

QUEERING GENDER:

AN EXPLORATION OF THE SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TRANSGENDER IDENTITY

CHRISTINE McLACHLAN

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Psychology, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg.**

DECLARATION

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

..... , in the Graduate Programme in

University of

KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. It is being submitted for the degree of in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Science, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.

Student Name

Date

ABSTRACT

Gender identity disorder is a disorder that challenges the predominant cultural understanding of gender and sex. A transgender person believes that s/he is of the opposite sex and gender than her/his natal sex.

This study aimed to explore and describe transgender people's experience of the development of their transgender identity, and the critical turning points that they experienced during the development of this transgender identity. Furthermore, the study explored the influence of religion and spirituality on the development of the transgender person's identity and how their transgender identity in turn influenced their spirituality and spiritual identity.

Feminist and queer theories were utilized in this study. A phenomenological approach was used to explore the lived experience of five transgender individuals.

The findings suggest that these five transgender people find themselves between the sex categories of male and female and the gender categories of the feminine and the masculine. This finding challenges the Western dichotomous view of gender and sex. It further emerged that religion/spirituality does influence the development of a transgender identity as well as the process of gender reassignment.

Key terms: Transgender, gender identity disorder, sex change, transsexual, G/god/dess, self-identity, phenomenology, queer identity, genderqueer, queer theology, binary discourse, fluid gender, trans man, trans woman.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
CHAPTER 1	
INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Motivation for this study	2
1.3 Purpose of this research	2
1.4 Structure of dissertation	3
CHAPTER 2	
GENDER, GENDER IDENTITY DISORDER, THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TRANSGENDER IDENTITY AND THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TRANSGENDER IDENTITY	4
2.1 Defining gender, defining sex	4
2.2 Gender in historical context	6
2.3 Gender Identity Disorder	9
2.4 Self-identity of transgender people	13
2.5 The influence of religious belief on the development of gender identity and gender identity on religious belief	14
CHAPTER 3	
METHODOLOGY	18
3.1 The research	18
3.2 The choice of a qualitative research design	18
3.2.1 The phenomenological approach	18
3.2.1.1 Human bodiliness	19
3.2.1.2 Spatiality	20
3.2.1.3 Lived relationality	20
3.2.1.4 Time	21

3.3	The research process	21
3.3.1	Sampling method	21
3.3.1.1	Gaining access to the study population	21
3.3.1.2	Criteria for selection of subjects	22
3.3.1.3	Invitation to participate in the study	23
3.3.1.4	The sample	23
3.3.2	Data collection	23
3.3.2.1	Establishing rapport	23
3.3.2.2	Nature of the interview	24
3.3.2.3	Formulation of the questions	24
3.3.3	Data analysis	25
3.3.3.1	The methodology process in phenomenological psychological research	25
3.3.3.2	Scientific phases of explication	25
3.3.3.2.1	Stage 1: Holistic view and intuitive grasp of the data	26
3.3.3.2.2	Stage 2: Emergence of meaning units	26
3.3.3.2.3	Stage 3: Transformation and rigorous reflection	26
3.3.3.2.4	Stage 4: Synthesis and reflection	26
3.3.4	The research report	27
3.3.5	Scientific rigour of the research	27
3.3.5.1	Reliability and validity	27
3.4	Ethics	28
3.4.1	Ethics approval	28
3.4.2	Ethical considerations	28
3.4.3	Minimization of potential risks	29
3.4.4	Accountability through reflection	29
3.5	Concluding comments	29
CHAPTER 4		
THE TRANSGENDER PERSON'S EXPERIENCE: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS		
		31
4.1	Introduction	31
4.2	Subjective experience of transgender identity	31

