
Year: 1979–1999

A Change of Sex features the life of transsexual woman Julia Grant, who undergoes gender reassignment. The first episode was re-edited and formed the 3 programmes from 1980 series. These were re-edited into 2 episodes with a 3rd updated film in 1994. Again they were repeated and another update film was broadcast in 1999. The documentary features the life of Julia Grant as she reflects back to her upbringing as well as looks forward to the future. She has breast augmentation paid for privately and we sit in with her appointments at Charing Cross Hospital, Gender Identity Clinic. We also see her performs drag acts in nightclubs as well as carry out her job as a catering manager in a hospital.

2. *The Fight to Be Male*

Country: UK
Transmission: BBC2, UK, 1979
Writer/Producer: Edward Goldwyn
Production company: BBC Horizon
Duration: 60 minutes
BFI archive: <http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/title/123999>
Year: 1979

This documentary examines the scientific work of sex and gender within the debates around nature and nurture. It look at the work of hormones and their relationship to sexuality as well as intersexed conditions.

3. *Sex Change, Shock Horror Probe*

Country: UK
Transmission: Channel 4 1989
Producers: Kristiene Clarke, Jane Jackson
Production company: Spot On Productions

Duration: 60 minutes
BFI archive: <http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/title/439448>
Year: 1989

Shown as part of the Channel 4 slot *The Eleventh Hour*, this film looks at trans issues such as the media interest, religion, the medial world and legal issues. It features Adele Anderson of *Fascinating Aida*, Oscar winner Tilda Swinton, Mark Rees and Dr Russell Reid. It is also the first film ever about the subject of Transsexuality made by a Transgendered director/producer.

4. *Fay Presto Illusions of Grandeur*

Country: UK
Transmission: BBC 2 1994
Director: Sally George
Series Editor: Paul Watson
Production company: BBC Forty Minutes
Duration: 40 minutes
BFI archive: <http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/title/508428>
Year: 1994

This fly on the wall follows magician Fay Presto around with her magic show. The camera captures a scene in which she was verbally abused.

5. *Finishing School*

Country: UK
Transmission: Channel 4 1995
Director: Kate Jones-Davies
Production company: Raw Charm Productions
Duration: 25 minutes
BFI archive: <http://explore.bfi.org.uk/4ce2b7e420df7>
Year: 1995

Finishing School was part of the Red Light Zone – a series of late-night programming aimed at an adult audience with topics that are ‘taboo, highly sexual and potentially disturbing’ as stated by the voiceover introducing the programmes. The episode *Finishing School* forms part of the series ‘Whatever Turns You On’. *Finishing School* centres on the facilitated workshops for transvestites and transsexual women who are offered beauty and speech therapy and other tips around how to be more feminine. Laura Graham who runs the organisation, Chrysalis, delivers the workshops. DRG distributed the documentary – <http://www.drg.tv/ProgramDetails.aspx?ProgramDetail=10102>

6. Q.E.D: Sex Acts

Country: UK
Transmission: BBC 1, 28/03/1995
Producer: Richard Dale
Series Editor: Lorraine Heggessy
Production company: BBC
Duration: 30 minutes
BFI archive: <http://explore.bfi.org.uk/4ce2b7e3776d3>
Year: 1995

Sex Acts was given prime-time viewing on BBC1 as part of the popular science documentary programming series *Q.E.D.* The programme features New York based performance artist Dianne Torr as she brings her Drag King Workshop to London. In contrast a talking head shot of consultant psychiatrist, Richard Green, offers an 'expert' opinion that 'gender is not purely learned'. Torr queries the idea that 'men own this behaviour called masculine' and 'women own this behaviour called feminine', but rather there is, Torr tells us, 'just behaviour'.

7. The Decision: The Wrong Body

Country: UK
Transmission: Channel 4, 6/02/1996 and 13/02/1996
Director: Oliver Morse
Executive Producer: Oliver Morse
Production company: Windfall Films
Duration: 120 minutes
BFI archive: <http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/title/581449>;
<http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/title/581450>
Year: 1996

As part of the series *The Decision*, which looked at medical and ethical dilemmas, *The Wrong Body* follows five trans men at different points in their transition. They fly to Amsterdam and Utrecht to find out more about medical treatment.

8. The War Cries: Thanks a Bunch Lord Ormrod

· Thank you to Dianne Torr for our e-mail correspondence. Torr has been delivering these workshops since 1989 which are now called MAN FOR A DAY workshops. They have been taught across the globe including in Helsinki, Brasilia, Chicago, Glasgow, New Delhi. See: Torr, D and Bottoms, S *Sex, Drag and Male Roles: Investigating Gender as Performance* University of Michigan Press 2010; the documentary *Man for a Day* by Katarina Peters 2013; <http://dianetorr.com/>. Her workshop allows for different types of female bodied people to explore, for various reasons, their own male or masculine performances, whether it is to free up their own inhibitions and 'stuck' behaviour as 'women' or to explore their own expressions of masculinity within female bodies. These workshops exemplify gender as performance and bring to the forefront notions of learnt behaviour.

Country: UK
Transmission: Channel 4, 1996
Directors: Pamela Jane Hunt and Kate Jones-Davies
Producer: Pamela Jane Hunt
Production company: Raw Charm Productions
Duration: 30 minutes
BFI archive: <http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/title/u555532>;
<http://www.rawcharm.tv/productions.htm>
Year: 1996

Directed by trans woman Pamela Hunt, the documentary explores the consequences of the 1970 ruling by Lord Ormrod that annulled the marriage of April Ashley in the *Corbett vs Corbett* case.

9. Heart of the Matter: More Sexes Please...

Country: UK
Transmission: BBC1, 15/06/1997, 22:40–23:25
Series Editor: Anne Reeve
Duration: 45 minutes
BFI archive: <http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/title/573065>
Year: 1997

Presented by Joan Bakewell, the programme is forefronted by a short contextual piece by Stephen Whittle who offers a historical context stipulating that many people have understood themselves to be outside of the gender binary. Bakewell introduces us to the contributors who, including Stephen Whittle, are photographer Del Grace; author Dr Georgina Somerset; Vicar of Jesmond from the evangelical wing of the Church of England, Reverend David Hollow; and deputy editor of *The Spectator* Magazine, Anne McElvoy. Each of these people argues for or against the 'bipolarity of sex and natural variation'.

10. Changing Sex

Country: UK
Transmission: Channel 4, 15/01/2002, 22:00–23:35
Director/Producer: Amanda Murphy
Executive Producer: Nick Powell
Production company: Ricochet South Productions
Duration: 95 minutes
BFI archive: <http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/title/726543>
Year: 2002

Changing Sex offers a historical account, looking in particular at sex change technology, charted chronologically from the 1930s up until the present day. It features April Ashley.

11. *Make Me A Man*

Transmission: Channel 4, 31/07/2002 and 07/08/2002
Director/Producer: Katie Buchanan
Production Company: RDF Television
Series Director: Claire Patterson
Duration: 2 x 50 minutes
BFI archive: <http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/title/746122>
Year: 2002

This documentary features the story of four female-to-male transsexuals. The focus is on obtaining treatment and the effects of administering the hormone therapy testosterone. It features Stephen Whittle and Lee Gale.

12. *Make Me a Man Again*

BBC series: One Life
Transmission: BBC, 2004
Director: Todd Austin
Production company: BBC
Duration: 60 minutes
BFI archive: N/A
Year: 2004

Making an intertextual reference to the documentary that had been aired before it, *Make Me a Man Again* explores the story of millionaire Charles Kane. Born in Baghdad, Kane transitioned from male to female and seven years later transitioned back and lived as a man. After having extensive surgery on his face and electrolysis, the documentary follows Charles having his breast implants removed and a penis constructed.

13. *My Mum Is My Dad*

Country: UK
Transmission: ITV, 1/04/2004, 22:45–23:45
Director/Producer: Nicola Stockley
Duration: 60 minutes
BFI archive: <http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/title/818506>
Year: 2004

My Mum Is My Dad features two biological fathers who go on to transition and live as women. The documentary considers roles in the family and how gender is fundamental to the exchange or dynamic between family members. Examples of the impacts of transitioning on the family members are: school bullying, violent behaviour, feelings of rejection and marriage breakdown.

14. Teenage Transsexuals

Country: UK
Transmission: Channel 4, 2004
Director: Vicky Hamburger
Executive Producer: Kathy O'Neil
Production company: ZKK
Duration: 60 minutes
BFI archive: <http://explore.bfi.org.uk/4ce2b8acad478>
Year: 2004

This documentary exploring the feelings and problems encountered by a number of trans people from the ages of 8 to 18 years old.

15. Middlesex

Country: UK
Transmission: ITV, 2005
Producer: Anthony Thomas
Production company: Granada
Duration: 60 minutes
BFI archive: N/A
Year: 2005

This documentary takes an international viewpoint on the topic of trans as it features hijras and 'ladyboys' as well as trans people living in the United States and in England. Its central idea is that 'sexual diversity' is a 'natural' phenomena and biologically determined (in terms of being intersex and trans) and also that it is worldwide.

16. My Dad Diane

Country: UK
Transmission: BBC2, 2005
Producer: Frans Landsman
Production company: BBC
Duration: 60 minutes
BFI archive: N/A
Year: 2005

This documentary focuses on the transition from male to female within family life and parenthood in particular. It features lesbian identities as part of a male to female transgender journey and hence challenges categories of sexual orientation.

17. Return to Gender

Country: UK
Transmission: Channel 5, 2005
Producer/Director: Julie Pia Aberdein
Executive Producer: Cat Lewis
Production company: Unique Factuals
Duration: 60 minutes
BFI archive: <http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/title/816336>
Year: 2005

This documentary follows two transsexuals who express regret over having transitioned from male to female. They undergo operations to make them the sex assigned at birth.

18. *Why Men Wear Frocks*

Country: UK
Transmission: Channel 4, 2005
Featuring: Grayson Perry
Director: Neil Crombie
Producers: Emma Morgan and Charles Wace
Production company: Two Four Productions
Duration: 60 minutes
BFI archive: <http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/title/802323>
Year: 2005

Featuring ceramicist and Turner Prize winner Grayson Perry, this documentary explores what it feels like to be a transvestite and how the desire to cross-dress manifests itself and for what reasons. In an article for the *Telegraph* Perry states: 'If transvestism is the symptom, what are the pressures, if you see what I mean?' He thinks transvestites are 'boys who have been constricted in some way in that very narrow male role. Or the male role models they were offered they didn't like.' (See: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/3637220/Just-a-sweet-transvestite.html>)

19. *Danny: Escaping My Female Body*

Country: UK
Transmission: BBC 3, 2007
Production company: Endemol's Brighter Pictures
Duration: 60 minutes
BFI archive:
Year: 2007

As part of the Body Image series, this documentary features young trans man Danny-Lee Sharkey, who undergoes chest surgery, as well as exploring the idea of phalloplasty surgery – the construction of a penis.

20. Lucy: Teen Transsexual

Country: UK
Transmission: BBC3, 2007
Production company: Endemol's Brighter Pictures
Duration: 60 minutes
BFI archive: N/A
Year: 2007

This documentary features the story of 18-year-old Lucy Parker from the north-east of England, who lives with her mother and is close to her grandparents. The programme features video diaries of Lucy speaking directly to the camera from her bedroom. She approaches private surgeons about breast augmentation and we hear about her teenage exploits with potential boyfriends.

21. Lucy: Teen Transsexual in Thailand

Country: UK
Transmission: BBC3, 2007
Production company: Endemol's Brighter Pictures
Duration: 60 minutes
BFI archive: N/A
Year: 2007

This second part follow-up to Lucy's medical transition takes her to Thailand to have her Gender Reassignment Surgery.

22. Sex Change Soldier

Country: UK
Transmission: Channel 4, 20/03/2008
Producer: Jane Preston
Production company: IWC Media
Duration: 60 minutes
BFI archive: <http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/title/837574>
Year: 2008

This documentary features Jan Hamilton who was once a Captain in the British Army. It explores the machismo of army culture in relation to a no longer suppressed desire to live as a woman as well as the prejudice she encountered on coming out as trans.

23. Transsexual in Iran

Country: Canada, Iran, UK, USA
Transmission: BBC2, 02/2008

Producer: Tanaz Eshaghian
Duration: 74 minutes
BFI archive: N/A
Year: 2008

This documentary looks at the ways in which transsexuality is considered in Iran. Following the stories of some of the patients at a Tehran clinic, it contextualises gender reassignment within a country where gay male relationships are illegal.

24. *The Boy Who Was Born a Girl*

Country: UK
Transmission: Channel 4, 09/2009
Director: Julia Moon
Production company: Green Bay
Duration: 60 minutes
BFI archive: N/A
Year: 2009

This documentary explores the story of a trans male teenager and his mother, how he has navigated coming out as trans, and how his mother has gained an understanding for herself and come to terms with her child being trans.

Appendix 2

TV Screenings

In early 2009, as part of my autoethnographic practice, I invited a small group of trans people to attend between 1–4 screenings in my flat in North West London in the UK. These were:

Documentary: **Middlesex** (2005)

Date: Thursday, 8 January 2009

Attended: Daniel, Jordan, Neil, Kris and Sam

Documentary: **Return to Gender** (2006)

Date: Thursday, 15 January 2009

Attended: Carl and Jordan

Documentary: **A Change of Sex** (1979)

Date: Thursday, 22 January 2009

Attended: Mary, Sam, Cecil, Blue, Daniel, Carl and Kris

Documentary: **Lucy: Teen Transsexual** (2007)

Date: Thursday, 5 February 2009

Attended: Jordan and James

Blue

Blue attended the arts project in 2006 for young trans people. At the time of the screenings Blue was 23 years old. Blue identifies as gender queer and does not stipulate any preferred pronoun to be used. They had already graduated from their undergraduate degree. Blue is from Manchester and was currently living there at the time of the screenings.

Carl

Carl and I were both on the Management Committee of FTM London. Carl is of mixed heritage (part Columbian) and at the time of the screenings was in his mid-forties. Prior to transition, throughout the 1980s he was a lesbian activist and a member of Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp. He worked for a long time in the print trade but has since had a range of jobs.

Cecil

Cecil attended the first trans youth project called Sci:identity (What's the Science of Sex and Gender in 2005. He was 14 at the time. He is a white British person, and was 17 at the time

of the screenings. Born in the south-west of England, he was completing his A Levels. Cecil identified as a trans man.

Daniel

I first met Daniel at a support group for female to male or trans masculine people called FTM London. He is a white British person and at the time of the screening he was nearing his fifties. He is from the south-east of England and lives in London. Daniel had transitioned about 10 years previous to the screenings. He studied for a Fine Art degree and at the time earned his living cleaning houses.

James

James had attended youth projects at Gendered Intelligence in the past. He is a white British person. At the time of the screenings Jason was 16 years old and he had started his A' Levels in a further education college in the Milton Keynes area. He was hoping to become an actor.

Jordan

I first met Jordan at FTM London when I was Chair of the Management Committee. He is a white British person and at the time of the screenings was approaching 50 years of age. He had started his medical and social transition within the previous year of the screenings. Jordan has a science-based PhD, but at the time was not employed. He was volunteering for the campaigning organisation No2ID, which was focussed on the opposition to national ID cards and the national state database.

Kris

Kris had attended youth projects at Gendered Intelligence in the past. He was 16 years old at the time of the screening and was attending an International School in London. He is white and was born and raised in the United States. He was hoping to be offered a place at Stanford University in the United States.

Mary

Mary was the only trans woman who attended the screenings. At the time of the screening she was in her sixties and had transitioned in the 1970s. She is a trained counsellor and works in sexual health in the LGBT voluntary sector. I first met Mary at the arts festival *Transfabulous 2005*.

Neil

I first met Neil when he was 16 years old. Neil attended an arts project for young trans people in 2006, which I was involved in organising. He is a white British person from London.

At 19 years of age at the time of the screenings, Neil was studying politics as an undergraduate.

