Trans youth, science and art: creating (trans) gendered space

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Abstract

This article is based on empirical research which was undertaken as part of the Sci:dentity project funded by the Wellcome Trust. Sci:dentity was a year-long participatory arts project which ran between March 2006 - March 2007. The project offered 18 young transgendered and transsexual people, aged between 14 and 22, an opportunity to come together to explore the science of sex and gender through art. This article focuses on four creative workshops which ran over two months being the 'creative engagement' phase of the project. It offers an analysis of the transgendered space created which was constituted through the logics of recognition, creativity and pedagogy. Following this, the article explores the ways in which these transgendered and transsexual young people navigate gendered practices, and the gendered spaces these practices constitute, in their everyday lives shaped by gendered and sexual normativities. It goes on to consider the significance of trans virtual and physical cultural spaces for the development of trans young peoples' ontological security and their navigations and negotiations of a gendered social world.

 Keywords: gender; transgender; transsexual; youth; arts; participatory

Introduction

This article is concerned with the direct and subtle ways that space is gendered. It is specifically concerned with the ways in which a transgendered space can be produced. i.e. a space of comfort where transgendered subjectivities can be expressed, recognised and formed. It takes as its example a UK participatory arts and research project 'Sci:dentity', which took place over a year in London. [i] An interrogation of the space Sci:dentity created is instructive in understanding ways in which social and cultural space is gendered and the consequences of that gendering for those of us who do not fit neatly within the predetermined gender categories available (Bochenek and Widney Brown 2001; Browne 2004, 2005; Butler 1999; Doan 2001, 2006, 2007; Halberstam 2005; Mason 2002). In order to consider the ways that these modalities of experience overlap and intersect, this article works across theories of bodies, genders and sexualities. A secondary focus of this article is to offer an example of the possibilities of grounding queer theory, which so often takes the trans subject as its object of inquiry, in the everyday lived experience of trans lives. Although the Sci:dentity project was small in scale and took place over a short period, an interrogation of the space created by it leads us to broader questions about the ways in which sexed, gendered and sexual normativities give shape to space and, in turn, the ways that these spaces shape bodies.

The article begins with a description of the project and an analysis of some of the art produced and discussions that took place. It identifies three significant features of the transgendered space created: the pedagogical approach at the heart of Sci:dentity, the significance of creativity as a response to science and diagnosis, and

the ethics of recognition. These are some of the key factors that meant that the project was, albeit temporarily, a transgendered space. The discussion then moves on to a consideration of feelings of 'comfort' in order to consider the consequences of being either misrecognised or unrecognised for many trans people in everyday spaces shaped by gendered and sexual normativities. In this way the article brings together empirical research into trans lives and contemporary theories of gender and space to interrogate the cultural logics of gender normativity.

Creating transgender space

Research by Doan (2007) has highlighted the limits of the inclusivity of queer spaces for trans people, and the gender normativity that operates in heterosexual and homosexual populations. Doan also highlights some the ways in which trans people are building urban communities which do not mirror the patterns of lesbian and gay residential concentrations. In the UK transgender people have been instrumental in creating trans and queer spaces organised around support, activism and the arts (such as TransLondon, FtM Network, FtM London, Transfabulous, Bar Wotever and Club Wotever, the London Transfeminist group). This organic network, albeit primarily London focussed, provides spaces of grassroots mutual support, activism, self-expression, representation, and celebration. While some of these are support spaces are aimed exclusively at trans people, others such as Wotever and Transfabulous organise regular events which bring together trans, queer and non-queer people, providing spaces that aim to be inclusive on the basis of mutual respect of difference rather than investment in identity.[ii] Sci:dentity was distinct from these spaces in two respects: firstly, it was specifically aimed at young people (who are often unable to

participate in events in licensed venues); and secondly, it was an educational participative arts project. The Wellcome Trust's[iii] generous funding allowed 18 young people, aged between 14 and 22, from across Britain and Northern Ireland, to participate.

Sci:dentity was formulated by three academics[iv] whose background was in queer theory, visual arts, participatory research and performance. Together we sought to share their knowledge and put theories of gender to work in a participative action research project. Participatory arts and research are areas where academics, artists and activists have found some common ground in working together to formulate research questions, and interrogate social and spatial issues (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Freire 1972; Hall 1982; Park 1993; Kester 1995; Kindon et al. 2007; Butler and Reiss 2007). The Sci:dentity Project embodied this participative ethos[v] combining participatory research, evaluation and art. In this spirit the participants were involved in making artwork, producing and curating an art exhibition, creating a final performance, formulating research questions and carrying out research, co-editing the documentary film about the project, training as facilitators and running outreach workshops, as well as taking part in the project's formative evaluation.

The Sci:dentity project had three main phases: first, a period of development and recruitment;[vi] and second, a creative engagement phase in which a series of arts workshops and 'science lessons' took place. During this phase a documentary film about the arts workshops was produced by one of the facilitators, in collaboration with the participants. The third phase of the project consisted of outreach workshops delivered to a variety of audiences including school and college students and

teachers, young people including LGBT youth, youth workers, arts practitioners, educationalists, activists and those working in the area of equalities and diversity policy and its delivery. In the spirit of participation some of the young people who took part in the creative workshops went on to co-facilitate the outreach workshops. The documentary film was shown in the outreach workshops with the aim of communicating the lessons of the project and the life experiences of the participants to a wide range of people, who were encountering the term 'transgender' for the first time. The outreach workshops involved predominantly (but not exclusively) non-trans young people under 22 years of age from all over the UK. This article focuses on the creative engagement phase of the project.