4.2.1	A brief introduction to the participants	31
4.2.2	The transgender person's world	32
4.2.2.1	Public gendered worlds	33
4.2.2.2	Private, hidden gendered worlds	35
4.2.2.3	Being between worlds, living in different worlds	36
4.2.3	The experience of self in relation to others - lived relationality	37
4.2.3.1	Experience of self as different	37
4.2.3.2	Experiencing of others in relation to self	40
4.2.4	The transgender person's experience of their body	43
4.2.4.1	Anatomical body versus lived body	43
4.3	Development and critical turning points in transgender identity	44
4.3.1	The experience of the body as critical turning point	44
4.3.1.1	Non-surgical/non-medical attempts to change	45
4.3.1.2	Transitioning - medical/surgical intervention	46
4.3.2	Self acceptance	47
4.3.3	Acceptance and support from others	49
4.3.4	Changing bodies, changing worlds, changing relationships	51
4.4	Role of spiritual experience	52
4.4.1	Religious upbringing	52
4.4.2	Religious conflict before coming out as a transgender person	53
4.4.3	Critical religious turning points	55
4.4.4	Being in a religious/spiritual world after coming out as trans-person	57
4.4.4.1	The dynamic relationship with G/god/dess	57
4.4.4.2	Changing religious/spiritual worlds	58
4.4.4.3	Finding a sacred space	59
4.4.4.4	G/god/dess's gender	61
4.5	Concluding comments	62
CHAPTER 5		
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION		
5.1	Discussion of the results	63
5.1.1	Subjective experience of transgender identity	63
5.1.1.1	The transgender person's world	63
5.1.1.2	The experience of self in relation to others - lived relationality	67

5.1.1.3	The transgender persons experience of their body	69
5.1.2	Development and critical turning points in transgender identity	71
5.1.2.1	The experience of the body as critical turning point	71
5.1.2.2	Self acceptance and acceptance from others	74
5.1.2.3	Changing bodies, changing worlds, changing relationships	74
5.1.3	Role of spiritual experience	75
5.2	Implications of this research	77
5.3	Limitations of this research	78
5.4	Directions for future research	79
5.5	Conclusion	80
 REFERENCES		82
APPENDICES		89
Appendix A: Letter of invitation		89
Appendix B: Reflections		91
Appendix C: Consent form		95
Appendix D: Example of a section of an interview transcription		96
Appendix E: Example of emergence of meaning units (Justin)		98

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

To be transgender is to believe and feel that one is the opposite gender than one's birth anatomical sex. This experience is classified by mental health care workers as Gender Identity Disorder (GID). For the transgender person this is an experience that encompasses their life, influencing them in their way of relating to self, other and G/god/dess. It influences their way of being in the world and how they experience their own bodiliness.

Lawrence (2008) is of the opinion that the number of people diagnosed with GID is increasing. In Belgium it is estimated that the prevalence rate for MTF (male to female) transsexualism is 1:12,900 and 1:33,800 for FTM (female to male) who have undergone sex reassignment surgery (SRS). Through studies in the Netherlands it has been estimated that the prevalence rate for MTF transsexualism is 1:11,900 and FTM transsexualism 1:30,400. In Scotland, people who have completed SRS or treated with hormone therapy prevalence rates were: MTF 1:12,800 and FTM 1:52,100. The prevalence rate was significantly higher when all persons diagnosed with gender dysphoria, regardless of treatment status, were included: MTF 1:7,400 and FTM 1:31,200 (Lawrence, 2008).

However little is known about the lived experience of transgender people. According to Benestad (2002, p. 225) "there is a great need for the insights and ideas of transgender people of all kinds to be shared among those whose profession can add to impairment or alleviation of these individuals' life processes."

The transgender group is marginalized in society and tends to be silenced. Transgender people are seen as being mentally sick, different from the dominant society and often ridiculed by members of the dominant society. "Silencing is a way in which domination exists in communities. Becoming voiceless disempowers the

silent group and empowers the group with a voice. But listening to silence can give the researcher new ways of understanding” (McLachlan, 2007, p. 83).

1.2 Motivation for this study

Working as a pastor in a predominantly gay church, the researcher had the opportunity to meet, pastor to and marry transgender people. Through this work the researcher became aware of some of the challenges and wisdoms that transgender people brought to the community. This in turn challenged her discourses about gender and spirituality. As the researcher started reading literature on transgender people, she realised that not a lot of research has been done in this community. Through conversations with transgender people she also became aware of the need for research in this area as the transgender people described that they felt voiceless in the broader society.

In South Africa, the recent case of Caster Semenya (Hanlon, 2009 & Longman, 2009) an athlete who had to go through gender verification testing, has challenged and problematised dominant paradigms of sex, intersex and gender. There has been an explosion of debate on these issues in the media in South Africa. Talk-shows, for example the Oprah show, and in South Africa, the Three Talk show, have featured transgender people. A book, *“trans: Transgender life stories from South Africa”* (Morgan, Marais & Wellbeloved, 2009), has been published telling life stories of transgender people in South Africa. But although transgender issues are voiced more often, for the average transgender person, community support is not so evident.