Sam

Sam had attended youth projects at Gendered Intelligence in the past. He is a white British person, and was 21 years old at the time of the screening. He was living and studying music in London, but had roots in South Wales. Sam identified as gender queer and preferred third person pronouns to be used rather than using 'he' or 'she'.

Appendix 3

Transcripts of Group Discussion

Documentary: **Middlesex** (2005)
Date: Thursday, 8 January 2009
Attended: Daniel, Jordan, Neil, Kris and Sam

Jordan: Sometimes I'm just a man, sometimes I'm a gay man, and sometimes I'm a transman. I don't know that I would describe myself as transgendered as such or genderqueer, those aren't the words I use. They kind of range between the three. Documentaries – I quite like documentaries... trans documentaries – I saw a couple of good ones, some of them before I started hormones. Gendernauts was one and the one that has got Lee Gale in it, and I thought that they were both quite good. Well, at the time I did, I haven't seen them since. Some of them really annoy me. There was one that I saw that where they'd been following some people, especially a young trans guy with his mother, and they were both terrified. This camera crew had been following them for a year and never told them that there are support groups. I was just so angry by the end of it that they had done nothing about their isolation. And I just thought that was ethically totally outrageous. Whereas that Thomas Beatty one I thought that was actually quite ok. [*unclear*]

Jay: So, you take them one by one but you watch them.

Jordan: Mostly, yeah...

Neil: Similarly to Daniel I guess, I mean I don't really particularly analyse my identity so much... I guess I feel like more that I'm identified as trans by say, I don't know, like the medical establishment by like whatever else... but I don't particularly think of myself as having a transgender identity. I'm just a guy and was born female etc. but that's as far as it goes. I don't think it makes that much of a massive impact in my life, any more particularly. With regards to documentaries, I think I've watched quite a few of them, probably more than a lot of people, but I pretty much watch any kind of documentary like that, like all the awful Channel 4 ones about really fat people or whatever else... I tend to watch things like that, I don't think it's necessarily a trans thing. Sometimes I get really annoyed with them though if they're really awful because it's something I know more about and just get a bit like 'what are you talking about?' This is awful. But I can't really think of many

I've seen that have been that great. I didn't actually get through all The Pregnant Man because like I said earlier I don't know, it got a bit boring. But yeah, I don't know, I guess I'll see how this one goes.

Sam: Identity – I'd say Genderqueer but more in terms of how I view gender rather than how I view my own, that affects how I view my own. Documentaries – generally watch lots of Channel 4 ones as well. Probably more for like, I don't know, I want to see if they actually start to make it better, as in make them a bit more acceptable because they're a bit bad most of the time. But at the same time I kind of enjoy the scandal of going round and talking to people about it afterwards. It's a bit sad really.

[After watching Middlesex, the tape recorder is set up again]

Neil: I thought it was quite good, because they covered a whole varied load of subjects. A lot of these documentaries are really one-sided, they present their viewpoint, and that's it, whereas this... not only did it show the scientific side of it, which again is quite rare, especially in the Channel 4-esque ones, but also they showed it how it is in different parts of the world. There wasn't actually that much on standard trans people, like they quite often show in other ones, but they did have Calpernia Adams at the beginning so I guess it did have that as well. I just thought it was quite good actually, compared to a lot of the ones I've seen it was pretty varied and it covered a lot of things. There were a few bits that were questionable but not too many I don't think.

Jordan: There seemed to be some story going on, it wasn't some one-dimensional thing, keep banging away at something that you already know about.

Kris: They were kind of banging... well a variety... it's kind of... it's a good message. It's surprising and nice to hear that message... that human sexuality and expression is a huge variety. That came up again and again and again. I thought it was a really broad and interesting message for a documentary to take. It felt more like a science programme.

Jordan: I thought it was really brave because that's hard to say, isn't it, that actually you hate us because you're scared of something. I thought it was really well argued, because they started off with this, and they weren't saying, like some of them do, 'we will prove to you that this is this', they actually take you on a journey that kind of helps somebody hopefully to understand. Sadly I think the people who need to watch it probably won't.

Jay: Would you say that this documentary is not aimed at you?

[Unanimously they say 'yes']

Sam: I thought the shock factor was more about the discrimination things rather than, look weird people. So I thought it had that into it.

Neil: Yeah, that shock was more like, yeah, they're not actually that weird. Not, Oh my God these people are freaks, let's watch them ...

Jay: It wasn't as sensational as some of this stuff that you can get, definitely.

Jordan: It felt like the documentary was saying it's about everybody, not just a particular group, which made it different. This could be anybody, this could be you; we're not making this about a specific group at all.

Jay: No, it was really varied wasn't it. Not even that trans orientated...

Jordan: Kind of a *[unclear]* argument though. And especially how this problem that some people have with diversity, sexual diversity, it's a real Western thing, and actually where it is in the rest of the world, we actually took it there. And actually if you go back far enough it wasn't there before.

Kris: I thought a lot of people expressed themselves very well, and I thought a lot of people who weren't the transgendered or the intersex people themselves, but the people that reacted to it, I thought they expressed it quite well and I think that would have been something other people could connect to because it seemed like it was a very honest reaction, but also that they had learned a lot.

Jay: Did anyone relate to anyone in the film? Any of the people featured?

Jordan: Well, the Indian stuff was interesting just because of the stuff that I've been exposed to in the last year, particularly about people in India. It's really good to hear them talking about themselves. And really interesting to hear the women in Thailand talking about themselves too. Especially as he was saying... coming from a culture that hasn't had any Western influence... and the people... and the diversity even there, I think people from here might

see trans women and lady boys as a single phenomenon, but even in that group of five there were very different expressions.

Jay: Yeah, that came across quite well. I think it's still packaged as a Western thing though isn't it? The whole tourism, the Westernism comes later historically.

Jordan: But they took you into each of those stories through what you know about already and then went beyond. They did it quite well, I think.

Jay: What do you think about the tone of the documentary? Did you pay attention to any of the music or the pace?

Kris: Some of it was cheesy, it was overplayed, but it could have been worse.

Sam: The whole format of it reminded me of science programmes like you said *[laughing]*...

Jay: There's a lot of imagery around science, isn't there?

Neil: I think it's sort of better doing it that way though, because the way it usually comes across is really sensationalist and this kind of made it a bit more factual and less kind of ridiculous, I guess.

Jay: What did you think about some of the arguments around why people are trans for example?

Neil: I think it's kind of good that they actually even touched upon it because a lot of the time they don't. It's just this person feels like this and it's not explained why or why it might happen.

Jay: What were the explanations?

Neil: Well, they kind of related it to intersex things didn't they? Sort of... I mean just saying about development and how you could develop ambiguously or develop one way and feel the other way. I think it's good because it makes it a bit less this person decided one day that they were a woman or a man, isn't that weird. Let's watch what they do about it but not relate to it in any kind of scientific way. So that was kind of good.

- Kris: It was definitely more biology based than I guess personal. I mean, in some ways the expression of the ladyboys, the two, the different kinds, but also it tied into causes rather than how people dealt with it.
- Jay: Did you relate to those causes? Are those causes that were there, the biological arguments are they arguments that you believe/subscribe to?
- Neil: I would say so yeah, because I get a bit irritated with the whole choice thing, and I feel like that's what a lot of people feel and how it often comes across and I think it's good that there's a documentary that is showing that that's not necessarily so.
- Jordan: I think it's also depends on what we're exposed to as well and how soon people know depends on that as well. I think it's interesting, I hadn't heard that thing about they'd looked at trans men's brains as well. I thought there'd only been research done the other way. I think you can be born a certain way but then how your life pans out affects choices too and how society looks at it. There's a whole load of layers of stuff isn't there and environmental factors as well as what happens to you when you're in the womb. Like they talked about.
- Jay: Yeah, they did a bit of both didn't they, but I think that there was a strong scientific... How about you Sam?
- Sam: I kind of see where it's coming from as far as the biology goes as well, but I think that it simplifies it a bit too much, especially the social element, the development of gender rather than how you view how your body should be. I'd separate those two things out a little bit more than what was done in that. Subconscious sex rather than gender. So I would relate that more to that and then gender to the social, but I think it's good because it's touching upon things, but I think it could kind of... well you couldn't probably fit all of that into that anyway. *Am* I making any sense?
- Neil: What do you mean by subconscious sex?
- Sam: That's just something I've heard somebody else say, but like how you view how your sex should be rather than how you view how you should be socially.
- Jay: So I, for example, as a trans man could say my sex is male

Sam: Yeah.

Jay: Because that's what I view myself as.

Sam: Yeah.

Neil: But isn't that kind of your gender as well?

Jay: [to Sam] Is it?

Sam: Depends on how you view gender.

Jordan: I get really confused about how people look at those two words.

Jay: How about you, Daniel? What did you think about the arguments around causes for trans or what makes people trans?

Daniel: I don't know really. I... didn't really think about what they were saying really. I was kind of thinking about how it came across as a documentary and how I thought... who would be watching it and what they'd think about it. I didn't think about what I thought about it. When I see documentaries like this I am more concerned about how they're affecting other people and how they're potentially viewing me in light of this documentary. And in terms of this I thought this was quite good and a lot of the things that I've seen recently have been so bad that it's completely put me off. When was this made?

Jay: We should find out shouldn't we, because it talks about '99.

Neil: I find it disturbing that this is significantly older than some of the recent ones, yet it's so much better.

Daniel: The most recent things I've seen or started to see on telly that were so... I just have to turn them off now. I don't really want to watch them and I don't like the idea that other people are watching them. I thought this was okay. That could be useful. That could teach them something.

Neil: Yeah, I felt that I could show that to someone and not having them think something really ridiculous.

Sam: There's been this whole Big Brother thing hasn't there, the reality TV thing over the last few years.

Daniel: The whole fly on the wall documentary, following somebody and trying to find out something really sensational.

Jay: It was 2005 actually, it was later than I thought.

Sam: It looks older.

Jay: So does that alienate? Do you think that's something about you that you have that distancing? Or, because it's specifically about trans it makes you... you're immediately distanced because you're thinking about a different type of person watching it rather than yourself?

Daniel: Yeah, I am. I mean, like I've said to you, I wouldn't particularly choose to watch a trans documentary, if I saw that listed in the Radio Times I would think, oh no, I'm not watching that because it might be really bad. I don't think about really why I'm thinking that, I just like switch off to it. But because I'm sort of forced to watch this here tonight... *[laughter]* it makes it kind of... it's a challenge, a personal challenge. But I've got this feeling of, yes I approve of that somehow. It's okay for other people to watch that.

Jay: So there's a representational sort of politic maybe; if it represents you in some way.

Daniel: Yes, I mean, I don't need to watch it or care about what it is they're talking about, as long as it's okay for other people.

Jay: So do you think it's important to all of us that the kinds of arguments, or what is shown on telly affects us, because that is what the general understanding will be in the world, and therefore that will have an impact on us? And so whether we watch them or not, there is an investment in wanting them to be quite good and intelligent.

Daniel: There is a feeling that really I should be vetting these things for people. *[Laughs]*

Jay: They should do that, shouldn't they?

- Daniel: But I can't imagine that would happen, it's like a censorship. As long as it's a relatively recent thing and it's relatively ok then...
- Jay: I think there's definitely an argument about dumbing down though. And also it depends on the channel really that makes it. Although Channel 4 are really bad. I think 10 years ago they were one of the best.
- Jordan: Trouble is I've heard stories secondhand about after the film about Thomas Beatty, people almost having problems at work because there were conversations going on about the programme, where people had missed the point or had just hooked on to the sensationalism of it and trans people were affected by that conversation going on, even if they weren't out or anything. And sadly I think a programme like that, a lot of the people who needed to see it wouldn't have sat all the way through. If they'd started watching it because of sensationalism, they probably wouldn't have tracked it all the way through. And that's a real problem isn't it. The people who need to see it, you would have to tie them down to watch it.
- Jay: Is it also the documentary aspect? Like you said it's quite scientific, or it has that kind of... the fact that it is a bit more scientific and less sensational than as a mainstream audience you are less likely to watch it, you would get tired quite quickly. So you almost need to have that entertainment aspect of it.
- Daniel: It's a really hard choice that programme makers have to make, isn't it? And also people who write newspaper articles. I have always avidly watched documentaries. That style or standard, that's how they used to be.... 20 years ago. If you watched a documentary it was like that. It wasn't any sensationalist rubbish, where you've got the cameras around and reconstruction and all that kind of stuff that they do now. You know there's actually some intelligence behind it, it's following some story, it's making some argument. That's really missing from a lot of telly in general.
- Jay: It was quite serious in tone, wasn't it? And again the kind of science aspect, traditional documentary...
- Daniel: The picture of the narrator, it seemed to be set at a certain level didn't it?
- Jay: Do you think some of it though was a bit scary and all a bit... there was quite a lot about violence in there.

Daniel: The argument they were actually taking us on, they started off with a question, why does this happen to trans people? Why are men especially so scared of trans women, what is that? And then they took us on a journey to try and explain why there are trans people and then why... that it is people's fear of non-normativity in themselves.

Neil: I think it was a bit weird how that guy, I don't know what his name was, he was some professor or something, he suddenly got off on a bit of a tangent about having a sexual experience with a gym teacher or something, and I lost him a bit there, I was like, what are you talking about?!

Jay: Quite an eccentric.

Neil: Yeah. Because they weren't really talking about sexuality that much and he seemed to go off on a bit of a tangent and I didn't really know how that was relevant to anything they were talking about.

Daniel: Well, he seemed slightly confused about transgendered people...

Jay: Yeah, he put trans in with sexual orientation didn't he.

Sam: Yeah, that happened quite a lot throughout all of it I thought. Referring to human sexual diversity and like trans underneath that, that kind of thing.

Neil: Well, I guess it is kind of sexually diverse isn't it?

Kris: The fact is, if they were using biology as their underlying argument then transgendered is a sexual variety if there's a genetic difference.

Neil: But sexual diversity in terms of biological sex, not as in sexuality.

Kris: OK. Well, I don't know, because some people belong in that category.

Davis: And that's where the confusion is.

Neil: Yeah, I know, so it was hard to know whether they were referencing that or sexuality.

Sam: I think something like that needs to be cleared up when the general audience is going to be someone like sensationalist documentary watcher

that might not pick up on it and probably won't have the conversation about it afterwards...

Kris: I mean different experts and different professors used different, and in some cases very different assumptions I think. And so that to me seemed kind of like... I mean, it was interesting but it was also rather inconsistent. Like... just the really wide interpretation by people, I think it maybe undermined some of what they were saying just because...

Jay: It's a bit higgledy piggledy and hotch potch.

Kris: Yeah.

Jordan: We have to remember as well that we're watching this as experts, aren't we? And if it was somebody that actually has no knowledge of trans at all people might find that difference in language use that you picked up on Kris, very confusing. But that's hard isn't it, because people do use different language.

Jay: I think it's the difference between making a documentary and writing an essay as well, because you do use different voices to back up your argument, whereas like, in documentary you almost have to disappear as the author of the piece. And yet that creates that inconsistency in a way.

Jordan: Because you've still chosen, haven't you. And it's been you that's briefed everybody.

Daniel: That was a bit strange to me that they kept jumping back to these professors sitting in these nice offices, trying to underline its seriousness of argument. It felt a bit like an essay somehow. They kept quoting people, you know.

Kris: The History Channel, you know like they go...

Jay: What does it do asking experts what they think?

Daniel: It must be right because the expert said it.

Jordan: Non-trans experts as well.

Neil: I think it's quite beneficial sometimes if they're not trans, these experts because if it's a trans person saying it it's like 'well they would say that, wouldn't they?' If it's for someone who doesn't know what's going on, I think it's better that it's not a trans person saying it sometimes. It gives it more legitimacy. You know it's like the crazy person spouting craziness, no it's a legitimate professional saying it, therefore it must be right.