A participatory pedagogy

> I learnt a lot about the *lack* of scientific/medical understanding about sex,
> or rather that understanding became less of a concept and more of a reality.
> It has driven me to learn more about sex and intersex. I think it has made
> me feel less like the female assignment and characteristics I have *make* me
> female. I think once you shed the ideal images of what a man and woman
> should be away it's easier to accept your own body, when you realize there
> is no clear line. It's like ok, I'm a short, unusual guy, and there's lots of
> them about and not all of them are even trans! The challenge becomes less
> of an internal battle (mind vs. matter), more of a process of getting the
> recognition of who you are! (Paul, FtM, aged 20).[vii]

The creative engagement phase of the project combined a pedagogical exploration of science with an encouragement to respond to the certainties of science with art (see Rooke forthcoming for a discussion of the projects relational aesthetics). In 'science lessons' participants listened to presentations on the science of sex, and interviewed medical experts in the field of sex reassignment. This project explored current scientific explanations of sex and gender: such as differences in the brain, hormones and their effect on behaviour, chromosomes and their function, hormonal and surgical sex reassignment, and the moral and ethical issues this raises. The purpose of this 'science lesson' was not to simply educate young people about the science of sex and gender; rather these encounters were a way of unpicking the variety of sciences which come together to explain the idea of sex. Paul's reflection on the project speaks of how learning about the science of sex and gender impacted upon his sense of himself as a transgendered young man. Learning about degrees of intersexuality, which are erased in the reiterative gendering declaration that 'it's a boy' or 'it's a girl', prompts Paul to rethink his relationship with gender. Participants became aware of the wide variation that exists beyond the apparent chromosomal simplicity of the XX and XY binary, and the extent to which physical appearances are dependant on a combination of growth and sex hormones.

A central pedagogical aim of the project was to encourage a critical exploration of these bodies of scientific knowledge and the ways they are instrumentalised by medical practitioners such as endocrinologists, psychiatrists and surgeons in trans peoples lives as they navigate the process of being diagnosed and treated. The work of these practitioners regulates the possibilities of embodied self-realisation in the

production of coherent transsexual subjects. This occurs in the discursive production of what Butler (2001) describes as intelligible genders. i.e. those genders which maintain coherence and continuity within the cultural matrix of sex, gender, sexual practice and desire.

In this pedagogical space, participants had an opportunity to ask practitioners and 'experts' questions outside of a diagnostic situation, by interviewing an endocrinologist and a consultant from a private gender clinic.[viii] Rather than recreating a patient/doctor diagnostic dyad, in which the medical expert asks questions of the patient, the interrogative role here was reversed. These encounters revealed the considerable time invested already by participants researching and contemplating the medical aspects of sex and transsexuality. This included the frameworks for diagnosis and the various hormone regimes which they may take up in the process of transition. For example, one group formulated the following questions, for a gender specialist regarding the relationship the ethics of 'gender dysphoric' diagnostics:

> What is the relationship between theories of hormones and theories of brain sex? Does endocrinology endorse 'brain sex' theories? How do you feel about the rightness and wrongness of a person's transition? How do you feel about having the responsibility of making decisions about a person's transition process?

This opportunity to investigate the science of sex outside of the disciplinary site of the clinic was also valuable to one of the facilitators who is a trans man:

> I benefited from the scientific investigations as much as the young
>
> participants. It empowered me to speak to these experts as an equal and
>
> not as a patient, which is what I have been. It was great to engage with
>
> how science gets produced – through evidence gathering and experiments
>
> in the lab – and to critique the authoritative voice in which it operates
>
> (Sci:dentity Facilitator).

Significantly, this participative pedagogical space allowed the participants, some of whom were already being treated through NHS Gender Identity Clinics, to express their reservations and concerns about the effects of a medical transition through hormones and surgery. This is in contrast to a diagnostic situation which invites the speaking trans subject into being through adherence to a set of scripts that both social actors are arguably familiar with.

Between diagnosis and identity: Young trans people in the UK

The value of this pedagogical space (and the project overall) is apparent if we consider the cultural and institutional constraints encountered by young trans people, seeking to undergo gender transition. At the time of writing, young people in the UK who identify as transsexual are not able to access hormones and surgery until they are 18 years old. The current guidance for medical practitioners, produced by the General

Medical Council and contained in the *Harry Benjamin Guidelines on the Treatment of Transsexuals* (2001), suggests caution regarding the treatment of young people. Medical practitioners are faced with ethical decisions as to whether to administer reversible treatments such as hormone blockers to trans adolescents prior to irreversible treatments such as hormone administration and surgery. Guidelines published by the British Society for Paediatric Endocrinology and Diabetes (2005) state that treatment should not start until puberty is complete. This practice in the UK stands in contrast to the situation in countries such as the US, Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium and Norway. This is now under review following considerable campaigning by academics, legal experts and grassroots organisations. A report published by an expert in the field of medical ethics (Giordano 2007, 2008) critiqued medical practice in the UK, arguing that UK doctors are 'depriving children relief from "extreme suffering" caused by their condition, leading to self harm and suicide and forcing their families into seeking help outside the UK'. The publication of this report, and two subsequent conferences in 2008, led to considerable press attention, debate and activism around the treatment of 'gender variant adolescents' and highlighted the difficulties faced by young transgender and transsexual people who often embody gender expressions which are not clearly male of female.