1.3 Purpose of this research

The aim of this research is to describe the lived experience of transgender people. It specifically aimed to explore and describe transgender people’s experience of the development of their transgender identity, and the critical turning points that they experienced during the development of this transgender identity. The study also explores the influence of religion and spirituality on the development of the

transgender person's transgender identity and how their transgender identity in turn influences their spirituality and spiritual identity.

The researcher used a phenomenological approach in order to best explore the lived experience of the transgender person as it presents itself in a specific time, space, bodiliness and relationships.

1.4 Structure of dissertation

Chapter two focuses on gender, GID, the development of a transgender identity and the influence of religion on the development of a transgender identity followed by a chapter focusing on methodology of this research. In chapter four the researcher presents the findings, followed by a discussion of the findings in chapter five.

CHAPTER 2

GENDER, GENDER IDENTITY DISORDER, THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TRANSGENDER IDENTITY AND THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TRANSGENDER IDENTITY

This study focuses on the transgender person's subjective experience of the development of transgendered identity. It also explores how transgender people are influenced by their religious/spiritual convictions and how the emergence of their transgender identity influences their spirituality as they consider transitioning, going through the process and/or have been through the process of transitioning.

This chapter reviews the literature on gender, GID, the development of a transgender identity, and the influence of religion and spirituality on this development.

2.1 Defining gender, defining sex

In Western society, gender is constructed as either masculine or feminine. It is the personal and social status accorded to a person as being either female or male (Cohen-Kettenis & Pfafflin, 2003). Certain visible sex characteristics, especially external genitalia, may lead to certain constructions of masculinity or femininity. But are sex and gender interchangeable concepts?

A person's sex can be seen as either female, male or intersexed - referring to the anatomical and biological differentiation between the different sexes (Fiorini, 2008). Sex can be defined biologically in different ways, for example, "genotype sex; gonadal sex, phenotypic sex, sex of rearing and legal sex" (Vilian, 2008, pp. 331-332). In Western society, when sex attributes are ambiguous, atypical, or a child is intersexed at birth, the genitals are mostly reshaped to fit one of the binary categories (Haynes, 2001). The child is thus "normalised" to be either male or female (Haynes, 2001, p. 7), reflecting that "anatomy is destiny" (Kirsch, 2000, p. 49). As

external body indicators could be ambiguous in determining sex difference, scientists have turned to internal markers, such as chromosomes to determine the sex of a person. Sex determined by these markers may even be in opposition to apparent sex, as seen in external markers. "The problem with chromosomes is that they are also not perfectly dichotomous, but may involve ambiguous intermediate categories" (Wiesner-Hanks, 2001, p.3).

Gender, a term that has been used since 1955 (Haynes, 2001), is mostly seen as a social construction (Green, 2001), and although usually constituted through physical characteristics and giving significations to anatomical sex (Fiorini, 2008), it is constructed through social, historical, institutional and political paradigms (Gilbert, 2001). "It postulates that femininity and masculinity are categories which respond to a cultural construction" (Fiorini, 2008, p. 117). Green (2001) contests this. As a transgender person he believes that his gender did not change despite him changing his appearance. He has made his gender more visible through changing his appearance, but for him, his gender was something inherent. Although society identified him as female, and thus feminine, he identified as masculine.

Gender can be seen as defined in behaviours and personality traits that lead to specific roles in different cultures, with a person being either feminine or masculine (Johnson, 2001).

(Western) ...societal structures dictate who we are expected to be and the social roles that we undertake. Values, norms, and beliefs guide those societal expectations ... many societies strictly adhere to a male/female binary identifying people in the categorization of male or female. The social construction of gender binary arrangements serves to maintain conformity and limit non-binary gender identities by providing two mutually exclusive choices of gender identity (Dietert, 2007, p. 1).

Gender roles in turn lead to a rudimentary division of labour (Kirsch, 2000). Through this normalising process, society attempts to create order (Michel, 1999) and thus identity is constructed based on the norms of society and in turn maintaining these norms.

Although most Western cultures have a dichotomous view of gender, occasional cultures develop more genders. In certain areas of the world, including Alaska, Australia, the Amazon region, Central and South Asia, North America, Oceania,

Siberia, and the Sudan, individuals assume the gender identity of the other sex (Wiesner-Hanks, 2001, p. 4). Although viewed originally as belonging to either the male or female group, through the combining of tasks, combining feminine and masculine behaviours and cross-dressing, they become part of the third gender (Wiesner-Hanks, 2001). Native American culture uses the word “two-spirit people” to describe people that are distinguished more by religious roles rather than their sexual activities, living outside the binary construction of gender (Wiesner-Hanks, 2001, p. 5).