Jay: And is that useful for us? Well, you're saying it is basically.

Neil: Well, I think, just generally like. Like, for instance, if I talk to someone and they don't know that I'm trans, if I talk to them about trans things they will listen to me a lot more than they would if they knew I was trans and were like then, well you would say that wouldn't you, kind of thing. I just think, just generally it's a bit more beneficial.

Jay: Does everyone agree?

Kris: I think that it really maybe shouldn't be that way but it is.

Sam: I think that sometimes though it does kind of... I don't know, if people think that you're making assumptions about stuff then it might help to back it up to say that... Ugh, I'm not really making any sense, come back to me!

Daniel: Yeah, there's that thing that Jameson Green does in his book isn't there, where he describes himself talking to a group of people and doesn't come out to them at all until they already accepted that he's a man talking about something else.

Jay: Does anyone feel... what was the sort of emotional relationship with the documentary? Were you feeling quite cold throughout or did anything make you particularly sad or angry? What was the emotional stuff?

Neil: I got really angry at the intersex thing but I always get angry about that. You know, the genital fixing, and mutilation basically that they do. And also it annoyed me slightly about how in the documentary they portrayed it as though it was a thing of the past. Well, it's generally not. It's still not a thing of the past really in a lot of cases. It's not just something that happened in the 1970s, it happened and still happens. That was the mean thing I think that evoked emotion in me.

Jordan: And brave little Noah as well, that just... wow. That kid... to have to survive that.

Neil: I thought his parents were really good though. You know, considering where they were from and the kind of general area.

Daniel: I didn't feel any emotional connection to it at all. I kind of felt like... It didn't feel like a trans film to me at all. I didn't sort of relate to it as that. It didn't feel like it had anything particular to do with me.

Jordan: Is that because it was mostly trans women?

Daniel: No. I didn't even see it as a film about trans women.

Jay: In many ways it wasn't, was it?

Daniel: It wasn't to me. It was a film about everyone. I just as saw it potentially everybody.

Jay: But you have said that the understandings of sex and gender and sexuality that are put in that film are important to you because somehow they are something to do with you.

Daniel: Yeah. *[laughs]*

Jay: So there was a bit of an acknowledgement.

Daniel: Yeah. So that was okay. If it wasn't okay I'd have something to say about it!

Jay: So there might be other films that you might get a bit more emotional about?

Daniel: Yeah.

Jay: So your emotion, I'm quite getting in to this, your emotional sort of attitude is about, is always about what it represents and whether it represents something that you agree with or disagree with?

Daniel: Not particularly agree or disagree, but just approve of.

Jay: Approve, yeah.

Daniel: Yeah, approval is uppermost in my mind.

Jay: Yeah, that's totally...

Jordan: Whereas I think I feel emotionally like I'm empathising all the time... very emotional.

Jay: What were your emotional highlights and lowlights?

Jordan: Well, like I said I think the intersex scene really bothers me and Noah. But then the Hijra...

Jay: Did you think it was all quite depressing?

Jordan: Not depressing...

Jay: Hard?

Neil: I got a bit angry about the Indian thing as well. Because it's really like, it's a bit like misogynistic the way they describe it's all about men, and what men do, and the women seem to kind of just be these things that they just kind of marry. Also the way that there's just no room for just actual homosexuality or variance really, and all the people who are anything different just kind of are shunned and they end up living in kind of those communities with... I've forgotten what they're called? You know, the trans women?

Jay: The Hijras.

Neil: Yeah, so it seems a bit... I don't know. It was a bit annoying.

Daniel: And that goes from probably mid-Mediterranean, all the way, til you get to Thailand, all the way through.

Jay: Patriarchal culture. Did anyone learn anything that they didn't know before? What were they?

Daniel: The Dutch brain thing. I hadn't realised that they'd looked at trans men as well.

Jay: Or was it all quite familiar? Did it feel like you already knew lots of it?

Daniel: I'd never heard ladyboys talking about themselves before.

Neil: Apparently all you need is someone that's pretty like a girl and horny like a boy. That's all you need according to that man. So I'll take that on board!

Jay: That was quite funny, wasn't it.

Kris: That kind of struck for me like a weird note in that. That was the only kind of like, this is... [*overlapping conversation*] It didn't fit with the rest of the documentary very well.

Sam: I liked the fact that they took it apart afterwards though, with the homosexuality and the homophobes in that test thing, in that study, kind of saying when he said, oh no I don't think there's anything to it, subconsciously, and then they showed that...

Daniel: In retrospect it showed his denial didn't it? He's actually a guy into cock. I don't think there's any two ways about that.

Kris: I thought the cultural perspective was cool and I didn't really know much about it. But I don't think I really connected with it emotionally, really with much of it. Partly because, I mean it was more information than people. And there were examples of people but they were... I mean, I didn't feel like I really got like a real clear like I don't know story from someone, or like more than a short thing of a person's views.

Jay: Because there was so much I suppose, you kind of didn't go on people's journeys did you? We went on a kind of a different type journey.

Sam: Yeah, I think that for any person in there it was literally to illustrate a point

Kris: Which I mean is valid, is good if you're making an argument, I just feel like, I don't really know how you would have a huge emotional response to that.

Jay: I think that... to have no emotion is also interesting though, isn't it? Because if it is a more scientific type documentary it's more likely that it won't play those cards, whereas some of the more sensational I stuff I suppose is likely to. I thought the moment where I always get really emotional is where the

partner or Max, the intersex guy, was talking about her love for him and it was so... I was like, Oh my God, it's just like really... she was clearly really emotional then. That was really... I quite connected at that point.

Can I just get a consensus around the biological determinism type thing, the idea of the brain arguments. Do we subscribe to those arguments?

Jordan: What do you mean by the brain argument?

Jay: The idea that when we're born, as trans people, our genitalia and chromosomes and hormones are assigned female, but we have male brains.

Neil: I personally agree with it, in terms of my own circumstances and of people who I would label as transsexual men or woman, but I realise that there's a spectrum. I don't necessarily believe that all people who identify as trans have that same thing happen. I think there is a bit of a spectrum and variation in regards to that, but I would say that that is a valid argument when discussing transsexual people.

Sam: I don't know, I think it's all relative to how you view yourself really. Because to say that there is a specific male brain and a female brain is to say that it's always going to be the same each time and that's kind of... I don't know, I don't think that like... I think you could have a brain that somebody else might consider female and then think of yourself as male and that's totally irrelevant. It's all about self-definition rather than you must think this, this this, and when you're cut up your brain has to look like this.

Jordan: I'm not sure that that's what it was arguing, if that's what you mean, because I think what they were saying is that there is a huge amount diversity. And just from the bit of genetics that I've been studying, that is what they're showing, that even identical twins aren't genetically identical and then if on top of that you've got layers of socialisation and culture and you know law and everything else, then I don't think there's any... that actually just we're wherever we're at at that point.

Jay: For me it comes across quite strong, but I feel like I might have to watch it again now. What do you think, Daniel?

Daniel: Oh, I don't know any more.

Jay: It is quite difficult to talk about this, straight after an hour and 15 minutes.

Daniel: It's difficult. To me it seems really cold almost to come and do this. I never ever think about this at all any more. And it's kind of funny to be thrown back in to it again. I don't think about biology, or what I think I am or anything. You just are where you're at and I'm just aware that at one point I in a was a mess and didn't know where I was at and now I'm okay so I don't think about it. And so it's kind of funny to be asked to say what do you think about it, when I don't think about it. So that's why with this documentary I just feel kind of detached from it from the point of view of it's supposed to be being about me. But it's not, it's no more about me than it is about anyone else.

Jay: But I could ask anyone in the world if they believe in biological determinism.

Daniel: You could and it would be the same – most people don't ever think about that, and I don't think about it, so it's not something you can even answer. I could probably have given you a really good answer ten years ago, but I just don't think about it. I don't actually know what I think about it any more.

Jay: Do you believe in innate personalities? That you're born with a personality?

Daniel: I think there is... I don't know. I kind of feel like there is something somewhere and you're just initially struggling to get to that person, and there are constraints and things around you preventing you from being that person. And somehow wherever I'm at now I'm obviously much closer to it, because I don't think about it any more. That sort of suggests to me that there is some kind of innate personality that I've got, that I'm struggling to find.

Neil: Isn't innate personality different to innate gender?

Jay: Well, yeah but I suppose I was opening it up a little bit.

Neil: Because that's kind of a different thing. I don't think I believe in an innate personality but I believe in an innate gender.

Daniel: Well, that's the problem with it, your gender and personality are seen as... if we're in this society that only allows two genders then you're kind of...

Neil: Yeah but being male isn't my personality. I'm male.

Daniel: I don't feel like that, I'm not thinking about, 'I'm being male'.

Neil: Well, I'm not saying that either. I wouldn't say being male is part of my personality. It's just a fact. It's not something that I have to...

Jay: You have to dress masculine, in order to express your maleness. You have to make choices.

Neil: Yeah, I guess, but I wouldn't say that was my personality.

Daniel: Your personality is affected by how you behave.

Neil: Yeah, but I wouldn't say that that made me have an innate personality just because I believe that I am innately male. I think they are two different things. Personality is something that develops through being socialised and whatever else.

Jay: But being male is something that is very socially kind of...

Daniel: It affects you very strongly whether you're actually are being perceived as male or female in society and how you're able to portray yourself. It has a big effect on you so it will affect your personality. Now I feel I'm just living and getting on with it, whereas there was a time where I wasn't and that had a huge impact on me, and that affected my personality. You just get to this point where you're not thinking about anything that's... when you're this dumb consumer of stupid documentaries is maybe where it's at.

Jay: But it's interesting then how much we consume information, documentaries or programmes and stuff, but it doesn't necessarily mean that it makes us think about things necessarily.

Jordan: But doesn't life anyway have an innate effect? I mean, Daniel talks about having a personality that he's getting to. I feel like I'm on a journey and haven't, you know... where I am at any situation affects who I am even to myself. You can change several times a day, depending on what happens, so I don't think there's any...

Jay: How about you, Kris?

Kris: I think this is interesting, thinking because I'm quite young here. I'm in a very different place from you (Daniel), I'm very concerned at like... I think about my identity a lot. That's part of my daily life and while I hope that in the future that's something that's not going to consume me so much I know it does now. And personally it's enough like, I mean going back to the biology thing, there's enough to deal with socially and with day to day, that I think I make a point I don't think about what could have made me the way I was, (biology or otherwise) because there are just so many things. Genetics affect so many things, but if we dissected everything we were because of genetics we'd drive ourselves crazy. And that's a certain thing, like strategically after a while you kind of have to make peace with yourself I guess, and there's only so much you can work on your identity based on outside factors, absorbing all this information after a while, I don't know, maybe you just don't like... you just don't take it in as much, because after a certain extent you have to be like... I'm ok with how I'm thinking about this, and really you have to decide I'm not going to think about this any more, I'm okay with what I have.

Sam: I think that in terms of social stuff, you can only really kind of react to it, and base your own identity on your own reactions, and so as soon as you stop reacting then I guess that takes you to a different... I don't know I just feel like I... like you were saying it's all based on your reactions whereas you don't think about your identity any more Daniel, because you're not reacting to it any more so why would you think about it?

Neil: I don't know though, I don't think I kind of think about... when I say that I believe in the biological argument, I don't need that argument to justify who I am to myself. I like to have that there because it kind of backs me up with other people. I don't need to think to myself, 'Oh I'm male because this happened in my brain.' It doesn't really matter to me, because I'm still going to live my life how I do, it's just it's helpful I guess when I'm trying to explain because it's quite a complex situation for other people to understand. It's good to have something definitive and can back me up and not sound like I've just made it up, because I obviously haven't.

It's useful but it's not like I sit there analysing my identity, I don't really think about my identity. When people ask me how I identify I find it all a bit ridiculous. Because you don't ask people who aren't trans 'how do you identify?' It's like, what are you talking about? I'm just me I'm just a guy, whatever. So, I don't know, I don't think it's something that I use in regards

to myself, it's just like a tool to help other people break it down and understand it, I guess.

Jordan: I just had a thought which, and probably everybody else has already thought about this, but if I had have watched this five years ago or something, I would have found it really reassuring. If I was still in a place of fear and ignorance then it would have been really interesting and really reassuring.

Jay: Because I know I have that experience of having been in that more muddy space when you're trying to work things out and actually watching a documentary and it actually being quite useful for you. Have we all had that experience?

Jordan: Reading Jamison Green's book did it for me.

Neil: I don't know how helpful that would have been that helpful to me in that position, because the reason it took me however long it did to have a 'trans-revelation' is because I didn't know that FTMs existed. It just seemed like it always seemed that it was the other way round. And that documentary was mostly trans women focussed. The only person who could be vaguely be described as... was the intersex guy, but then that's not the same thing. So that might have just made me think 'Oh God there actually really is nothing.' Do you know what I mean? I don't think I would have found it reassuring if I completely didn't know. I mean if I knew there were trans guys and they just weren't featured then that would obviously be different, but if you were completely ignorant then it might have made it seem like a bit like there just weren't any trans men because they weren't on that really.

Daniel: I remember seeing a documentary, I can't remember who it was... it was '97, '96, it was some 13 year old, I can't remember his name...

Jay: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, Fred. The little boy? Who was 13.

Daniel: That was the film that I saw... I don't know I was at some point in life and I was thinking about things, yet again, and it was quite a seminal thing. And it was the fact that he was Female to Male, if that had been something else then... and it was the fact that it was a personal story as well. Whereas with that that we've just watched there was no personal stories in it. Plus it all seemed to be from some biology/male or intersex point of view, there wasn't anything going in that direction. Although I wasn't thinking of it as trans, but I

think that if I was looking at this documentary to kind of get some information for myself, for my own personal situation, I wouldn't have found much in it really.

Jay: Apart from the reassurance around it's all diverse and therefore there's a place for me, type of thing.

Neil: Yeah, but there wasn't though. It's like, it's all diverse but there isn't actually... do you know what I mean? It's diverse but you still don't fit in, according to that. That's how it was. It was like there's all this diversity, wow, isn't everyone wonderful, but you're still confused...

Daniel: You must be really weird because you're not part of that diversity.

Sam: Diversity means that there are loads of people that are really weird, as opposed to we're all really weird.

Daniel: And you're busy trying to feel normal and not weird.

Kris: For me, it's more like, I wouldn't have found out... if I was watching it, for myself I wouldn't have found that very helpful. Because to a certain extent I view information that I read on gender or watch, I ask how does this help me understand myself? And if it doesn't I don't connect with it that much.

Sam: I think documentaries tend to detach myself emotionally a little bit, just because it's a documentary and so I know I want to think from it rather than get an emotional response. If I was watching a play or something I might have responded more to that, and to the emotions surrounding it, rather than any sort of argument, any academic arguments.

Jay: Yeah, definitely, and that's their genre I suppose, isn't it.

Sam: Yep.

Documentary: **Return to Gender** (2006)
Date: Thursday, 15 January 2009
Attended: Carl and Jordan

Carl: Initially it's quite sad I think because there were a lot of people that are quite confused and aren't happy. That's the general thing you get that they had a horrible time.

Jordan: My first response was when I realised it was one about when people change their mind, I feel quite angry and defensive, because it's like how dare people say that it could be the wrong thing to do... But then, my response after that is that it's really sad that these people obviously, especially Paula, have big issues.

Carl: I don't think they should have been grouped with the one FTM because she didn't even make the decision herself in the first place.

Jay: But there was an argument about responsibility wasn't there. That was one of the points it was trying to make. How do you know whether to have a sex change and if you do regret it can we allocate responsibility to a misdiagnosis for example.