While these debates endure, and the medical professions persist in delaying the treatment of young trans people, there exists concurrently an increased cultural awareness of transsexuality, a growth in trans networks, and legislation offering legal recognition of trans people. In light of this, it is not surprising that increasing numbers of young transsexual people are wishing to change their sex at a younger

age. Some of these young people are opting out, albeit often temporarily, of both the existing medical discourses of trans identities as 'gender dysphoria'[ix] and the associated regulation of its possible temporality. Many trans young people are involved in trans and queer community spaces and the associated discourses, which bring together identities organised around the modalities of gender, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, desire and location in unpredictable, dynamic and playful ways. These spaces offer opportunities to explore gender expressions that fall beyond the binaries of being transsexual/non-transsexual through a myriad of identity expressions such as femme, butch, daddy, drag king, drag queen, boi etc. Simultaneously, increased global communication has led to the surgical procedures and hormones which are carefully regulated and rationed by the UK's National Health Services being available, (to those can afford them), in other ways; principally by accessing available treatments and services online.

Creative space: re-narrating gender

The Sci:dentity project opened up a creative space where young people could explore their self-understandings of their sexed and gendered selves and interrogate some of the cultural incitement to gender intelligibility that they were encountering in their daily lives. As well as offering a space to critique the discourse of sex being a matter of certainty verified by evidence of scientific evidence, this space offered arts practice as an expressive opportunity to communicate the humanity of trans lives, with dignity and pathos. The methodologies employed, such as drawing, cartoons, painting, song writing, performance and film making gave the young people an

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opportunity to narrate their self understanding – and crucially, their sense of their

own gender – in creative ways which combined both community narratives of trans

selfhood such as female-to-male (FtM), male-to-female (MtF) and genderqueer, with

medical discourses of transsexuality to narrate a coherent trans-self (Rooke and

McNamara 2008).

The artwork created in the course of the workshop was shared with an audience

of 150 people on the final weekend of the workshops. This included performances,

screenings of short films, photography, a zine, sculpture and puppetry. The length of

this article does not permit a detailed description or discussion of all the artwork

produced in the project. However, I do want to focus on just two of these pieces of

artwork and discuss their significance for the themes of this article: a short film

produced by Liam, an FTM young man aged 22; and the Sci:dentity Zine which was

produced by participants in the course of the creative engagement phase.

Liam's film exemplifies how the creativity at the heart of the project opened up

a space to respond to medical discourses about the science of sex and to articulate the

participant's self understanding. This in turn, offers insights into the transgendered

space created by the project. After the first weekend of the creative workshops, Liam

expressed some ambivalence about the 'science lessons' presented that weekend

when he wrote the following in the evaluation blog, 'the most challenging aspect of

the weekend for me was the science talk and the thoughts and feelings it always

evokes in me when biology is mentioned'. However, by the end of the creative

workshops he had used these feelings to critique the authority of science, by making a

short film based on a first-hand encounter with medical discourses of sex and gender.

This occurred when, several weeks into the project, he approached his GP to request referral to a gender identity clinic. The encounter was less than satisfactory, revealing his GP's lack of awareness of trans identities and NHS procedures. He describes his experience of the appointment in an interview:

> So I talked to him about things and he immediately turned away from me
>
> and listened to me, but pretended to fiddle about on his computer and stuff,
>
> and then eventually he wrote this: 'This 22 year old asked me to refer her
>
> as she has not been feeling fully female, has felt more male gender in her
>
> physical and mental activities. Her menarche started late 14 and her sexual
>
> organs showed reasonable development. She denies any hirstuitism, would
>
> you kindly see her for further investigations'.

Discussing this encounter Liam stated in an interview:

> My doctor called it the gender determination department. When I said to
>
> him no it's the gender identity clinic, and he didn't know any of the
>
> doctors names, so later on I wrote 'To Dr (X) [x]' on it.

Clearly Liam had a negative and frustrating experience with this initial approach to his GP. From the content of the letter, it seems that the GP had no knowledge of transsexualism and may have referred for investigations into whether he was intersex (reflected in his notes about evidence of normal biological development). Liam then took this medical text and proceeded to rework this medical text, with the intention of re-narrating the encounter until it reflected his sense of his gender.

The video intelligently explored the notion of transition. It begins with Liam clean-shaven, and as it plays backwards, we see Liam seemingly shaving on shaving foam, then with a beard prior to the shave, and finally putting on a beard (with the use of glue and hair clippings). The visual dimensions of the video achieve a transition from male to female (or at least imbue in the viewer some uncertainty). Simultaneously the voice-over which accompanies these visuals begins with Liam's (pre-transition) female-sounding voice reading out the doctor's letter referring to 'her', 'she' and female biology (such as a lack of hirsuitism and menarche). As the film progresses the voice-over becomes deeper and the words of the letter change, until at the end, a deep male-sounding voice states:

> This 22 year old asked me to refer him as he has not been feeling fully
>
> male, has felt more male gender in his physical and mental activities. His
>
> menarche started late 14, and his sexual organs showed unreasonable
>
> development. He denies any hirstuitism, would you kindly see him for
>
> further investigations.