Gender identity is “a complex system of beliefs about the subjective self in relation to masculinity and femininity, maleness and femaleness, and culturally assigned roles prescribed to those categories” (Ault & Brzuzy, 2009, p. 187). In addition, early experiences as a child “‘imprint’ a gendered identity onto the child” (Kirsch, 2000, p. 50). According to Benestad (2002), gender identity is the person’s basic sense of self as man or woman, or both or neither, and this is influenced by the common frames of sex and gender. Haynes (2001) is of the opinion that gender identity consists of a cluster of dominant features that tend to lean to either the male or the female side, but that the average, normal person will not be entirely female or male. However, these dichotomous categories are challenged by the rapid change of the construction of gender, as well as the change in gender and sex roles within society. Furthermore “identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalising categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression” (Butler, 1991, pp. 13-14). In order to investigate the change in construction and understanding of gender, one needs to look at the history of the development of gender categories.

2.2 Gender in historical context

Discourse is one of the main elements through which one can know history, as all history is influenced by biased and partial pictures that are presented through historical sources (Wiesner-Hanks, 2001). Historians not only explore through their own biased lens created by discourse, but also analyse the historical sources that are created and presented within their own biased discourse.

Discourse surrounding gender has been slow to change as “the gender hierarchy has been remarkably resilient to change, surviving political and economic reforms and revolutions as well as intellectual and technological transformations” (Wiesner-Hanks, 2001, p. 13). It is generally assumed that learned behaviours, or social construction, rather than biology, led to the gender hierarchy (Wiesner-Hanks, 2001).

Historians have different views as to whether a matriarchal society or even an egalitarian society preceded the dominant patriarchal society we reside in. The sources for Western culture, namely Greek thought and the Bible, affirmed the patriarchal system that in turn affirmed the secondary position of women. But most scholars see “the development of patriarchy as a complicated process, involving ... property ownership, plough agriculture, the bureaucratic state, writing, hereditary aristocracies, and the development of organized religion and philosophy” (Wiesner-Hanks, 2001, pp. 16-17).

The rise of the feminist movement placed a new focus on gender. One of the primary concerns of feminist theory is problematising much of what is assumed about gender by foregrounding the social construction of gender. According to Gilbert (2001), contemporary feminists are of the opinion that gender is constructed through historical and social processes, embedded in traditions and practices, rather than being due to biological facts. Furthermore, “feminist researchers have long questioned the effectiveness of forcing all people into one of two sex/gender categories” (Crawley, Fowley & Shehan, 2008, p. xiii). The feminist movement has seen the rise of the Queer movement that incorporates the voices of the LGBTI - the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex community.

Queer theory finds its origin in the movement towards post-structuralism and postmodernism (Kirsch, 2000). Queer theory positions itself beyond where a person’s gender is socially constructed, not only by interpreting the biological features of the body, but also by going beyond the social roles that are assigned to this particular body. But adherents of Queer theory acknowledge that:

...social constraints, prohibitions, and threats of punishment operate the ritualized repetition of norms, and this repetition constitutes the temporalized scene of gender construction and destabilization... this repetition creates an effect of gender uniformity, a stable effect of masculinity or femininity, it produces and

destabilizes the notion of the subject as well, for the subject only comes into intelligibility through the matrix of gender (Butler, 1997, pp. 16-17).

Butler (1997) is of the opinion that people are called into gender by the power of the “performative”. In opposition to such gender uniformity, Queer theory utilizes diversity as “resistance to ‘normativity’ and dominant cultural values” (Kirsch, 2000, p. 36). Queer theory focuses on the legitimisation, “to be just as one is”, where gender, individual variants and sexuality are incorporated not only in thoughts and speech (Kirsch, 2000, p. 99), but also in a person’s preferred reality (Morgan, 2000). Queer theory is thus an approach that “combines theoretical innovation with reactionary tendencies” (Moon, 2008, p. 1), focusing on power, politics and activism (Hodges, 2008).