Jordan: But nobody can force you to take... you know, to be injected or to have your breasts removed. So there's a bit of me that's saying 'look, come on here you're adults, this is your body, nobody forced you to have this done to you.' At that point that was what you wanted to do, take responsibility for it. There was a bit of me that feels that. And how is – and it must have been Russell Reid probably who diagnosed Paula – you know he's a facilitator, he's assuming that unless you're really whacky you are a responsible adult making a decision that you are wanting to make. For anything elective I think the doctor has to assume that you're in the right mind and have thought about it and Paula is saying that she wishes somebody told her to think about it more, well that's not anyone's fault but hers really, is it?

Carl: I think there is a role for people you go and see to help you with your problems, not to assume that you've got it all sorted out, but to help you and work with your thoughts and things. As for Paula saying that once you're on the hormones you can't get off them that's ridiculous of course. I don't have a problem with using hormones as bit of a diagnostic test, because if you like how it feels, I do agree that that is quite a big indicator as to whether you

are going through with it. I'm not sure I still agree that you should be given them on your first visit. And anyway that doesn't happen now.

I do think there is a role for psychotherapy, because it is quite a difficult thing. It's a big thing to change gender and there's lots of issues to work around.

The thing about Paula is that it's quite clear to me that she's not 80 or 100% male or female, I think she's someone who feels comfortable in both. Now I think it's very unfortunate in her case that she had such appalling lack of support from her family and it was quite clear as well that the bloke that she was with, if he had have carried on living, she wouldn't have felt so much pressure to go back. That's a huge thing. If you get recognition and support and people are really happy for you when you've changed your gender then you'll be happy, but unfortunately that isn't the case with her.

Jordan: You just got the feeling that.. none of them talked about having any contact with the trans community and I think what really helped me was just that summer that I had talking to you guys so much and meeting so many other trans people and people who had decided not to do it, like Z_ and people who were thinking about it like B_ and J_. Because I'm not sure psychotherapy... I mean I was in psychotherapy for years, and it was useful having that person who knew me so well to talk to and to check things out, because he knew more than anybody about what we'd talked about in the past and stuff, but actually he didn't help me decide. It was being in the trans community that helped me decide.

Carl: I'm not saying it would necessarily help you decide, but help you separate issues out. For example, Paula feels guilty because her mum didn't have a daughter and there's all these other things there, and you can't change gender for anybody else apart for yourself at the end of the day. Going onto Kieran, I thought that was quite interesting because he was suddenly shocked and came to a rather late realisation that most women have relationships with men, and he never fancied men and he didn't want to be a heterosexual woman, but it was also interesting that he couldn't contemplate at all being a lesbian. So that was very interesting.

Jay: The way it was filmed was interesting, because it didn't question that either, did it?

Carl: It didn't question it at all. It just assumed that most transsexuals want to be heterosexual and as we all know it's possible to be gay or lesbian as well as a transsexual. That's what shocked me, because clearly he prefers female company. He likes lots of aspects of female life. I'm quite curious that his friends are saying he's more confident now, well maybe that's because he hadn't had much experience throughout his life of being female. I think what a lot of this 'Return to Gender' is, is going back to what you know best, what you're used to mostly in your life and you do know how people will react to you and changing gender can be quite a shock when you realise how different people treat you. It was a shock to me anyway. How women related to me, how men related to me, it was suddenly very sharp.

I think I disagreed with the woman from the Albany, because she said 'Oh yes transsexuals have a tendency to think of all the positive aspects after changing gender.' Well I didn't, I thought of all the negative aspects. I thought 'God, do I really want to do this?'

Jordan: I remember Russell Reid spending some time in that first session talking to me about those things as well... making sure I had thought about stuff like that.

Carl: Stephen Whittle made some good points about the thing about having a lot of money and going to Thailand and you can do things really, really quickly and apart from anything it does take time to adjust into another gender.

Jay: I find difficult this idea of responsibility. Whittle talks about being regulated, and we need to ensure people are making the right decision and I worry that that takes autonomy away from myself, about making my own choices. And the whole thing about buying private practice, private surgery is that it gives you that customer autonomy.

Carl: Well, it's interesting what words you use, because if somebody said to you 'I think the private and public sector should have the same safeguards' you might think differently. Because essentially it's about protecting people, making sure that they're (a) not ripped off, (b) are fully informed. There's a lot of different information about NHS services and I still find people who are paying £200 so that they can get hormones and I think that should be the last resort. You could emphasise to them that this is really down to you. Actually not everything is entirely irreversible. Paul seemed to think that he wouldn't be able to have a penis and what about all the FTMs who do have

a penis and what about Charlie Kane who did have the surgery to go back to being a man.

Jordan: And if he wanted a bit of libido then he just needs to take some testosterone.

Carl: Oh yes, that was a bit sad – both of them said that that they didn't have much libido.

Jordan: There didn't seem to be any support for Paula or Paul to meet other people who have taken that middle road.

Carl: You would think that Paul or Paula would be happier in a very queer or gender variant environment, not that there are many that exist, but there are some...

Jordan: There are in London,

Carl: Yeah there are in London, but not on every day. You still have to walk down the road and get your groceries... but there's the queer camp thing, summer camps, and he or she might really experience comfort there... Clearly Paula doesn't want to be totally male and personally I think had Paula had lots of support as a woman, and lots more recognition and acceptance, she would have stayed as a woman.

Jay: What did you think about what she said that 'being a woman was like playing a role, like acting in a scene that never ends?'

Carl: I thought that was just about conforming to certain stereotypes and she always said she didn't really like the stereotypes but all she needed to do was look around at many of the women that also don't conform to those stereotypes and she would be able to be herself as well.

Jordan: When I was thinking about transitioning, the men that I noticed were very male looking men, wearing suits and coats and lace-up shoes, and then my gaze kind of widened I suppose when I realised I didn't have to be this very typical man, actually I could be whatever kind of man I was, and I wonder if that's the same when trans women are thinking about transitioning that they have to be hyper feminine and put their bums into cars first and not separate their legs and all of that stuff, whereas there are so many different ways of being female.

- Carl: Well, there is that but also we know that the hormones on us are very effective in terms of passability, now for transwomen it is a bit harder so there's probably a bit more pressure on them to adopt those sort of feminine acts, I think.
- Jordan: What I felt it was saying was that sex change very often is done by mistake. And it started off with that and finished off with that and it just had a couple of people stuck in the middle who were fine with it, but they got so much less time and all of it was on people who had changed their minds and were having to reverse this terrible thing that was done to them by mistake. So I thought it started off with an agenda, and I guess all documentaries do. That's why I just wondered how much this had to do with Russell Reid's case, because it was so much about that point, about the danger of misdiagnosis.
- Carl: The thing is that it's actually I very... I don't know if voyeuristic is the word, but it's a topic that appeals doesn't it. Like not just sex changes, but sex changes that have gone wrong and actually the truth is that it's an extreme minority when they've worked it out. It's less than 1% have regrets and of course it's a great story unfortunately. I think that's why it was shown.
- Jordan: And again they make a film like this but not think to actually help or put people in touch with support groups. It really bugs me, when they'll follow people for quite a long time like that and they might be saying 'I'm really isolated in this', although that wasn't so much with Kieran, but you got the feeling, and maybe for transwomen there isn't very much non-judgemental support, I don't know. But I would have thought that just to hang out with other people who are thinking about doing it would help anybody.
- Jay: Do you think this documentary does more harm than good for trans people, or is that too strong?
- Carl: The only negative impact is that it makes people question you when you're transitioning. I mean my own Dad said that to me 'Oh you're not going to change your mind are you?' And when I explained that the magazines and the media focus on those stories, he immediately saw my point. So apart from that it's not a bad thing. It's good for people who, if there are any more people out there who are thinking of doing it and may be really confused as well it's good for them, to make them think even more, but I don't know if it

does damage. I just think they should have put something at the end. I would have preferred it if right at the end they would have said- to our knowledge there are approximately 5,000 transsexuals in the UK and less than 0.001% have regrets.

Jordan: I think they should have said it at the beginning and said here is a story of a few of the people who have actually changed their mind.

Carl: I have met two 'regretters'. I met one person who came to the group who said he was MTFTM and I heard of another person (FTM) who regretted but that's it. Oh, I heard of someone who was going to but all they did was have the chest surgery and stayed a lesbian.

Jay: I just know quite a lot of people who do different things to their bodies, but kind of are still within that gender queer category and it's a very affirmative category for them, whether they have had chest surgery or whether they have taken hormones and have stopped. There are quite a few people who take a much more experimental freer attitude towards it all rather than 'I regret it'.

Carl: I was quite shocked to hear recently of someone who I thought was FTM who decided to stop taking hormones, because a lot of us are used to different levels of surgery and that, but this person actually stopped taking hormones and started having periods again. Now that I did find radical.

Jordan: I know a few people who have done that. The body is amazing that you can take testosterone for a few years and then your ovaries kick back in.

Carl: Yes, I get all that but where is their identity at? Do they still want to be called he or are they going to start asking me for sanitary towels when they're next visiting?

Jay: This is one of the reasons why we ask young trans people what pronoun they want us to use, because they do change and change back again.

Carl: I still think that we give off indicators in the world as to what pronoun we want to be called.

Jay: I think the use of pronoun is just one aspect of their gender expression.

Carl: I think there aren't very many people in the world who have a well-known female name and call themselves 'he'.

Jay: I did meet one person at a conference who was called Robert and male bodied and female identified and would go to trans meetings as Robert, and not change, wearing male clothes and identify as a woman.

Carl: But the thing is, you're going to have to concentrate really hard to say 'she' and everyone else in the street, in the bank, in the post office, at Robert's work isn't going to say 'she'.

Jay: I agree you have to concentrate but that's okay, you just concentrate.

Carl: Yeah, but everyone else or people who haven't got a chance to be told... that's the whole thing about indicators isn't it, you're indicating all the time.

Jay: Well, that's why I changed my sex, because I need to give those indicators out.

Jordan: Trying to explain to J_ for example, if he doesn't want to transition but he still wants to be called J_ and use the male gender, then he has to deal with people's confusion and that's part of taking that road. If you still sound like woman speak like a woman, still look quite feminine but insist on being called J_ and 'he', then okay that's fine but you deal with it, it's not going to be easy.

Carl: I often think that one stage towards testing transitioning is having a 'male' name and seeing how you feel about it. I was going to transition and then I changed my mind, but I still changed my name and I felt so much better writing it officially and I thought that was a really important indicator. I don't think it's the name so much, I think it's more the pronoun. I've just said the opposite of what I've just said. *[laughter]*

Jay: Contradicting yourself! We've got it on tape.

Jordan: I think taking that middle road is the hardest, but if that's where you are then that's good.

Jay: I think also you can compartmentalise your life. You understand if you are going to go down the road and do your groceries then people are going to

read you in a certain way, but if you surround yourself in a queer circle where everyone is like that, you can explicitly say this is my gender identity, this is how I feel, treat me like this and on a Friday or Saturday night then you can experience that. I suppose in some ways cross-dressing is like that. Men who have their jobs and might cross-dress at the weekends.

Carl: Cross-dressing is a very useful thing to do actually in exploring how comfortable you are, whether it's just a play thing in the evening or whether you really want to be like that a lot of the time.

Jay: They did stipulate actually that both Paula and Kieran were not transsexuals but were actually transvestites, do you remember? And then Stephanie said 'Transsexual is not the same as transvestites. It's nothing to do with cross-dressing, it's biological.'

Carl: I can see why people want to draw that distinction, but there is also a lot of crossover between the two as well, a lot of people before they realise they're transsexual they can dress in the opposite gender clothes and it's just not that straightforward.

Jordan: And trans women have to do it that way, because I mean for us, for women becoming men it's so much easier because of the blurring- women can wear trousers, you can actually wear quite male clothes but still be recognised as female, and for trans women, you only have to step out of the house with a skirt on and it's such a different deal.

Carl: There are clubs available where men can dress up as women and I think that's a really good thing to try that out.

Jay: If there is a lot of overlap how then do we talk about transsexualism being biological?

Carl: Isn't Transvestitism biological? Yes, I think so, because I believe that a lot of your personality is hereditary as well, so if you feel inclined to dress...

Jordan: My feeling is that from doing this genetics course I think that feeling about your own gender is really multifactorial, I mean a bit like heart disease it involves a lot of different genes, but also involves a lot of environmental factors as well. So if you have a genetic make-up which might give you that and then you have a family background which pushes you in that direction

as well, then you're much more likely to go that way, whereas even if you had the same genetic make-up but very different gender role models in your family then you might be fine by not changing gender. Because just from talking to so many trans people you can see the family influences that have had something to do with them deciding that they need to change gender, but that's not all of it, because their brothers and sisters didn't decide to do that and they came out of the same family, so there must be some other thing going on there as well, it's not just family. You don't have whole families of transsexuals.

Carl: There are more incidents of lesbian and gay people being in one family.

Jordan: Maybe that's a different set of genes that comes in.

Carl: I would say the negative pressures are huge. We've just seen Paula wasn't affirmed as being female... What we all need very importantly in life is love and affirmation...

Jay: The compulsion to change sex must be huge because society doesn't 'sell' trans. So why would you do it? The biological argument is there.

Jordan: Just looking at me, I had a therapy session today and so it's still fresh in my mind, and my therapist was talking about the me that he knew before I realised I was transsexual and how he had thought that I was quite male even before trans had ever crossed his mind and he'd thought it was because of the relationship that I had with my mother and my father was a much easier role model. And so that was why. And I agree, I think that there was that influence in my family, but that alone wouldn't have meant that I did transition, so it wasn't just that and... but why am I different from my sister? It is so multifactorial and it's like the throw of the dice. And also it's about who you meet. My passage into trans was so by mistake almost, just finding out about it. And the people that I met early on had a big impact on that as well. Because I was such a scaredy cat. If I hadn't had all those positive messages I probably would never have got here... If I'd been still living in Kent...

Carl: I think the biological has a huge influence.

Jay: Do you think it's multi-faceted or multifactorial?

Carl: Well, multifaceted almost gives the biological an equal element and I'm very, very doubtful about that. I had a lot of freedom when I was brought up so if anything that delayed... I didn't have pressure to be a girl or pressure to be a boy, I was very much given loads of freedom. Now, if I'd been brought up by my Dad then I would have been really really rigidly made to wear frilly knickers and all of that and I probably would have transitioned a lot earlier. Because I wouldn't have been able to cope with all of that. She was trying to make me wear ultra, ultra-feminine clothes, the woman my dad was going out with, but I knew that you didn't have to be like that to be a woman, because of the way I was brought up by my mum and my stepdad who were 'hippy dippy' and they didn't mind me calling myself Daniel... Nobody bat an eyelid. But I didn't have particularly good male role models, I didn't see my dad very much and my stepdad wasn't...

Jordan: I don't think there is any particular... you know just like with heart disease... it's a combination of a whole load of stuff. And I think that if it is something that can happen... from conception onwards... Just comparing childhood memories with my siblings is excruciating because we all have such different memories! You would never realise we had the same parents.

Carl: But right from a very early age I really identified as a boy, I didn't think I was a girl, I thought I was a boy, but somehow I had been labelled as a girl... I started having intimate relations quite early on when I was 7 or 8 with girls and that was quite good because it made me feel like I was a boy really. But I think it was quite horrible with that whole adolescent thing, trying to come to terms with that... Somewhere somehow I knew there was another world out there and I thought I found it when I found the lesbian scene.

Jordan: The deportment thing - It's very sexist. Is there a mocking of trans people there, a laughing at trans people? It certainly would allow people to laugh at us. Like Little Britain. It's so dated and odd and bizarre and the idea of deportment.

Carl: When you were younger weren't you told by your parents to be more ladylike? I was. My Dad used to refer to me affectionately refer to me as Pansy Potter... the cartoon character... a really boisterous little girl. It must have been from Sparky.

Jordan: What did we think about that Australian woman who had kids then transitioned back?... 'God cleared my mind.'...