This final statement is an account of transexuality narrated from the perspective of the trans person. His body has not developed appropriately, and the absence of the external evidence of his male embodiment is hindering him in feeling fully male. When discussing this video later in an interview Liam stated: 'There will be a progression; cause that's what a transition is; from what's not acceptable/not real to a better place'. Liam's film is an example of how the creative space of the workshops enabled him to respond creatively to the provocations of the 'science lessons' and his frustrating entry into spaces where medical discourses are at work. By using creative

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technologies, Liam was able to narrate his gendered self-hood in the very terms which had been used to dismiss it.

In curating the final show and exhibition, the participants came up with the idea of a 'grey room' that explored the space between binary genders; a trangendered space. The exhibits here drew attention to their everyday spatialities. Rather than thinking about transgendered space through the identity politics of location, position and territoriality (Keith and Pile 1993) found in spaces such as clubs and bars, the artwork here foregrounded movement through time and space, and the everydayness of trans peoples' lives. This in turn reveals the inextricable matrix of gender normativity that they continuously negotiate. The exhibitions' grey room contained a series of sculptures and projections, which explored the ways that gender is 'done' in the social world and attempted to undo gender. Installations included a collage titled 'Buying into Gender' showing gendered consumer goods such as children's toys and clothes, typically coded in pink and blue colours. A video installation showed a participant playing with clothes and gender stereotypes in a shop changing-room, while a sculpture featured gender stereotypical clothes which had been ripped and burnt. I want to focus here on an installation in the grey room which consisted of a large toilet with walls that on three sides were covered with the young peoples' writing. This writing spoke of their experience of the binary gendered space of the public toilet and how navigating these spaces was particularly treacherous. These quotes speak of the ways in which sexed and gendered spaces are maintained and policed through what we might call the visual regimes of gender normativity (for

further discussion of the negotiation of the toilet as a site which is sexed in regulatory ways, see Browne 2004; Halberstam 1998; Munt 1998, 2001; Sibley 1995).

As well as transcriptions of overheard questions such as 'Mummy, is that a boy or a girl?' and 'Is he a girl?', some of the participants' writing speaks of the impact of gender normativity on trans peoples' navigation of 'public conveniences' and the inconvenience they create for trans people who do not easily pass as one gender or another.

> I have yet to go to the 'gents' but now that I am 'going over to the other
>
> side' I find it hard when I am in the 'ladies'. It's true that I don't really fit
>
> into one category and one box so therefore I get looks and whispers. I
>
> have had remarks but even when there is no one in the toilets I can still
>
> hear them.

> Women looking at me disgusted. Others confused. But all of them, ALL of
>
> them looking, thinking. If not saying something to me with words, it all
>
> comes out in their eyes. Their body language … Wouldn't you think twice
>
> about which toilet to go into? Sometimes I hold it in for hours until I get
>
> home. Or until I can find toilets that aren't separated to male/female.

These two brief examples point towards the complex ways that young trans people, whose bodies cannot be read in straightforward binaried ways and who do not have access to hormones, hormone blockers or surgery, are finding their way in a binary gendered world.

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This discomfort, which as these statements demonstrate, is both ontological, haunting and sometimes urgently physical. It speaks to a disturbing experience of both 'feeling out of place', not having a place, and an awareness of the discomfort which bodies that are read as 'genderqueer' imbue in others. It is worth considering that these moments also occur in places which are, albeit temporarily, open to 'queer people'.[xi]

Transgender recognition: From virtual to 'real' life

> I consider myself a newly 'discovered' transboy as I only came out in February of this year. I am pretty new to everything, all the new terms and information makes my head hurt. Most of my research has been through various TG[xii] sites on the Internet. Different websites say different things, but nothing beats meeting a transperson in person and talking to them. I got to do that this weekend and I am very happy I met the guys here, as it helps me divert text and websites into real life experience (Steven, FtM 19 years old).

I now want to discuss the significance of the Sci:dentity project as a space of recognition where trans young people's self-understandings could be expressed, explored and developed in the process of working together to conduct research, produce art and reflect on science. Steven's quote points towards the limits of online interaction and the value of offline embodied encounters. Existing research shows how transgender identities are often formed in physical isolation from other trans people through virtual encounters in cyberspace (Whittle 2006). Transgender

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community knowledge is acquired, incorporated and managed between the boundaries of the virtual and the 'non-virtual'. This was evident in the participants' stories of the ways they came to identify as trans. Sixteen of the 18 participants had never met another trans person in 'real life' before coming along to the workshops. Most participants had developed their self-understanding as trans in virtual spaces such as Internet forums such as NuttycaTS, message boards, sites for sharing photographs such as www.transster.com and chat spaces such as MSN. In these spaces, trans people receive and pass on (trans)gendered cultural knowledge and form collective identities, through sharing photographs and information on hormone regimes, surgery, and discussing the standard of care and skills of various surgeons. In this way the Internet offers alternative transgender identity narratives to those perpetuated by psychiatry (gender dysphoria) and broadcast media (the spectacular 'freak show' material of talk show and makeover television, see Gamson 1998). While it is doubtful that these spaces are free of bullying or harassment, they do tend to offer a space of some support which stands in contrast to the difficulties of navigating the 'real' or offline social world. Existing research shows that in 'non-virtual' space transgendered people continue to face high levels of victimisation (Doan 2006; Namaste 2000; Hill and Willoughby 2005; Lombardi et al. 2002). The cultural knowledge gained in virtual space, such as how to navigate gender segregated spaces such as toilets and changing rooms, is valuable once incorporated, embodied and improvised upon in the navigation of trans people's 'off-line' lives. This space of recognition offered a valuable alternative to the routine dismissals of the participants' self-understandings that were encountered on a daily basis. At a

basic level, this space of recognition was established in the first session by working

as a group, establishing ground rules, and discussing with the participants the name

and pronoun they preferred to be addressed by (he, she, either, neither). While this

may be considered a fairly straightforward exercise its performative potential in

offering affirmation and recognition should not be underestimated. To ask someone

which name and pronoun they would like to be addressed opens up the possibility of