But Queer theory has been criticised for “falling into the pattern set by traditional history, that is, regarding the male experience as normative and paying insufficient attention to gender differences” (Wiesner-Hanks, 2001, p. 8). Queer theorists would argue that the queer movement is based on resistance and insubordination and that it focuses on inclusivity, rejects sexism, and brings a profound suspicion to any form of identity category (Hodges, 2008). Feminist theory, on the other hand, focuses on the experience of women, thus enforcing once again the gender dichotomy, the either/or. Cultural feminists such as Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, Marjorie Garber and Judith Lorber, on the other hand, challenge the construction of gender categories as dichotomous and oppositional (Somers & Haynes, 2001) and explore other possibilities outside the male/female binary.

“Ethnographic evidence strongly suggests that identity is a fluid construction, comprised of dynamic processes and multiple motivations that are dependent on context, situational constraints, and life course events” (Dana-Talbert, 2001, p. 57). Placing a person in a fixed gender identity, or even in a transgender identity category, ignores the dynamic fluidity of identity. Creating such new categories constructs new ways of being, diminishing the possibility of fluidity. Furthermore, a gendered social identity can be seen as an ongoing development, a person constituted as gendered on a daily basis, and is thus gendering (Ekins & King, 2001).

Through feminism, queer theory and the gay liberation movement, gay and lesbian people became “unlikely to consider their homosexuality to be related to any problem with gender” (Jeffreys, 2003, p. 47). However, for the transgender person, gender is still centralised, because their perception regarding their own gender has been challenged. They experience themselves as differently gendered than society proclaims their gender to be. They have experienced the dichotomy of gender through their body-mind dissonance (I think of myself as female (male), but my body looks male (female)) resulting in an embodied knowing, an embodied knowledge.

In this study, the focus on the development of the transgender person’s transgender identity places the person within an identity construction. It requires an acknowledgment that a transgender identity is also constructed through society, research, the media, classification as a disorder, and so on. It is a construction entrenched within power hierarchies as people are constructed within the gender binary, but are simultaneously classified as having Gender Identity Disorder.

2.3 Gender Identity Disorder

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR) defines Gender Identity Disorders (GID) as “a group whose common feature is a strong, persistent preference for living as a person of the other sex” (Sadock & Sadock, 2007, p. 718). A transgender person has a sense that they are female/male but that knowing does not correspond to their anatomical sex. They experience a “cross-gender identification and discomfort with (their) assigned gender role” (Sadock & Sadock, 2007, p. 719) and consistently experience their gender identification as inappropriate (Reber & Reber, 2001). Their inner conviction of their own gender identity is that of the opposite sex to that which they are born into and they go to tremendous lengths to affirm their self-experienced gender (Benestad, 2002).

“The affective component of Gender Identity Disorders is gender dysphoria, discontent with one’s designated birth sex and having the desire to have the body of the other sex, and be regarded socially as a person of the other sex” (Sadock & Sadock, 2007, p. 718). Transgender people move “from one gender/sex locus to the other” within the binary construction (Gilbert, 2001, p. 41). It needs to be noted that

transgender people never see themselves as being one gender and then becoming another gender, but rather being a different gender from their born anatomical sex and transitioning physically in order for their physical body to correspond to their perceived gender (Morgan & Stevens, 2008). The transgender person is seen as transgressing societal norms and the prescribed societal gender identity expectations (Dietert, 2007) as they experience gender dysphoria (Griggs, 1999).

The term “transsexualism” was used in the 1950s to classify people with Gender Identity Disorder (Lawrence, 2008). This term is still used in the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-10; World Health Organization, 1992). The criteria for transsexualism according to the ICD-10 are:

A desire to live and be accepted as a member of the opposite sex, usually accompanied by a sense of discomfort with, or inappropriateness of, one’s anatomic sex, and a wish to have surgery and hormonal treatment to make one’s body as congruent as possible with one’s preferred sex (World Health Organization, 1992 in Lawrence, 2008, p.428).

The terms GID and transsexualism tend to be viewed as synonymous although “the latter term technically refers to a method of treating or coping with a gender identity problem” (Lawrence, 2008, p. 425). The term “gender dysphoria syndrome” was coined in the 1970s. Use of this term has changed and it currently simply denotes an “aversion to some or all of those physical characteristics or social roles that connote one’s own biological sex” (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 823).