- Jay: I thought it was interesting that in everyone's stories... the reasons why they transitioned back, not all of the reasons but a big component, was... heterosexuality, like being at a wedding ceremony and realising that I couldn't do that... okay, I'm going to go and be 'normal' again...and that's why I'll transition back.
- Jay: There are issues with people who transition and have a history of mental health issues.
- Carl: I'm pretty sure that one of my first major breakdowns was down to identity crisis.
- Carl: It didn't probe further as to whether Kieran still dressed up in women's clothes occasionally or whether it put him off totally.
- Jordan: Or whether there was any awareness of trans people in homosexual relationships, or that there's gender queer. It was totally ignorant to any of that spectrum.

Documentary: **A Change of Sex** (1979)
Date: Thursday, 22 January 2009
Attended: Mary, Sam, Cecil, Blue, Daniel, Carl and Kris

Blue: It was eye opening to see the differences and eye opening to see the similarities...

Jay: In terms of the generations?

Blue: Yeah, because that was like 5 years before I was born.

Cecil: It was 12 years before I was born

Blue: Similarities were the psychiatrists not being that useful or patient-centred. And he said when you were ready you can do it, and then when the patient was ready, he was just like, no. And so that still continues today. But also to see that people can get Gender Recognition Certificates to get all the documentation changed so they don't have to out themselves to their employers, because that must have been hell back then. No wonder trans people are on benefits if you can't get a job because people won't hire you because their clients don't want to work with you... that's just disgusting.

Carl: I remember it being very influential amongst people I went to school with. What was it, in '79? I would have been 13, 14 then and people at school thought it was absolutely brilliant. They were really impressed with what had happened. I also think that everybody thought the psychiatrist was outrageous.

Cecil: Yeah non-trans people as well... How can people speak to each other in that disrespectful way?

Jay: So you were really on the side of her weren't you, in that film, and that was quite powerful I think.

Blue: It was also powerful to put the NHS on bad stand on public TV for everybody to see, you think they'd put a better showing of themselves.

Kris: I thought she articulated herself quite well, and I thought that some of those things, like there are similarities, and I can still see that now, I can imagine what it must have been like, I thought it communicated quite well.

Mary: In those days, as you can imagine, it was so difficult to get a job and before that... I mean I started taking hormones in '69, so that was before then, and they were my friend's hormones, and when I did see Randall (the psychiatrist off screen in the film) he didn't like the fact that I'd been taking hormones that weren't prescribed for me. I only saw him three times and then I saw someone in Manchester because that's where I'm from. But, it was just very different, as you probably know, then. It was just impossible – if you went for an interview, well, 'what toilet are you going to use?', they might say that today, I don't know, I don't think they can. Or they'd laugh at you if you'd disclose you were trans.

Carl: But it was pretty much still unheard of wasn't it, wouldn't you say? In the '70s?

Mary: That depends, I guess, yes.

Carl: There were less people doing it I suppose.

Mary: I don't know because I lived in a house with lots of trans people in the very early '70s. But there were less people. But it was more sensationalised. You heard about it in the papers – other people did.

Blue: Maybe it was more under the carpet, now we've got the Internet, where they publicise meetings and so you do feel that there's more of a community now. But there may have been just the same amount of numbers as before, but the psychiatrists were shooting people down and people felt obliged to stay in their own homes and do it discreetly.

Mary: Well, there were a lot of people on the gay scene. Trans people often mixed on the gay scene. There wasn't a separate trans scene or community as it were. There was a lot of trans people.

Jay: Do you think the trans community was still as tight then as it is now, if that is a description you'd use

Mary: I think it's changed. I mean we didn't use the word trans then, we used to use the word 'sex change' about ourselves. And when I heard Julie use that term 'sex change', it reminded me very much of: 'I'm a sex change,' or 'I'm

going for a sex change.' We used to talk like that. We didn't say transsexual, we didn't say trans.

Jay: What's your feeling towards that expression now?

Mary: It kind of jars with me a bit now.

Cecil: It jars with me. I mean I remember people in school going 'oh you're going to get a sex change then?' [*in a mock gruff voice*]... It's not nice. There's a lot of negative connotations...

Jay: It's still got some currency now though hasn't it? I mean people will understand that more than the word trans or transsexual .

Kris: Yeah but they understand it almost in a sensationalised way.

Blue: Sex change is the blunt headline, where as trans, transgendered, transsexual is a bit more... a bit less sensational and a bit more medical.

Jay: Mary, do you want to say a bit more about Randall and what people thought about him in the day and...

Sam: Where he lives. [*laughter*]

Mary: There was very few people, there wasn't much option. There was one or two but Charing Cross was like Mecca. You weren't there and if you towed the line then you got what you wanted. And if you challenged him he didn't like that, he wanted you to do it his way. And there was no varying off that. Just the wearing trousers, you'd go in in trousers and he'd say 'No, that's not how women dress.'

Cecil: I'm sure women wore trousers in the '70s.

Carl: But it's true that women in the '70s wore less trousers than they do now.

[*Everyone talks at once*]

Blue: I mean hippies and punks had already gone by this time. It disturbs me about what had already been said and the NHS was still that backward.

Mary: I think it was his view of what a trans person should be doing and looking like.

Blue: Or he wanted a woman to be attractive and if they weren't attractive he wasn't interested.

Mary: Although he did say that thing: 'Well, what is a woman?' I think that's a relevant point...

[Everyone talks at once]

Kris: It was very clear that he was trying to push her. I don't like the person I'm seeing for therapy at Tavistock Clinic, but I mean I had never imagined that it would be that confrontational, that's incredibly strange for me, and how stressful that must have been.

Daniel: It was like a process of humiliation going on. I remember watching it and I remember whole thing being very disturbing and off-putting. That was '79 and so I was 20 then. And there were a lot on things going on in my mind then. I remember it very clearly because I remember watching it with my Dad and my sister and it used to be on a Thursday night and that was the night my mum went out to work and we used to watch things like that then, like 'Brideshead Revisited' and there was something kind of odd about it because we wouldn't be allowed to watch things like that if my mum was there, we couldn't watch interesting programmes unless my dad was there.

And it was on over two or three weeks or something and we watched it, we kind of followed it. Not that there was much choice then – only about three channels, but I remember it because of what I'd been thinking about myself and it made the whole thing seem very scary. I didn't know anything about anything. To see something like that where you had to go and see a psychiatrist and they were going to be really horrible and humiliating to you was very off-putting.

Cecil: Yeah because if you have no other exposure to any ideas as to how it would be like to transition and that's the first thing you see...

Daniel: It was kind of like that or the News of the World shock horror sex change sensation stuff.

Carl: On the other hand it was really inspiring because it showed people that this could be done. That was what it informed me about it. Wow this is really possible.

Jay: Did you relate to her then? Did you think oh that's me, or that's not me because I don't want to go down that route?

Daniel: I don't recall relating to that. I was just kind of confused why someone would ever want to be a woman, at all...

Sam: That scene contradicted a bit where the psychiatrist kept saying 'but what is it to be a woman?' ... You can't really describe it specifically the mannerisms or anything, but then a minute earlier it said that those people who decide to have this sex change are the ones that don't really fit into either and so we give them the surgery if we think that they might become a bit better at one when they got to it. So it shows that nobody really knew what they were on about at all.

[unclear]

Sam: In these documentaries they always seem to start off with their pronoun from before, like 'he', and that might make it less confusing for people, but at the same time you've got it stuck in your head.

Jay: Yeah I said 'he' actually.

[unclear]

Blue: I don't know why I chose to say 'he Julia' because that doesn't make any sense whatsoever.

Jay: I know, and I said 'his Manchester accent'.

Cecil: And that's because she is presented... that's what the documentary makers say, they say 'he'. And that's what the psychiatrist said when she was in there and she'd been full time for months. And he just goes 'he...'

Blue: That mutterance when she'd walked out of the room, 'he makes his own problems' and I'm just thinking, holy shit! How can people get away with saying this?!

Cecil: How was someone that evil allowed to be a psychiatrist for trans people?
[laughter]

Daniel: There was an interesting power thing going on because it's a documentary and this psychiatrist had obviously agreed to be in it, but under his own terms. He can't be seen. He wants to be shown demonstrating his power but not give anyone the opportunity to answer back. The weird thing is that the editors had the overall power and actually portrayed him in a very bad way.

Cecil: I like the fact that they give her time to talk about what she feels about the way that she's been treated on the NHS. I think that's really good because she's been made powerless by the system but whoever has made that documentary is empowering her, giving her power back...

Jay: Do you think that's part of the seduction around documentaries and why so many trans people do it?

Blue: Yeah to get the power back. Maybe. Or to show the failures in the services.

Kris: It would be really interesting to hear from her about why she did the documentary...

Carl: Well, she has been in a documentary quite recently actually talking about why she did it... As I understand it, from what I remember, she wanted to bring more awareness about it.

Mary: Well, they were also paying her as well. So there was that element to it. But I think there was the aspect of bringing awareness around it.

Mary: I've met her several times and I kind of know her. And I've not met her for about 10 years, but I've always found it difficult to connect with her in a very deep way.

Cecil: It wasn't very empathetic. .. It wasn't like you can empathise with this person. It was more like they're presenting you this person who's doing this thing that's strange, which is something that documentaries have a tendency to do. They're not like they show you weird things and they don't try and get you to empathise with them... I think most trans documentaries.

Jay: Some trans documentaries really push the emotional side of it. And I thought this one wasn't so.... you're not like so pitying this person, somehow she was quite powerful wasn't she.

Cecil: Yeah I liked that, but at the same time that made it less able to empathise. I felt cut off from her.

Jay: She is quite hard actually.

Carl: But I think that is her personality.

Jay: I was rooting for her.

Carl: And I think most members of the British public were as well. Because people admire somebody who's going against all odds.

Mary: And I think she needed that strength, that courage to go through this.

Jay: What did we think about the drag scenes?

Cecil: That was weird, that was really weird.

Micelle: What was weird about it?

Cecil: I don't know. I did see drag once and it was mostly just kind of like a comedy thing.... I'm not very comfortable with drag. It's just very over-sexualised and I feel a bit uncomfortable with it.

Blue: Is drag any more sexualised than your average human being?

Cecil: In drag shows, yeah... not all drag, but in like that one.

Blue: But if you go to any burlesque cabaret you're going to see things like that, whether it's a trans woman or not.

Cecil: Yeah. But I think that whole over-sexualised scene...

Carl: I didn't think it was over-sexualised at all. I thought most of it was parody. It was entertainment. Especially the 'oh you Naughty Boy', everyone joins in like an old mother's knees up.

Mary: It depends on how you look at it I think. If you look at it in a PC way it could be seen as not a very good representation of women, it could seem like a piss take of women.

Carl: She herself said 'now I'm a woman I don't have to do all that.'

Cecil: She only did it as an outlet.

Jay: What about that part of her story in her route to becoming a woman, that she had this space where she performed drag. Was that something common then? [*I ask Mary*]

Mary: It was fairly common. Not something I did. I did a lot of other things. But not that. But it was fairly common.

Cecil: But she didn't seem like it was something she particularly wanted to do. She did it more as an outlet.

Blue: To allow herself to be a woman.

Cecil: Yeah, because she said quite a few times that she didn't like the gay scene, but she liked it because she felt accepted and she could wear the clothes that she wanted...

Blue: And not get bottled which was amazing.

Jay: But it's hard though because I wondered if she said that because that's what she was supposed to say.

Mary: I think she probably was. She was very much involved with the gay scene for most of the time I've known her.

Sam: I felt a bit bad at the start of the documentary because I was almost gender policing this person because they kept calling her he and I thought anyone watching that would probably be watching her mannerisms and 'Oh let's see how much of a woman she really is' and so the drag scene because they hadn't shown her in female role specifically at that point I think it kind of was interesting because it did show those elements. When they kept putting it on after that, when they kept bringing it back to the drag, I didn't like it because

it was like taking it back to the whole gay scene, and the fact that it's an act and this is just some melodramatic performance for her or something.

Carl: But drag can be about exploring how you feel about gender. I mean myself did a drag king act and I realised 'wow this is really me' and I was really disappointed that I didn't win – it was a competition thing. I remember there was quite a lot of excitement when all that drag king thing started happening. So I do think it is relevant as well on our side.

[unclear]

Daniel: Trans that I did then was very much sort of 'Porchester hall balls' it was almost like very extreme drag. I guess trans people were in it as well but I didn't know.

Mary: There was a moment about prostitution and a lot of trans people in those days did work the streets and I did too during my teenage years.

Carl: They still do.

Mary: And I was doing lots of drugs but that's a long time ago and it feels like a different time for me, because it was a long time ago, but that was an option for us.

Blue: Well, because getting a usual job probably wasn't.

Cecil: People connect those things – transsexuality and prostitution but only because it was a reality because they couldn't get employment. And then that stereotype's carried over and people say we don't want that, because this is what that's connected with, but it's employers... it's a vicious circle, isn't it.

Daniel: I think also a lot of trans people didn't go through any medical route. They found things on their own and then found themselves living in this mid-world where you couldn't be employed so you did end up in prostitution or some other strange life, just to support yourself, just to live.

[unclear]

- Carl: There weren't very many documentaries then. That's the only one I can remember.
- Daniel: Yeah, it was quite an important thing then, it was very well remembered through the '80s. It was always being referred to. Even now lots of people know it.
- Carl: There's like a plethora of them now.
- Blue: Yeah, if you say to somebody did you see the trans documentary the other night, people are like 'which one?' *[laughs]*
- Daniel: If you think this one is 30 years old, and any others I've seen, I can't recall any one that is actually negative about the trans person... And even that, 30 years ago, you got the impression that they were on her side... You've never seen a documentary about a poor psychiatrist who has to deal with these difficult people, do you?
- Blue: What is it about the documentary form that attracts liberal people seeking the truth...?
- Carl: That's what people did in those days. People didn't have telly in the rooms. There was only one telly in the house. I watched it with my family as well.
- Cecil: Documentaries give an opportunity to give an alternative view from what the mainstream view is given. The mainstream view of transsexuality – you've got the tabloid press, you've got what the NHS say we should do and that's still ridiculous. The tabloid press is still ridiculous. There was an article in my local newspaper a while ago about a local trans woman and it was really badly written and I was sitting there going, this is horrible.
- Mary: I think that sometime the press can still refer to people... if it's a trans woman as 'he' constantly.
- Cecil: Yeah, I've seen that in the Daily Mail. That's the first thing I look for in an article, just because I know that's the one mistake they always make.
- Jay: The thing that I really hate is when someone dies and they say ... 'so and so, born a man.' And I think no-one is born a man – like they come out and

they're a big man! *[Laughter]* I absolutely hate that... They were born a baby!

Carl: I think that although the media is still pretty bad, at least the tabloid is, I think the NHS treatment has improved a lot since then.

Cecil: It's improved somewhat, but it's still pretty inadequate compared to some things. I don't know, it's like the booklet they sent me when they finally referred me to the gender identity clinic (the local – it's in Devon), this leaflet says 'you will start your hormones at the same time as you start your real life experience', we will decide when you start your real life experience... Like they will decide.

Carl: That's not how it used to be. It used to be you had to start your real life experience and not have hormones for years.

Cecil: But I'm sitting there going, but I've already done my real life experience. I've been doing my real life experience since I was 13.

Carl: It's that thing about having to demonstrate it to them though, isn't it?

Cecil: It's still like we'll decide. It's our choice what happens to you and I find that very disturbing. With this condition it's self-diagnosis. There's no test. It says on the piece of paper that Dr Curtis gave me today there's no test for transsexuality, nothing can test for it and ultimately...

Carl: Would you prefer it if there was a test?

Cecil: It might make it...

Jay: I'd be afraid I wouldn't pass. *[Laughter]*

Daniel: It's hard to discern about how are things in the NHS and psychiatry and whether things have changed because everybody deals with this once at their time, and then they change and things happen so you can't really compare...

Kris: I think the assumption still is... that you can't make this decision... It's weird to me that someone should have the power still over what I'm going to do with my life, if I am perfectly confident adult functioning in society.