'linguistic agency'. As Butler (1996, 5) observes:

> to be addressed is not merely to be recognized for what one already is, but
>
> to have the very term conferred by which the recognition of existence
>
> becomes possible. One comes to 'exist' by virtue of this fundamental
>
> dependence on the address of the Other. One 'exists' not only by virtue of
>
> being recognized, but, in a prior sense by being recognizable.

Thus, this exercise created the conditions for the possibility of recognition. It also

enabled participants the speech act of stating their name in their felt gender, and

allows others to hail them forth in their felt gender from there on, in the workshops.

This exercise was repeated at the start of each week, giving the participants an

opportunity to reiterate their gender and, at the same time, recreating the linguistic

conditions of recognition. Some of the participants were clear at the outset that this

was a space where they wanted to be recognised as being a gender which they were

generally not routinely, officially or legally recognised by in their everyday lives.

Some participants changed their name and choice of pronoun over the course of the

workshop series as they experimented with the ways their gender could be expressed

and received. This may reflect an increase in confidence and a sense of being in a

safe trans space. Alternatively one could read this as an example of the ways in which the very incitement to be intelligible *as* trans amongst one's peers did its own performative work amongst the participants. Indeed I do not want to suggest that the project was a site that sat outside of identitarian or medical science discourses of the meaning of being trans.

This space of recognition that the project opened up, where a sense of gendered agency could be expressed, can be considered one of the distinctive features of the transgendered space I am describing here. However, it also points implicitly toward the consequences of one's gendered agency *not* being recognised. At the end of each weekend the participants returned to families and their everyday lives at schools, colleges and work, where they were interpellated in ways that routinely foreclosed the very possibility of recognition that the project created. At times the boundary between the 'here' of the project workshops and the 'there' of the everyday was crossed; the recognition of gendered agency that the project made possible was undone. For example, when two social workers from the social service care team dropped off and collected one of the participants who identified as male-to-female the space of recognition was temporarily dissolved. In spite of the project team clearly referring to this participant as 'her' and 'she' and using her chosen name (a female version of her male name). The social workers insisted on referring to 'him', 'he' and a male name. The social workers gendered speech was perhaps routinised rather than malicious, however, it emphasised the space of recognition the project had created. In a discussion of hate speech, Butler (1996) considers the disorientation of injurious speech and how, in suffering injurious speech, one can experience a loss of context.

This is precisely the work that the social workers speech act brought about. It was a temporary disruption to the context the project created. Most of the participants returned to worlds where their gendered agency would be contested repeatedly in these ways for some time. As one participant stated in an interview:

> David said to me at the end of the project, 'I am going home now and I am not going to get called 'he' for months and months'. Obviously someone can call you he on the Internet but it is not the same as that real experience that you are wanting to have (John FtM, 22 years old).

The experience of 'real-ness' that this participant refers to is the experience of one's embodied gendered presence being hailed forth and recognised. Similarly, in another interview, a participant discusses the embodied and intersubjective dimension of the project and the ways in which it provided a space where gendered expressions could be worked on.

> Yes, it gives you validation, when you meet other people in your situation, because not only can you have the words, but get tips on haircuts, binding and where to buy shirts and stuff. You can't get that on the internet, like someone saying 'that doesn't suit you. You need to buy different jeans' (Shannon, genderqueer, 19 years old).

These participants' experiences speak to the relationship between on-line interactive trans culture and the visual culture of the heterosexual matrix in the 'real' (i.e. off-line) world and the ways that transgender embodied cultural capitals and resources (Bourdieu 1990; Skeggs 2004; Rooke 2007) are acquired through off-line affective

interactions. The workshop offered a space where gendered expressions and trans

identities could be reflected upon, worked on and re-worked. As Browne (2006)

argues, in a discussion of masculine appearing women who are mistaken for men, it is

not the case that the sexed body is an essential element of the individual. It is more

the case that the sexed body is produced performatively in relation to others. As

Browne argues, thus 'the creation of the sexed body is not a sole individual

endeavour, rather it is produced through a nexus of interrelations' (Browne 2006,

137). Crucially, it is through encounters with others that sexed bodies are constituted.

The Sci:dentity project is an example of one nodal point in this nexus of interrelation

and encounter.

Becoming comfortable

Before concluding, I want to return to matters of comfort and discomfort, which were

highlighted in the participants art work about binary gendered spaces such as toilets,

to consider what a transgendered space might feel like. I have been cautious in this

article to not define transgendered space *per se*, and yet, through pedagogical

practice, creative methodologies and an ethic of recognition, the project *did* create a

comfortable space where transgendered subjectivities could be formed, expressed,

recognised and received. A significant body of work concerned with sexual

geographies has paid attention the relationship between the formation of lesbian, gay,

bisexual and queer spaces and queer subjectivities (see collections by Bell and

Valentine 1995; Ingram et al. 1997; Browne, Lim and Brown 2007 for an overview).

These sexual spaces are formed within the overall cultural logic of heterosexuality

(even in its refusal) and crucially within the gendered binaries on which it rests and the ubiquitous performative work they do. In interrogating the gendered logics of heterosexuality, we must consider the ontological space it produces. In a consideration of the relationship between emotions, bodies and space Sara Ahmed (2004) describes the ways in which heterosexuality provides a space of comfort for those who can inhabit it with ease. This comfort is found in the fit between the body and the spaces surrounding it.

> To be comfortable is to be so at ease with one's environment that it is hard
> to distinguish where one's body ends and the world begins. One fits, and
> by fitting, the surfaces of bodies disappear from view. The disappearance
> of the surface is instructive: in feelings of comfort, bodies extend into
> spaces, and spaces extend into bodies (Ahmed 2004, 147).

Ahmed argues that comfort is characterised by a kind of ontological osmosis between the unambiguously gendered heterosexual body and the space it occupies; discomfort on the other hand is characterised by a feeling of disorientation, whereby one's body feels 'out of place, awkward or unsettled' (ibid). A comfortable body relaxes - indeed, it is in moments of discomfort that we feel our bodies and their lack of fit in space more insistently. In the space of the Sci:dentity workshops the pressing, quotidian logic of gender normativity could be temporarily cast off and transgendered and transsexual embodiment could be expressed with comfort, as seemingly straightforward boundaries between male and female could be explored, blurred and crossed. At the end of the first weekend of creative workshops, the facilitators and I were left with a mental image which summed up some of the value of the project and

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the significance of the space it created for the young people taking part. On the first day many of the participants entered the workshops, uncertain, quiet, shy, speaking softly into their chests. They seemed to be holding their bodies in a way that took up as little space as possible. By the end of the weekend the same young people were laughing, playing physically and expressing themselves with boldness and confidence. This was, without doubt, due to the elation of being with other trans youth for the first time, but it was also due to the project teams' thoughtful work in conceptualising, creating and maintaining a space where young people could feel safe to explore and express their self-understandings of their own sex and gender without the ridicule, refusal or demands to account for themselves that they encountered on a regular basis in their everyday lives. When asked 'What are the most important things you have got out of this project?' This participant stated:

> The chance to be entirely yourself for the duration of the weekends, to not have to hide anything or be worried about being misunderstood. That for me has been the most important thing I think and has contributed to a massive surge in confidence, in being myself and being out ... actually the most important thing I've got is friends (Eddie, FtM, 20 years old).

Many of the participants spoke about how their participation in the project had impacted on their self-understandings and ability to articulate these in the social world. Here Aiden discusses the ways the project offered the possibility of 'being who you are', in contrast to being 'who you want to be'.

[W]hen you're allowed to express yourself more and more as who you are, it becomes more apparent who you're not and who you weren't when you were trying to act a different way. So having this full weekend where you can just without question be yourself and be who you are was a first for me. Like I've gone to bars where for the night I can be who I wanna be – I've got friends who know me as who I am, but they still don't know the gender thing yet, don't know the sex thing yet, they just know who I am. The pronoun stuff … grating. But being here, for like a solid two days and being completely in this space is like one of the first times for the longest period of time that I've been able to do that, and feel better and better about it, and it being more comfortable with me (Aiden, genderqueer, 22 years old).

However, the comfort that the project opened up simultaneously highlighted the ways in which the navigation of a binary gendered social world - which routinely foreclosed any confirmation of the participants felt gender[xiii] - had emotional consequences.

It's a nasty shock leaving that safe environment and going in to a challenging one again that looks at you and sees something else. It was severely unpleasant going home sometimes. And I know, speaking to (name) she said, 'I want to stay in there because that's the life that I want and life can't be like that'. It was deeply disturbing for me as well. I remember going home the first time and thinking, 'I am glad there are

three more weekends of that 'cos that was fantastic'. I will really miss it

(Shannon, genderqueer, 19 years old).

This participant speaks both of the possibilities that the workshop allowed and the ways in which these are foreclosed in the binary gendered everyday, a world which does not routinely afford cultural space for those who are transgendered. The 'nasty shock' that this participant refers to can be understood in reference to the ways that sex and gender act as a set of discourses and a visual regime which limit our ways of seeing, in which you are looked at and not seen as you feel yourself to be. This is the visual matrix of cultural intelligibility that is central to the workings of both heterosexuality *and* homonormativity (Duggan 2002; Halberstam 2005, Rooke 2005).

Conclusion: Theorising gendered space

The Sci:dentity Project provided a temporary space in which trans youth could see themselves, and the possibility of creating a space for themselves in the world, *as trans.* This space of recognition existed beyond the gendered logics of the everyday which determine what a body should or should not do, what a body should or should not look like, and where a body should or should not go. Self-understandings, which were initially realised primarily online, could be actualised. One of the legacies of the project was the development of capable, informed and skilled trans youth, who went on to participate in existing spaces of political and cultural representation.[xiv] In addition, the parents of some of the young people participating also contacted us to tell us about happier children, about their own new found confidence when speaking to schools and colleges regarding their children's gender identity, and asking for

changes in the care and treatment of their child (for example, being able to request that the appropriate pronouns were used in these spaces). These are small, but significant successes. They speak to the critiques and concerns of trans people themselves.