Carl: They're still tied up with the legal responsibility thing aren't they and they don't want to be sued. It's to do with that I believe.

Mary: I opted out of the NHS a long time ago, nearly 30 years ago.

Carl: I opted out at the beginning and then opted in.

Cecil: I just opted out today.

Daniel: I really wasn't involved with the NHS system at all and actually I really do think it was due to that program. That's how influential it was over me. That I never wanted to do that. I actually was fine with my GP surgery at the time and I talked to them to see about counselling and I wanted to make sure I was doing the right thing. I think at that point I was aware of Russell Reid and that route, but I needed to work things out and I asked them about counselling and they came back to me with an appointment at Charing Cross and I immediately phoned up and cancelled it because of that programme. I didn't go there I didn't even know if it had changed by then.

Carl: I found it incredibly empowering when I watched it in the '70s. I didn't particularly think oh I'm going to change sex myself when I watched that, but I was fascinated and I thought wow this is great. Yes, it was horrible that Julia... but if you go on, she carries on, she doesn't ever go back, that's it. She becomes Julia.

The thing with the documentary is that it doesn't cut out the bad side. It doesn't show the bad sides of being trans but it doesn't cut out the good sides either. It shows how it positively impacts but it shows up the flaws in the system which I think is an important thing and I think if I'd seen that at the time it would inspire me to try and do something to change it. And it is empowering in some ways to see how she moves through it and beyond it and she's got all that being thrown at her, I think.

Sam: The trouble is though that it's so definite, like – this is what you're going to have to do, and these are the troubles that you're going to encounter, this is how you're going to feel and this is how you've got to prove yourself ultimately. I don't think that's really going to be that empowering unless that's the exact route that you want to take. It's kind of saying that you have to have the surgery to be female and that might not be, for anyone who

doesn't feel the definite need to have surgery, they're going to think well I'm not like that and so maybe I'm not at all.

Cecil: And the documentary was called 'A change of sex' and the sex change bit of it was that bit, and the rest of it didn't matter. Whereas for me right now I'm going hormones are good and I'm don't really care about anything else right now.

Mary: Surgery isn't the only focus.

Carl: I must say I'm looking forward to the day when we have a documentary that isn't hormones, surgery etc, well, that as well maybe, but concentrates more on how they suddenly find the world relating to them differently, because that was for me a huge steep learning curve. Suddenly I had to really change my behaviour and people's expectations of me were different and that I think would be really interesting. I don't know if you know about a woman who dressed up, decided to look like a man for six months or a year... society's expectations of behaviour...

I've watched so many trans documentaries and I'm starting to get a bit bored. I found the surgery a bit boring, especially when you've seen the exact same image.

Jay: Why is it such a strong visual trope?

Sam: Because it's like weird, because it's like 'why would somebody want to be cut up?' It's the extreme. If you want it so much that you want to be cut up then that means that you really are.

Daniel: Its total focus on the physicality than... then and now there's all this concentration on the person acting out a role or waiting for a doctor's appointment. There's nothing about how they're feeling in the world and how people are reacting to them.

Daniel: She seems to be there just a person in total isolation from everyone. Random strangers and trying to deal with them, people who work in dress shops or whatever and psychiatrists and that's not what people are like really. You're around people you know and she talked briefly about having lots of friends and they all seem to have drifted away and you didn't see any of them at all.

- Mary: You saw the guy she was with a bit. You saw the relationship that was beginning and stuff.
- Carl: Yeah, that was very positive, I thought.
- Cecil: It was very interesting to see the attitudes of the public, individual people who respond well to her like the shop keeper and then the big institutions like the job centres and the NHS saying no, and having such a negative view, these groups that are supposed to be here to help you...
- Carl: Yeah, but that's precisely the point isn't it. They're not individuals, they're thinking ok I'm part of this institution therefore I can't say what I really feel.
- Cecil: Yeah, but the institutions are there to help people and they're not actually helping people, it's just individual people that don't actually have anything wrong with it...
- Jay: My experience is I've not experienced any transphobia from other people, everyone has been really positive and affirmative; pick anyone from strangers to close families, but maybe like institutionally you do have that when you kind of hit more barriers, do you know what I mean?...
- Kris: People are more anonymous in an institution... it's a group they belong to, they can be behind the institution.
- Carl: I'd agree with you mostly. Two GPs, being treated at Charing Cross too, no problems there, family all positive, work all positive.
- Carl: I only had one not very nice experience with a new GP, but I mean, I changed.
- Mary: Except for Randall, meeting him and that experience that I said about him, most of the professional people that I met I've never had difficulty with. When I was a teenager in Manchester a lot of people knew me and I was stabbed and beaten up when I was in my teens for being trans, but not for the past 30 years, that's not happened. But then... I don't know if it's times have changed or if it's just me.
- Cecil: I'd like to think that hopefully times have changed. It would be nice to think that times have changed.

Jay: Do you think times have changed partly because of documentaries like this? Do you think they do do good as well as bad?

Cecil: Well, they start up conversations don't they, and that's good.

Carl [to Mary]: When that happened to you they saw you moving from male didn't they presumably?

Mary: Well, I don't know. When I was in my early teens I was very androgynous, so for me, it wasn't like I suddenly transitioned, it was like a gradual process.

Carl: Oh, I see. So they would have found that quite challenging then presumably.

Mary: Yes, especially in the late '60s, it was...

Cecil: People do find androgyny challenging. They feel like, well which one are you then? You get a lot of that.

Carl: If anything I'd say that challenge is more of a...

Mary: Yes, I think so.

Cecil: What one are you then? What one are you? Kind of thing.

Jay: And that's still current now, isn't it?

Cecil: But at school, I got that mostly at school, where I dropped out of school a few times. I wasn't just not being at school, I was being home educated because I couldn't cope with being at school, I was bullied a lot. But that was the kind of stuff you get from people, what are you then? Well, they knew. They did know like who I was and what my position was, but they'd come up and say it to you anyway like it was... because they had the right to, because they were on the side of the majority, they had the right to come up to you and say, which one are you? You have to put yourself in a box.

Mary: I'm so glad you said that. It's like people think they've got the right to say these things to you. Like, they don't have to respect you, they've got the right because you're different, you're 'an odd' so they can say what they want. I don't mean you personally, I mean like...

Cecil: Yeah, when I was younger it did annoy me though, this whole sex change documentary things, so it allows people coming up to me at school and being like so are you having a sex change then? And it was never like are you a boy or a girl it was like, are you having a sex change... *[Laughter]*... Do you want a willy?... They'd always say that! And one boy at school did come up to me and say, yeah but if I had a girl's body for a day I'd just be like standing there in the mirror, feeling myself up.

[Unclear who speaks] Ohhh, that one!

Jay: I've heard that one as well. *[Laughter]*

Cecil: And I'm like... yeah, why don't you try it some time and then maybe you'll think differently. But yeah, there was a lot of questions like that, like physical, and I think people are really, and it's like they... I think what this documentary is guilty of is overplaying the physical thing because people are impressed with that...

Jay: I mean that's become really dominant so it's still the narrative isn't it, now, the story of the physical change...

Cecil: And it's like, for me it's like physical change is an afterthought, and right now, people say transitioning, well transitioning for me would be living as a woman now, because I never have, I've never been female all my life. I've never done that, I don't know how to do it, I couldn't even begin to think about what that would be. That would be a transition for me. I think the physical thing is just something, the logical next step now, that I've been living this way for such a long time, and I've seen my friends go through puberty and I'm sitting their going, what hasn't that happened to me? Kind of thing. And it's like it's weird that people are so obsessed with the physical side of change because it's so, it's almost irrelevant in a lot of ways. It's not the most important thing and that's what people see from it.

Jay: I'd like to see a documentary where you see like a trans person within a collective of trans people, because you never see that do you? Well, you do sometimes, a couple of trans people who are mates and stuff, but... because I found my options kind of got bigger when I had conversations with other people.

Cecil: Oh God, yeah totally, totally expanded.

Jay: So I was like I could do it like that, or like that, or I could do a bit of that and a bit of that, and like work myself out that way really.

Cecil: They were generally on their own... On their own without any people, like any kind of support networks, and if I hadn't had any other trans people supporting me, I have no idea where I'd be now. I'd probably be living as a butch lesbian or something going around being really depressed or something, that's probably what I'd be because I wouldn't have been able to... like... there are so few options.

Jay: Well, I think it's very different for you have been given, to be exposed to the trans options, like I wasn't, when I was your age.

Cecil: The Internet has so opened that up so much. I joined Mermaids I think when I was 13. And that was awful! [Laughter] Oh it wasn't awful, it wasn't awful, but it was a bit urrgggh!

Jay: It wasn't dangerous or damaging?

Cecil: It wasn't dangerous or damaging, it was just a bit...

Jay: It could have been so much better...

Cecil: You know, yeah. It could have been done better. And I kind of hated that it was called Mermaids, I was like urch! I don't want to be a Mermaid! Why would I want to be a Mermaid? This is stupid! But I mean that's how I met Neil and that's how I found out about Sci:identity and that's why I'm here now. If I hadn't done that, I have no idea what my life would be... my life would be totally different.

Kris: I agree. I can imagine. I go to school as a guy and... the school is fine with that. They have my records as female, but they're perfectly fine with me going to school as a guy. And I can't even like... it's weird for me that they'll do that but I can't even imagine a world where like this is... It's so different from how I used to live but ... that this is something I wouldn't like... I mean I would have been... I don't know what I would have done if they hadn't let me do it. Which I mean, I suppose there are things I would have done, but...

Jay: I mean there's definitely, like you can, you know, live, I don't know there's just that... I suppose the problem with these documentaries is when the emphasis is on surgery and changing and physical changing and stuff, people don't think there's an option to kind of like change your name, go to school as your chosen gender, your preferred gender or whatever...

[overlapping conversations]

Sam: The psychiatrist said something like, and if we decide that you can pass in society... Well, loads of trans people... you don't know if you're going to pass or not.

Cecil: I know loads of non-trans guys who are read as female all the time. I've got this friend called M_, he's one inch taller than me, he's got blonde hair that long, and him and his girlfriend are being mistaken for lesbians all the time. If he was trans and he went to the psychiatrist and he had long blonde hair they would be like – cut it off. You've got to have short hair or you can't pass.

Jay: Yeah, that is one thing that is still quite common isn't it. You couldn't be a trans man and go with really long hair.

Carl: I know a man that's got hair down to here.

Jay: But does he go to Charing Cross?

Cecil: You've got to get it right in their eyes as opposed to just having the confidence to correct people. You have to fit like... you have to be more... like the way he was being.. the psychiatrist was being, you have to be like a woman in this...you have to fulfil these criteria of being a woman.

Sam: And yet what is a woman?

Cecil: Other women are accepted just as women because they are, and that's it, and there's nothing more to it. And then with you, you have to fulfil these criteria of what a woman is and if you don't fulfil them then you're not.

Mary: Yeah and justify it all the time.

Cecil: Yeah, but why?

- Jay: I mean that is the main contradiction within trans people isn't it? Because on the one hand you say no one really knows what it's like to be a woman, it's how you feel on the inside and all of that stuff, but still we're all psychiatrists and trans people invested in expressing some gender codes and signifiers so we can live in the world and be read as the gender we want to be read as, so that inner/outer thing always contradicts itself.
- Carl: I think a lot of people when they first transition they probably try and overcompensate a bit. I think I was probably like that and I've relaxed a bit more. I think that's bound to happen for a couple of years or something.
- Cecil: And for a long time, I think I've probably ever since I've had any kind of sexual orientation I think I've probably been bisexual the entire time. But for a long time I was like I could just be attracted to females because that allowed me to have a male role. And once I became more comfortable with myself and thought, oh ok, I am a guy and that's fine. I can be attracted to whoever the hell I want to be and it's not got anything to do with that, I became more comfortable with that, and I became more comfortable with the parts of me that were feminine, and I think that a lot of people have that experience, that feeling of being, there are parts of me that are feminine and parts of me that are flamboyant sometimes, and I don't have to be Grrrrr manly... I'm not like that.
- Carl: Shall I just query? You said then... so were you afraid of... let me get this right... were you a bit cautious of being attracted to women? No I mean attracted to men, because that makes you feel, oh because that made you feel like you're more female if you're attracted to men?
- Cecil: Yeah. It was like, because I hated the idea of... actually the whole idea of sexual relationships between friends... you see, you've got the boyfriend and the girlfriend. And if you're not... and if I had a girlfriend then I could be the boyfriend, but if I had a boyfriend I'd have to be the girlfriend.
- Carl: Everyone would think you were the girlfriend if you had a boyfriend, yeah.
- Cecil: And I don't... and that was what I was opposed to. Not men, not males. I wasn't opposed to being attracted to males, it was the role that was attached to that...

Carl: Because people always say it's separate but actually it's not separate, that's what I think.

Cecil: They're separate but they're not.

Carl: They're separate but they are very closely related.

Jay: I think it's harder to be pre 'T' gay guy, isn't it?

Cecil: Well, I'm not gay and I'm seeing a girl at the moment so that's okay, but like, ooh I'm justifying myself! But I think it would be difficult and I've thought people on the scene I'm attracted to and thought about going to approach them and thinking no, I don't want to, I don't want to be anyone's girlfriend, that's not what I want to be and I feel like I can be... it's much easier.

Jay: But I suppose my point is, after you take testosterone maybe you'd be more...

Cecil: Oh yeah yeah yeah I know. I know gay trans guys who are in relationships with guys and it's fine, but it's just not... and first it's just... I don't want to be read as the woman in a couple...

Carl: I found it quite challenging, when I met people who'd come to the group who hadn't had the transition or taken hormones but were in relationships with men, and I found that... I just thought how the hell did they do that? Because there's a few that are...

Daniel: It just felt like, being with a man made you feel female, and just wrong.

Carl: Exactly, yeah.

Sam: I just went out with the first, the most feminine girl I could find for a few months, and then after that I was like, that was just really stupid. But at the time it kind of made sense... She was a lesbian until the week after we split up. *[Laughs]*

Cecil: Yeah, actually, mine was bisexual before she met me, and then a lesbian when we were together, and then bisexual again after we split up! Yeah, great experience there.

· 'T' is a colloquial term for testosterone.

Jay: I used to always go out with straight girls and it's just the most masochistic thing you can do I think.

[Overlapping conversations]

Mary: My partner is bisexual but we've been together over 30 years, so I think it does work sometimes. Other times it doesn't.

Cecil: It's interesting how they're tied together. People say like gender and sexual orientation, and it is important to know that not every trans guy is straight, and trans women are straight, you know you're not just transitioning so you can be heterosexual... So it's important you know, you have to get rid of that idea, but at the same time, they do have a lot to do with each other.

[Overlapping conversations]

Kris: Because being a lesbian or being a gay man is non-gender typical.

[Not clear who is speaking] Yeah, exactly, it's a form of gender variance so...

Kris: In general typical men and typical women aren't attracted to the same sex, so in a way it's being un-gender typical.

Cecil: And so if you're a trans guy but you're gay you're not fitting into this role of perfect maleness that you're supposed to conform to, so that you can prove yourself, you're not proving yourself because you're not straight.

Carl: Well, that's an area which has definitely improved in the NHS. I've got a friend who's trans and who identifies as gay and he's a drag queen and there aren't very many of those and he's been approved for treatment at Charing Cross.

Mary: It's very interesting how we have to label all these kinds of sexuality as well as gender identity. And I'm a trans woman. I don't have to see myself as a heterosexual woman. I'm just me. With my sexuality.

Jay: I find it hard to say I'm heterosexual I find it difficult... But if people read me as that then it's fine.

Documentary: **Lucy: Teen Transsexual** (2007)

Date: Thursday, 5 February 2009

Attended: Jordan and James

James: I like the way that they're sympathetic about Lucy, and give you lots of information about like when they're doing the surgery, what they're doing and how they're doing it. But they have a lot of statistics there which I don't know if they're still up to date or anything, but I was just like wondering where they got their statistics from and things like that.