> What counts as a coherent gender? What qualifies as a citizen? Whose world is legitimated as real? Who can I become in such a world where the limits and the meanings of the subject are set out in advance for me? By what norms am I constrained as I begin to ask what I may become? And what happens when I become that for which there is no place within the given regime of truth? (Butler 2004, 58).

The project speaks more generally to the questions raised by Butler above. The project attempted to open up a transgender space, albeit small and temporary, within the 'regimes of truth' regarding sex and gender. Sci:dentity's participative ethos speaks more broadly to the difference that engaged empirical research can make. If, as Whittle argues, trans theory is a project which aims to enable the coherent voices of trans people to be heard throughout the academy (Whittle 2006; xv), we might ask, which voices are allowed to be heard and are considered coherent within emerging theory?

The trans subject has proven useful to think with within the disciplines of sociology and cultural theory. Indeed, we might argue that the trans subject is something of a fetish for the deconstructive project of queer theory (see Prosser 1998; Stryker 2006; Whittle 2006). The 'transgender phenomenon' (Ekins and King 2006) has been employed productively within queer theory to examine the way in which it

epitomises the deconstruction of the categories male and female and the mechanisms

of heterosexuality (see Butler 1993, 1996, 1997, 1999, 2004; Garber 1993). It also

speaks to concepts central to queer theory such as performance, performativity,

visibility (Hennessy 1995), recognition (Butler 1997; Young 1990), as well as to

Deleuzian notions of becoming (Deleuze and Guattari 1972). However, within this

body of theory there has been a neglect of the socially located, embodied materiality

of transgender lives (see Hines 2007 for a more extensive discussion of the dangers of

privileging poststructuralism as an analytical framework for analysing transgenderism

see also Stryker 2006; Whittle 2006, 2007; Namaste 1996; Bornstein 1994, Califia

1997).

Simultaneously a significant body of work in feminist geographies has been

influential in rethinking the relationship between gender and space (Duncan 1996,

Hayden 1981; Rose 1993; Valentine 1989, 1992; Women and Geography Study

Group 1997). It has focused on the stability of the category 'woman' in

deconstructing spatial dualisms of private/public, and the role of space in the exercise

of gendered power. Geographers of sexualities have focused on the significance of

place and location, and the spatial dimensions of homophobia, heteronormativity and

heterosexism (see collections by Browne, Lim and Brown 2007; Bell and Valentine

1995; Ingram et al. 1997 for an overview of this work). I want to suggest here that

each of these bodies of theory have neglected the significance of the specificity of

transgender and transsexual lives for theorising the interconnectedness of gender, sex,

sexuality, spatiality, the cultural and political consequences of gendered

(mis)recognition *and* their potential for imagining what a less gender normative

world might look like (the work of Namaste 1996a, 1996b, 2000; Lim and Browne 2009; Browne 2004, 2005, 1994; Doan 2001, 2007; Hines 2007 being notable exceptions). An emerging body of trans theory is shifting the intellectual focus from a queer and postmodern project, which employs the trans *subject* 'to think with', to one of thinking about trans *lives* in an engaged, interdisciplinary way. This shift enables us to focus on the relationship between materiality and representational practices, social and political recognition, the specificity of trans experience and its connection to other sites where social justice is fought for (see, for example, the work of Currah et al. 2006; Davidmann 2003, 2006, 2007; Doan 2007; Griggs 1998; Hines 2006a, 2006b 2007; Namaste 1996a, 1996b, 2000; Lombardi et al. 2002; Rooke forthcoming, and the politically informed writing of Califia 1997; Fienberg 1996, 1998; Green 2004; Whittle 2006, 2007). Contemporary trans theory offers a welcome interrogation of the significance of trans lives to such theorisations of social and cultural spaces. It locates the critique of gender norms *within* the complexity of the lives of those who are living the consequences of not fitting neatly, within a social world which is organised primarily around a gendered and sexual normativity. Central to trans theory is a project of 'enabling coherent trans voices to be heard throughout the academy' (Whittle 2006, xv), bringing to fruition an intellectual and activist project whereby theorisation may make a difference to the lives of trans people, especially the more vulnerable trans people such as the young, the isolated, and those with physical or mental health problems. This article makes a contribution to these debates by grounding such theorising in the materiality of the everyday and the routine negotiation and regulation of gender norms that it brings into force and

asking important questions regarding the extent to which the theories we produce can work to shape trans lives and their liveability.

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Notes on Contributors

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ⁱ　　**Notes**

　　Throughout this article certain terms are used that need explanation for the sake of clarity. *Trans* is used in this report to include transsexual and transgender. *Transsexual* is a medical term used to refer to a person who identifies as a gender which is different from that which they were assigned at birth. Transsexuals usually undergo a medical process of sex reassignment through the use of surgery and the administration of hormones. *Transgender* is a more colloquial term used to describe a person who feels that the gender assigned to them at birth is not a correct or complete description of what they feel. Transgender can be used to describe a wide range of gender expressions, which are a variation from the norms of society (for example including masculine or 'butch' women, feminine men, cross-dressers). *Genderqueer* is also a colloquial or community term that describes someone who identifies

as a gender other than "man" or "woman," or someone who identifies as neither, both, or some combination thereof. In relation to the male/female genderqueer people generally identify as more "both/and" or "neither/nor," rather than "either/or." Some genderqueer people may identify as a third gender in addition to the traditional two. The commonality is that all genderqueer people are ambivalent about the notion that there are only two genders in the world.