Jay: Was there anything in particular that you remember thinking, hmmm?

James: Things like 'the average woman worries about their body every 15 minutes' and also some statistics about how many transsexuals there are... they sometimes have statistics about how teenagers view their body, or how anyone views their body. But I like the way they make Lucy sound like a girl. Like they said 'women worry about their body every 15 minutes' and they're kind of comparing Lucy to them, like they're the same.

Jay: A bit part of it was about her body and her body image and it was quite well contextualised within 'regular' teenage stuff, rather than the idea of being a transsexual and being a bit too over...

James: It's very stereotypical though, it makes me feel a bit weird, a bit like a 40 year old, because I know I'm not exactly a teenager any more but I wasn't exactly like that then, but I suppose everybody is different. But then they...

Jay: But is that something to do with femininity rather than masculinity maybe?

James: But I think they were portraying young people as... it was being very general as well as it applying to Lucy. It feels like... I don't know where that was filmed, but the culture was different as well, if she lives in a place where people party more or something.

Jay: So what you're saying is, her lifestyle is really not like yours?

James: Basically. But I'm a bit sort of old and boring anyway. *[Laughs]*

Jay: What did you think Jordan?

Jordan: I think my main impression is how hard it is for families. I thought that was a really good picture of a family struggling with it. How we sweep our families along with us. I actually don't agree with James, about young women, I mean I didn't do it either, but young women certainly, when you see girls, it seems like from the age of 8 now, they're very obsessed with how they look, looking the right way, make-up and clothes and all that stuff...

When I first met trans women it surprised me, and I don't know why it should have done, but just that trans women were feminine in a way that I never was. And just how cool that was really. That they are women and we are men, and actually that's quite cool isn't it?

James: I think they're a bit stereotypical, because I know that there are men and there are women, but some people don't exactly feel very feminine although they are girls and some people don't feel very masculine even though they're boys, and it's kind of like putting everything in black and white terms. Because I know that in the trans community there are lots of different gender identities and things and it's kind of portraying that there aren't any other genders than two genders.

Jordan: I think that's a bit where her family is – Middlesbrough, working class, you know. How could she have been exposed to genderqueer, she just wouldn't have come across it. Her family with very clear binary roles, you know.

James: I suppose to get it out to the public, they need to be very...because it's about her feeling totally female, so they have to portray it as men and women, or people will get confused, because they're already confused enough with different transitions.

Jordan: I think actually they just told her story. I mean, I don't think they made it look in a certain way.

James: But I mean like, sort of in these documentaries in general as well, because I've never seen a documentary that isn't very very gender...

Jordan: Oh I have. Have you not seen *Gendernauts*?

James: No, I haven't seen that.

Jay: I don't think *Gendernauts* has been on the telly, it's more... I think I've got the video actually. Or it's in the... it was in the library. I kind of know what you mean in some ways, it's like if you think about the trans community and there are some trans women aren't there, who celebrate their femininity and it's like who they are, and that's fine, but there are also some trans women who fight against that stereotype of having to be that girly or feminine. They're women but they want to wear trousers, and I think it took a long time for psychiatrists to accept that. And this obviously, this representation, and obviously she is being herself, it's not like she's trying to be anything else, but it is interesting that they chose her.

James: I like the way that they asked questions to her family members like they're kind of portraying peoples different emotions, because like her mum's concerns were she was just like afraid for Lucy, but then Lucy was talking about her granddad being... she was afraid to come out to him because of what the males in her family would say. So I liked that they asked the granddad questions as well, even though her might not have been fine with it.

Jordan: It was interesting though that he was the only man that was shown. Even at Lucy's party it was all women, they never showed any of the male family members.

Jay: What did you think of that then? Why did you think that was interesting?

James: Well, because are there no other men in the family? And yet when she was talking to her granddad she was saying she was afraid of coming out to the men in the family but her dad never gets mentioned so maybe he's not around. But she has cousins so her aunt must be married. Or maybe her aunt's husband is dead too, I don't know.

Jay: So, in some ways, the negative side of that is suggesting that men are more transphobic or have got a much more difficult relationship to trans people.

James: But is that only like, maybe to trans women? Or does that apply to trans men as well? I suppose the people that I've talked to, the trans men or trans women, or anyone basically, is that men are not really the people to talk to. People don't really talk to their dads, they talk to their mums for advice and things, especially girls. So it seems like women are more for talking about your emotions and things if you want to talk.

Jay: How does that compare to your situation then?

James: Yeah, that's the same as well. I talk to my mum about things. Because my dad, he's supportive but he doesn't say much, he's not really in tune with his emotions like my mum is.

Jay: And so can you imagine him being interviewed for a documentary and being happy about that? Or maybe your mum would be a bit more...

James: He would talk on it but he wouldn't say much, he'd just be like, he'd be a little bit like that granddad on there kind of, oh yeah, it's good, I get a bit confused sometimes but they're my child and... because he gets the name wrong and stuff sometimes, but it's not that he doesn't care, he just doesn't pay much attention or something. I'm not really sure, I can't really get inside his head.

Jay: How about you? Does it compare to the coming out to your family in terms of gender experience?

Jordan: I was just thinking about that when James was talking because my parents weren't around. I've talked most to my sister I suppose about it, but even then we haven't really talked very much about how I feel. My brothers and cousins and stuff, it's funny, I used to occasionally get invited to cousin's parties and stuff, but I never do any more. But everyone seems quite friendly about it. One of the cousins who lives in Exeter always says, oh you must come down and visit us this year, but I never go. My brothers always talk about themselves, they don't usually ask about me, but they were like that before so I don't think that's changed, they just aren't very good at talking.

I loved the way in that film that Lucy seems to have grown up with a bunch of women, there are actually quite a lot of women in her life, whereas there weren't men in my life really.

Jay: That's interesting. You definitely get that sense of camaraderie or whatever. It's like a kind of buzz from...

Jordan: Her 18th birthday party was great, wasn't it, with all her cousins around the same age as her.

Jay: Why do you think her mum was so emotional? Like we see her upset but she doesn't really articulate it does she?

James: I think it's she was remembering when Lucy was Richard and his 16th and how it's moved on from there. Maybe she was thinking how Lucy must have felt, and maybe a feeling of guilt sometimes.

Jay: That her child went through all of that for so long sort of thing?

James: Yeah, because she wasn't aware, so she probably feels a bit guilty even though she couldn't really have helped if Lucy didn't say anything.

Jordan: My gut feeling is that she's more afraid about the future. Because it's... you know, any parent wants their child... actually it makes me think of J_ because J_ and Lucy are quite similar I think, in there kind of emotionality, and wanting something so badly, and then even when they've got it it's still not good enough, you know? So all the fuss about Lucy having her surgery...

Jay: I know, it's hard isn't it because her mum's paying for her surgery.

Jordan: And it's a huge amount of money

Jay: And you want her to be a bit grateful.

Jordan: But I think Lucy's mum is a bit like... Is she actually going to have a life? She's going through these huge changes and she must be really really aware, especially comparing Lucy with her cousins, how little Lucy's lived yet, and is she actually going to manage to do it.

James: The thing is right, trans people, or like a lot of people that want something, like Lucy, you think that your life is going to be so much better and that you're going to be so happy when you're living in your right gender or you've changed your name, or I'll be really happy when I've had that surgery. But even after you've got what you want you still feel down sometimes, you still have the same kind of feelings, even though you're happier in yourself, and you're much happier maybe than you were before, just in general how you feel about yourself and things, but you're still going to feel basically the same emotions. Life's not suddenly loads better just because you've got what you want and it's not going to become like a heaven all of a sudden,

Jay: I think that's one of the benefits of talking as a community isn't it and hearing that. Because obviously that's a powerful thing to say to someone who's just come into it. When you can't see the wood for the trees and you just want that next thing.

Jordan: It does really piss me off about these documentaries when somebody who is so isolated from other trans people like Lucy, they don't actually say, how about meeting some other trans women? You know, people who've already been through this. Her only contact from the trans community was the woman on Big Brother... When you think of all the trans women's groups that there are all over the UK, there must be one in Middlesbrough.

Jay: Or even online. But I don't know, it's always such a... it's never talked about. You always get the same story which is one person going through this on their own, with their family, negotiating all of that...

Jordan: And where's everybody else?

Jay: Because I think she's been on Nuttycats, Carl was telling me

James: She used to be on Mermaids when I was on there as well. Apparently, a friend says that she says she regrets being on the documentary because a lot of people know and things.

Jay: Now people recognise her in the streets. Yeah, that's interesting, isn't it...

Jordan: So then that is kind of made by the documentary makers then isn't it, in that they've decided on the particular story and they've decided they're not going to show... I guess because it's more dramatic isn't it? Somebody on their own.

Jay: What does it do? Just to picture somebody on their own? I think it makes them out to be sad creatures then. You wouldn't want to be one. So it's a double thing, on the one hand you see them and you think, oh that's me, you can recognise yourself, on the other hand you can think, she's on her own, her life's not very good...

Jordan: They keep showing pictures of her on her own in her room with her cat. And yet she's got this big family of women around her.

James: The good thing is she's documenting it, I've seen other documentaries where the actual trans person is documenting it, but she gets to say what she wants...

Jay: Yeah on the video diary...

James: But also it's very negative, a lot of the stuff... and that's because it's like their opinion. I suppose it's like getting the feelings out, but then some people won't look at the positive sides. Say like people who are trans who are watching it... it kind of makes you think about your own life and how it relates to that and it kind of makes you dwell on in the past a bit. So maybe if it was a bit more positive, like the positive things about being trans, like the community and things, then it kind of would make you think about moving forward rather than dwelling on the past. But I suppose that's also to make society see that, how hard it is, because it is very hard, and you shouldn't disguise that because I think some people underestimate how hard it is to be trans sometimes, all the misunderstanding and things.

Jay: So it is important that it's not just a straightforward thing and it's not like you just wake up one day. And they always say that, it's a very serious thing that's going to take a long time don't they. But there's nothing positive about being trans really. It's just like people accept her and her life is going on. There was a positive kind of tone I thought, compared to others. I thought on the whole it was quite upbeat. There were actually funny moments, like when she got really drunk...

James: That's what I like about the video diary, that it catches her personality, not just that she's trans, it's about her as well.

Jay: Yeah, that's nice... To give a whole hour on one person is quite unusual I suppose isn't it? And they made a second one as well and they followed her, which I've got online actually, you can download it, but I haven't finished seeing it...

Because it said about the Nadia thing, which I think is quite interesting, seeing someone on telly made you realise you were trans, and I just wondered if either of you had had that experience as well, or how did you find out that trans existed? Was it through a telly programme?

James: I thought about how I hated trying to live as a girl for some time, and one day I thought , that's it and I typed in 'sex change' into Google and all this stuff came up and I found some websites and things and I thought, hmmm yeah, that's me, but they're saying many things, like under transgender. Because I thought there were either men or women and I was a bit like, well there's transgender or there's transsexual, I think I could possibly live as male but not have surgery and things like that. Or be a bit more in between so that I didn't have to do so much and thinking how I could possibly live. But I did kind of think that I was an actual transsexual. Then that night there was a documentary on called 'Teen Transsexuals' and I watched that and I instantly knew that I was a transsexual and it was really good. It's quite amazing that that came on that evening as well because there's not usually that much stuff on

Jay: So did that confirm things for you?

James: Yeah definitely. I just instantly knew. So I pursued that and then I came out to my family a couple of months or three months after that. I came out to my mum because my mum's quite easy to talk to, even though I had to build up for a long time before I actually told her. So she knew for a while and then she told my dad, because she always tells him everything. *[Laughs]* I know that's bad but I'd said, you won't tell anyone will you, and she was like, no, no I won't tell anyone. But I suppose, looking back, I was 18 at that time which was kind of quite young. But looking back I thought it was quite selfish or me to tell her not to tell anyone. Because then she'd be on her own. But that's part of the good things about being trans, it makes you aware more of other people's feelings and things, and trying to put yourself in their shoes. And being more understanding because we talk a lot. And I talk a lot with my family and stuff now which I didn't so much before. So that's a good thing.

Jay: Yeah, yeah, that's really good. That's a good story. How about you Jordan? Can you remember?

Jordan: I was really distressed in therapy for ages and started talking about my fantasies. I was in one-to-one but in the group there was a woman from New Zealand who was like 6ft tall. The first time I can really remember talking about having the sex change was just something that was... I think at the time I was feeling... I had kind of come to terms with the fact that the fantasy me inside was me. That was what it was about. I was just feeling even more fucked up than usual because of that on top of everything else, and ultra-

dysfunctional. And then I think I was saying, well it would be all right if I was as big as L_. I think maybe my therapist said something like would you think about having a sex change and I said if I was as big as L_ I would, something like that, and then I started looking around actually and saw that there were lots of guys my size. So I went online and I still had long hair then, and I was thinking about having a haircut and I think I googled something like 'boys haircuts for girls' or something like that and found this passing site in America, and looking around there and thinking, what's passing? And then I think it was for drag kings kind of thing, but that was what I found my way to FTM London's website. And I don't know if you remember but I sent you an email and you wrote back to me and you actually sent me a newsletter and it had a picture of you and F_ at Pride and that was really mind blowing actually. Just that picture. And that was what got me to that August meeting.

Jay: I never knew that. You never told me that. That's really sweet.

Jordan: Yeah, and then you weren't at the August meeting because you were away. But that was when I met Carl and he lent me Holly Devor's book and I just read it in about a week, and that's what really did that kind of clunk, because there were so many... not just one person's story, but so many bits of people's stories. But it's also a bit depressing as well, because it's not very positive about relationships and sex lives and stuff like that and actually I've seen much more since that, so it was good. Then I met Jack and Daniel at a picnic in Greenwich Park, so I ended up talking to them a lot.

Jay: So you were like totally pulled into the community straight off really.

James: Support groups are such a massive part really, especially when someone's first seeking help. Just the impact that a support group can have on someone. For me FTM London was like my second home for a long time because it was a place where I could just go to be me. The people there made such a difference. I don't want to get all sentimental or anything!
[Laughs]

Jordan: I can still remember the first night you came because you got there and you said, it's the first time I've been on a train on my own. I think that's what you said wasn't it? And I asked Jack to take you back to Paddington.

James: Yeah, the guys at FTM London meant so much to me for such a long time, especially Jordan. And I would spend my time when I wasn't at the meetings, just generally, like after college and stuff, I'd go on websites when I got home and spent a lot of time just researching trans things and talking on forums, because that's where I could go to be me. Outside that, even in my family, I felt like I had to be somebody else, but I could finally be me on the computer.

Jordan: I had the advantage of living on my own so I didn't, you know...

James: I remember hiding, every time someone came past the computer screen I was like 'don't look!' because I didn't want them to see what I was doing. I didn't want anyone to see my computer screen for ages but I think that they kind of gradually hooked on to what I was doing, and my brother kept making remarks like, Oh, I 'd wear a shirt like that, or Hi dude, and I was like, I think he knows. I told them, but I told them very dramatically, but I think that's another story.

Jay: Well, maybe we'll have time for that later. Ok, a lot of the thing about Lucy as well... let's talk about her relationship with her body. We talked about it a little bit but... what did you think about that?

James: I think that if she was a little bit maybe maturer, she would try and think and maybe see the positives in her body. Because a lot of it was I hate this or I hate that... because everybody hates a certain bit of their body maybe, and just see the positive bits, like, I don't know. Like she could have said I like rubbish breasts but I have nice hair or something, I don't know. When she was preparing for surgery you know, I thought that she would be so happy, but she was like, oh, I don't know if I'm going to go through with it, and it's just like, to have that chance though, because if she'd been born in maybe like a poorer country or something...

Jay: She may not have the money, yeah. So do you think there's a relationship there with her age and her body? Because in a way... it was just represented like she was just a normal teenager, preoccupied with her looks...