[ii] Wotever describe their events as aimed at people who are 'friendly, respectful and ok with all kinds of gender and sexualities' ... 'most people are LGBT, but it doesn't stop our non LGBT & Q friends, co-workers, family members etc to come along and have a good time with us ... and we all realise that we all transition and can change gender, sexuality and friends' (Wotever 2009). Similarly the Transfabulous Arts organisation describe themselves as providing 'the opportunity for the transgender community to celebrate their artists while also participating in the creation of art during workshops'. Their definition of 'transgender community' is an inclusive one. They welcome any transgender person or those questioning their gender, their families, friends, colleagues, supporters etc. (Transfabulous 2009). Their events invariably include a wider community of the families, friends, lovers and admirers of trans people.

[iii] The Wellcome Trust is an independent biomedical research charity. Sci:dentity was funded as part of the Wellcome Trusts Pulse programme, which supports arts projects which work engage young people with biomedical science and encourage them to tackle complex, emotive issues.

[iv] The project was conceptualised and led by Catherine McNamara. Jay Stewart was the documentary maker for the project. Together the project team had training and professional experience in applied theatre, participative arts, mental health work and youth and community work with LGBT and non LGBT youth. I was responsible for the participatory evaluation of the project. This involved participation, observation, working with the participants in formulating the research element of the project, designing evaluation methods (which included blogging and keeping log books, one- to-one and group interviews and evaluation workshops). The project was evaluated by myself using evaluation tools developed at the centre for Urban and Community Research by Alison Rooke, Ben Gidley and Imogen Slater as part of the Hi8us project, Beyond the Numbers Game. This research project looks at the efficacy of existing performance measures for participatory media work and developing an alternative approach to making the case for the value of creativity in general, and participatory media in particular, as a tool for engagement and social inclusion. Central to this work is developing rigorous ways of evaluating the significance of movement, embodiment, cultural and social capitals in arts and media work.

[v] See Rooke (2006, 2007a) for a fuller discussion of the project and its participatory evaluation.

[vi] The participants were recruited through LGBT youth groups, groups aimed at specifically supporting trans youth (Mermaids) and Social Services departments. Many of the young people came with the consent of project workers and social services care workers rather than parents. The young people aged under 18 who were in the care of their parents varied in the extent to which they told the parents that they were attending a project aimed at trans youth. Many participants preferred to tell friends and family that they were attending an arts project aimed at LGBT youth rather than *trans* youth as this may have caused difficulties at home. The few cases where young people aged under 18 had the consent of care or youth workers rather than parental consent raised ethical dilemmas for the project staff. This required consultation on a case-by-case basis with the other responsible adults working with these young people and careful consideration of the balance between the potential benefits of the project for the young people versus potential recriminations or difficulties that may arise. This dilemma is clearly not limited to the project and can apply to work with LGBT young people under 18 in general. However, due to the sensitive nature of the project, and the potential subsequent use of images and a documentary produced as part of the project, issues of consent, image release and matters of confidentiality required careful ongoing negotiation and dialogue. It is worth noting that by the end of the first phase of the project most participants had begun to broach the issue of feeling trans with their parents. Many parents and care workers came along to the performance and exhibition at the close of the first phase of the project. For several of the youth this was a 'coming out' moment. It is also a reflection of the participants increased confidence about their gender identity gained through participation in the project.

vii   Throughout this document participant's names have been changed in order to protect their anonymity.

viii   The experts who kindly agreed to participate in the project were Prof. Andrew Levy and Dr. Richard Curtis.

ix   The term 'gender dysphoria' has a particular trajectory (see Ekins and King 1996, and Hines 2007 for further discussion). The term is used amongst medical professionals to refer to a sense of dissonance between one's physical sexed body and one's gender identity.

x   Referring to a NHS gender specialist.

xi   For example, an incident that happened London's gay pride celebration in 2008, when a trans woman was denied access to the women's toilets in Trafalgar Square and asked by stewards to show her gender recognition certificate as evidence of her female gender, a certificate of entitlement. Similarly in New York City a black butch lesbian was thrown out of the women's toilet of the Caliente Cab Company in the West Village, in the midst of pride celebrations. While LGBT pride is ostensibly an event which opens up predominantly heterosexual public space to queer bodies, clearly these spaces are not as utopian moments as some of the queer community would prefer to imagine. The trans body clearly troubles the gender binaries that both heteronormativity and homonormativity rest upon.

xii   TG is short hand for transgender.

xiii   See Browne and Lim (2009) for a discussion of the idea of gender as 'felt' and sensed as a way of doing justice to research respondent's complex testimonies regarding their gender.

xiv   Representational fora such as London's Metropolitan Police LGBT Advisory Group (an independent group of LGBT people who advise and monitor the metropolitan police) worked with the participants, in the development of a trans subgroup. Four Sci:dentity youth went on to be involved in the development of the Department of Health's Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Advisory Group's (SOGIAG) trans work stream. This group has been established as part of the Department of Health's Equality and Human Rights team, which seeks to make healthcare in the UK more accessible to LGBT people.

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