[Overlapping conversation]

James: Depending on the individual, like how they see things. Some teenagers, although they might act a bit immature sometimes, they have good logical minds, like to think about...

Jay: I mean, she was quite articulate wasn't she in the way that she spoke. I wouldn't describe her as immature or anything...

Jordan: If you look at the other women in her family though, they're all... you know... I mean, her mum with her hairstyles, and her cousin... that women should wear make-up and have a hairstyle, that was absolutely the culture that she was growing up in so and it doesn't surprise me that she was very obsessed with how she looked. And when I kind of compare me and Johnny, you know he is totally obsessed with his clothes and how he looks, and would rather be freezing cold than, you know, be unfashionable in his eyes. Whereas what I wear, as long as I'm covered up and you know, fairly tidy and clean, then it just doesn't bother me at all, I haven't got the energy for that, but isn't that because... because that was what I was like before as well. That's what my family was like pretty much and people weren't very very clothes conscious.

Jay: But J_ must have come from a very different...

Jordan: But still very clothes conscious, well ok, women have to cover up outside, but in the home, people are very...

James: Maybe that helped Lucy though to see that she was trans? Because if she came from a family that was very much you can look however you want, you don't have to look girly or masculine, then maybe she wouldn't have had to think about it so much and to come to the conclusion that she was trans.

Jordan: No, I think she was... I mean even when she was a little girl she knew she was a girl, didn't she?

James: Yeah but, because a lot of people don't transition until they're much older, because they don't realise, and hadn't thought about it in their mind I guess...

Jay: I mean, she was like very definite, wasn't she?

Jordan: I mean, her mum was saying even when she was four she was crying her eyes out.

James: I mean, if it was me, when I was young I wore very boyish clothes and looked kind of very boyish, and because my mum had always told me that girls are allowed to be very boyish and you don't have to be exactly in a set.. you don't have to look like everybody else, you're allowed to be individual, so I guess I always knew that I felt like a boy, but I thought that I could maybe just kind of... I don't know...

Jordan: Society doesn't accept little boys dressed like girls do they? But they do let little girls dress like little boys. I mean it's really different.

Jay: But I kind of get what you mean as well like, you know, you understood that... cos Carl always says the same doesn't he? He thought that he could just be a very masculine woman and he found his place in different places around that...

James: I did make up boys names for myself when I was very young because I hated having a female name though, but I thought, I suppose I thought that as I was a child it didn't matter that much, that I could worry about it when I was older. And then it kind of... when I got to a teenager it kind of all got a bit more confusing. And so I tried to like push my thoughts away, but that didn't help. It just came back.

Jay: So we didn't really get whether she had done that, whether she had tried to push it away and it had come back or if she was always very...

James: I think she was always very... I think she didn't try and push her feelings out of her head but she tried to not let anyone else know her feelings.

Jay: Because she did have that period didn't she when she was very sullen. Well, Richard was kind of very...

Jordan: Well, they mentioned that she didn't have the language for it for a long time. She was seeing a psychotherapist and didn't actually know the language until she saw Nadia and then said, this is me. I mean, that's the case, I mean certainly my discomfort about being a woman didn't get framed into the language of being trans until really late on because I just didn't know it was possible to think that way about myself. So it's like, if you don't have the

language, but people are... but you know, the chances of being exposed to the descriptive language are much better now, aren't they? I mean, people shouldn't get to my age and never have heard about gender reassignment. Which is good.

Jay: Yeah, I mean I didn't have that language until quite late either really. Even though I'd seen programmes on the telly I hadn't had the 'clunk' until years later really. It's interesting. What about her sexuality and the scene around when she went on that date and she didn't tell the man and something awful could have happened and that was all a bit alarming and then he ended up being quite horrible to her anyway, didn't he?

James: It kind of... I like the way that it tells about kind of teenagers' life really. Like, the way they feel about things. Like a lot of older people might have forgotten like how they think differently from older people. Probably like me still as well. I still think of how I look and things like that as really important and um, so yeah, but it's kind of, everyone has problems of like feeling lonely and things, but like if you're trans it's kind of exaggerated. And especially with Lucy and she's kind of like a bit shy and things and she just wanted to go out on a date, and then that happened. But then, I kind of... he was probably a jerk anyway, he was probably horrible.

Jay: It wasn't really resolved was it, in terms of... I mean, she did... I mean, it's interesting in terms of how she did her emotions, because she's quite like quite emotional at times wasn't she, and she was absolutely devastated when he texted her and then she got very angry towards him and that was the only thing that kind of Sam said, well, like he was probably a jerk anyway.

James: I think if she just forgot about, like stopped texting him, just moved on maybe, if he just stopped texting her...

Jordan: Yeah, no, desperation makes people take huge risks doesn't it? Luckily she was safe.

Jay: But what kind of messages is that sending I wonder around how trans people can have ... I mean whether anyone will ever actually love trans people?

James: Yeah, it's kind of saying that if you're trans you're going to lead a miserable lonely life, with like nobody else. It's the same as what my dad thought when he first found out I was trans. Apparently she was talking to my mum, cos like they'd discuss things, and he was like, apparently he said that nobody would want to go out with me if I like turned into a boy. And it was like... that's kind of a misconception... it's kind of... they're strengthening that, what people think on the documentary because usually people get like more confident, more in themselves, and then they don't all like me, I've had lots more like boyfriends than... I only had one before I transitioned, and now like, it's just like confidence, being who you are, because trans people, before they transition usually they kind of lock themselves away like Lucy did...

Jay: So you got more opportunities you're saying?

James: Yeah, I'm not like a slag or anything, I mean like, I just feel like I could go out with who I wanted to.

Jay: What do you think, Jordan?

Jordan: Yeah, no, I mean I'm just thinking about me and the stories that I've heard at FTM London as well, it does seem to divide into people who, well there does seem to be two broad groups of people really, who feel better being recognised as a boy and just get on with it, and people who still struggle, I don't think it's about trans, it's about self-confidence generally, and just maybe messages that you've grown up with about sex and relationships and stuff like that, so I don't think it's just the trans-ness but just that some people it allows them to blossom and get out there and get involved and that other people really struggle. Very hard to advise on how to meet people you know, because there's that other stuff going on too, it's like... and then it doesn't help that you haven't got the right body, and I think in... I was gonna say something but I don't think it's true... I was gonna say that I wonder if trans women... maybe if their surgical results are good, their bodies obviously fit better, I don't know, or whether... because even if you've got a good phalloplasty you still have to pump it up don't you. And you can never get away from the fact that it doesn't actually erect properly. But if your self-confidence is good enough then none of that matters anyway, because you'll find a way to have sex anyway.

James: I think it's different things, just dating people, and actually a physical relationship, although they can kind of tie in...

Jordan: I'm not sure though. Because I mean just thinking about me... meeting people is actually harder. If I can meet somebody who's interested in going to bed, then that's not a problem, it's the actual going out there and meeting somebody.

James: Mine's kind of the opposite.

Jay: And you're saying for you it's the other way around Jordan? That's interesting.

Jordan: And I think for her, I mean it would be interesting to see the second film, did you say you'd watched it all the way through?

Jay: I've not seen it, but I think it's interesting, the only thing that I know about it is that- and Carl told me this- on Nutty Cats she was wondering whether to do the second documentary but I think that she goes to Thailand doesn't she to have her gender reassignment surgery, and I think they pay for it, so that was one of the reasons why she did it, which I thought was interesting, but I don't know if that's actually true or not, or whether I've even got like a sort of...

Jordan: I think I'd heard that she went to Thailand. So it was confusing to see whatshisface... the British surgeon.

Jay: And I reckon that they pay to go and see those surgeons as well, for the consultation scenes and stuff like that. Because it seems... well, I don't know, it's just a speculation I suppose. But like, if she's not quite ready... I mean it's good for her to find out what GRS is and bla bla bla, but she's gonna be even two years away from affording that probably, or getting it in any... whether you would actually go and have that conversation? Maybe you would.

Jordan: I think it would be really interesting to find out now how she's getting on in terms of whether she's done her beauty course and whether she's getting proper boyfriends now. That would be really good.

James: Some of those scenes were really filmed and they were really like acting. You know like when her mum says, oh I'm paying for you to get your upper surgery, and she was like, oh, that's great. I think that was so put on.

Jay: I was going to say that. That was on my list as well, because there was some bits where the family almost interviewed each other didn't they? And there was an element of artificiality about it all and stuff.

James: Yeah, Lucy's not that expressive anyway, but like the way that she goes, I'm so happy, that makes me feel really happy, and she doesn't look happy, it would have been better if she was like, oh... oh, yeah.

Jay: And so do you think that they set that up to film?

James: Yeah, I think because if it was just her saying that straight away to Lucy, they wouldn't be able to predict what she was going to say, or she could have said something and they'd have filmed that and it was like, something they couldn't show. Maybe because she didn't want them to show it or maybe because they didn't think it was appropriate. So maybe they just redid it.

Jordan: Yeah. I'm sure some of that stuff must happen when they're not around, you know... and I'm sure her mother must be amazing if when Lucy was having the ab flabs about having the chest surgery her mother wasn't saying aaarrggghhh I've borrowed all of this money and now you're not going to have the surgery?! I mean if she hadn't got angry she's got to be a saint!

Jay: But some of that as well, because I always think, because the voiceover is the one that says – Lucy is going into her surgery, it's an hour away but she's still not absolute sure – and I was thinking, I'm sure she's sure by now... There's an element of drama that they just put in I think to make it all a bit... But also I mean sometimes, it makes you think do I actually like this person? Because when she was doing her video diary as well, she was saying, I'm gonna cry now and stuff, and it was almost like I didn't believe her, at all. And I had not very much sympathy for her, because of just, she seemed to be so performing for the cameras sometimes. But I mean I did like her, obviously.

Jordan: She's 17. I mean she's a baby, isn't she?

James: But I mean some people are like that anyway. Like they'll say something just because there's a camera or a certain person there and stuff like that. And also people, well some people, a lot of people, when you meet them you kind of know what they're about. And like, you know when they're excited because they express it like people do. But sometimes you meet someone and you can think they're being really horrible to you, but then later on when you know them better, you just realise that's how they are and they've got nothing against you.

Jay: Yeah, just their behaviour and like reading them... I suppose when you just see it on telly though it's a bit different isn't it, 'cos you just think... like it was weird that... yeah, like what you said, that she was like, yeah, that makes me feel very happy, I can't tell you, but she was just totally monotone doing that, so it's hard to read what actually is going on. How would you describe the general mood of the documentary then? Like the tone and the...

James: Well, they have some happy things and some negative things. It's kind of mixed.

Jay: Do you think it was balanced?

James: I think maybe there was, I don't know well they said negative things sometimes but not in a, well you might as well kill yourself kind of way. It expresses some of the negative things about being trans but they then kind of follow it with a positive thing. But maybe it was a bit more negative because there are a lot of negative things in trans people's lives and they've only got an hour to say it so they can't put... so they have to just... yeah, they can't put everything that's positive in there as well.

Jay: Yeah, it needs to be balanced.

Jordan: Yeah, I thought they balanced it as much as they could but it must be very tricky making something like that that will actually read like a story, because people's lives aren't like stories are they? It's kind of stop and go. I mean, I guess they were lucky in choosing her because it must be a real risk when they do those kind of over time documentaries because actually you haven't got a clue, you know, she could have topped herself or you know, decide not to go ahead after all, or you know, so...

James: And people change as well, like, some teenagers, they don't always know how they feel. Like me included, when I was like younger, I was like, you don't always know, how you feel one minute you might be... and especially just starting on hormones as well you might be up and down. Things like that.

Jay: Yeah. That's like saying it was a bit of a gamble for the documentary makers. It was interesting that thing you said about story, because if you think about documentaries they're not really supposed to be kind of narrative driven are they? But this I think definitely was, compared to other ones that we've watched.

James: It was very much going through the stories of their life.

Jay: You wouldn't describe it as scientific for example.

James: No.

Jordan: No. I think it feels a little bit like... I mean, I didn't actually notice enough, because sometimes you can sort of tell with hairstyles whether people have actually had to go back and do a bit again because they realised they needed it, you know to make the story run. Or if they can do it with just voiceover.

Jay: I think it flowed quite well, didn't it? The story was very conventional. The trans story was there, it wasn't like... apart from her maybe being younger. That was the only thing that was slightly different to all the other trans documentaries.

James: There are some... there's been like more teen trans documentaries lately, like the BBC... had something like called *Crazy?* And someone I know from Mermaids is doing a documentary at the moment they're filming and things. There was that *Escaping My Female Body* and *Teen Transsexuals*. So that was pretty much...

Jay: *Escaping My Female Body* is the same series as this one. I think it's BBC3. But yeah, *Teen Transsexuals* I think was Channel 4, I'm not sure... I haven't got that, I'd like to see that again. What did you think of the psychiatrist?

James: I can't remember which one he was.

Jay: It was the woman, wasn't it?

Jordan: Blonde.

James: She was... I liked her understanding. I think she said it was not a choice and things like that so... some of the counsellors I've been to are like totally, totally, really bad. Because, well because one of them I was paying for and she just told me anything that I wanted to hear and basically didn't give me any advice whatsoever. She just listened and went, mmm, mmm. I could have just talked to myself for an hour or whatever it was. And the next one was on the NHS, my GP recommended her and she was a counsellor on the NHS, and she was like really bad. She just didn't understand what trans was at all. She just thought that I wanted to be a boy but was actually a woman. And she told me, oh you're a really pretty woman, why do you want to be a boy for? And things like that. And that was just like yeah, really bad.

Jay: That's not so good. I suppose this woman here though was a bit more further down the line in terms of she was a specialist...

James: Yeah she was good...

Jordan: I don't know.

Jay: Can you remember now? She wasn't in it much.

Jordan: Yeah, no I mean... just you know, comparing the way she was with... You know, I've been in therapy for years and years so...

James: She didn't really say that much. She was supportive. But didn't actually say that much about the actual condition or anything.

Jordan: I mean, I think because when I was deciding about stuff, it wasn't somebody else making the decision for me. You know, and certainly psychotherapy in my life has never been about him making decisions for me or even helping me make a decision. It's always been, you know, I can certainly talk stuff through with him but it always relates back to, you know, where I've come from, because that's the context of my making decisions and stuff like that. So I find that kind of therapy that obviously hasn't been that way at all very confusing. I don't actually know why they call it psychotherapy because it's

much more like the way that psychiatrists work, and I didn't get the sense that they'd actually had any...

Jay: Actually was she a psychiatrist or a psychotherapist?

Jordan: Well, they said psychotherapist, I'm sure they did.

Jay: Oh right, okay. You mean in terms of her literally diagnosing her as trans and doing all that and basically sort of...

Jordan: And they didn't seem to have what I would see as a therapist's relationship, in terms of you having spent a lot of time talking about other stuff. You know, because it's only because, from my experience being trans was just, and is still, just a tiny bit of who I am, not everything, and it couldn't possibly be the focus of therapy, you know, in that way, because there's loads of other stuff as well. You know, just like when I first started even though I was very bulimic, the bulimia was never a focus of it because that's a symptom it's not a, you know, and ok, trans is a symptom but it's just a bit of who I am, it's not 100% of who I am. So I wasn't very impressed. But then it's difficult to know what role she was taking.

Jay: You didn't really see.

Jordan: No. Why do people call that relationship psychotherapy when it's very much consultant/patient rather than being therapist/therapee and it kind of bothers me a bit. Because it doesn't seem psychotherapeutic to me.

Jay: And actually, she wrote the letter didn't she to the surgeon, so it was very much about getting her onside for the medical situation definitely, so that's a good point... I thought it was quite a good documentary actually.

Jordan: Yeah. I mean, I thought it was, you know, real. A real story. And okay, some of it obviously had been a bit stage managed but I think the real people kind of came through didn't they? The mum and the cousin and her. It's interesting watching it again with other people because I saw it when it was on telly a while back but it's always interesting talking about it afterwards...