Transgender people were first diagnosed as having Gender Identity Disorders in the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III; American Psychiatric Association, 1980). The categories designated to people with GID were transsexualism and atypical Gender Identity Disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). In the DSM-III-R (American Psychiatric Association, 1987) the atypical Gender Identity Disorder was expanded to include another two categories. The first was Gender Identity Disorder of adolescence or adulthood, nontranssexual type (GIDAANT). This diagnosis was “applicable to persons who met most criteria for transsexualism but who did not have a persistent wish to acquire the anatomic characteristics of the opposite sex” (Lawrence, 2008, p. 425). The second

category was Gender Identity Disorder not otherwise specified (GID-NOS) (American Psychiatric Association, 1987).

The DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) introduced the term Gender Identity Disorder and subsequently replaced the transsexualism and GIDAANT categories with the GID category. The GID-NOS category for adults was not replaced and these two categories, GID and GID-NOS, were retained in the DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

Although some transgender people are classified in the DSM-IV-TR as having a mental disorder, this diagnosis is currently contested in favour of declassifying GID as a mental disorder (Ault & Brzuzy, 2009) and seeing it instead as a gender variation. This could have implications for the treatment of transgender people. To have SRS in a state hospital in South Africa, the patient needs to be diagnosed with GID and been through psychiatric and usually psychological evaluation. The first modern SRS was performed in the 1930s in Germany (Lawrence, 2008). Since then, SRS has been a very controversial surgery. It needs to be noted that not all transgender people can be classified as having GID as they do not comply to all the criteria as put forth by the DSM-IV (Baker-Johnson, 2010), and although they identify as transgender, they do not classify as having GID. Furthermore, a person who has gone through SRS cannot be classified as having GID as they no longer qualify for all the criteria.

Lawrence (2008, p. 430) identifies transsexual subtypes which are depicted in the following table, including the criteria that identify the types:

Table 2.1
Transsexual subtypes

	HOMOSEXUAL	NON-HOMOSEXUAL
Male-to-female	Exclusively attracted to men	May be attracted to women, women and men, or neither sex
	Overtly feminine during childhood	Not overtly feminine during childhood
	Rated as more feminine by observers	Rated as less feminine by observers
	Not sexually aroused by cross-dressing	Sexually aroused by cross-dressing currently or in the past
	Usually transition in 20s	Usually transition in 30s or later
Female-to-male	Almost exclusively attracted to women	May be primarily attracted to men or women and men
	Overtly masculine during childhood	Usually less overtly masculine during childhood
	Sexual attitudes are more male-typical	Sexual attitudes are less male-typical
	Greater desire for phalloplasty	Less desire for phalloplasty
	Less comorbid psychopathology	More comorbid psychopathology
	Usually transition in 20s	Usually transition in 20s

Different modes of “transgendering” exist, namely:

- ❖ “Migrating” - Moving from one side of the binary to the other side on a permanent basis. The “migrator” enlists medical aid to change the body in order for the body to fit the other side of the binary.
- ❖ “Oscillating” - This entails movement to and from the different sides of the binary.
- ❖ “Negating” - This is the “ungendering” of a person, denying the existence of a binary divide.
- ❖ “Transcending” - This group of people move away from the binary, going “beyond gender, into a third space” (Ekins & King, 2001, p. 125).

This research focuses on people from the first mode of transgenering, moving from one side of the gender binary to the other on a permanent basis.

2.4 Self-identity of transgender people

Transgender people experience themselves as being physically born of one gender, whereas their mental bodily image is that of a person of the opposite gender. Thus they are either born female bodied but identify as male, or born male bodied but identify as female. Their self-identity regarding gender thus does not correlate with their physical sex.

This research study focuses on the transgender person's perception of their own emerging identity, identity that can be thought of as the "territory of life" (White, 2006, p. 27). The research questions the development of the transgender identity as well as the establishment of this identity in relation to G/god/dess. Identity is the way in which people construct, perceive, present and enact themselves, the group that informs this identity. It "is the way in which we can understand ourselves and the world we live in" (McLachlan, 2007, p. 54).

Myburg (2000) proposes the term "narrative self" to describe the ongoing creation of identity rather than seeing identity as being a fixed structure. In this research, gender identity is seen as a dynamic interplay between a person's physical attributes (that could be changed through SRS), its social construction and the narrative self. "Identity forming becomes thus an ongoing process of growth and creation" (McLachlan, 2007, p. 55). Morgan and Stevens (2008, p. 595) found that "the process of recognizing, acknowledging, and developing one's identity as transgendered is a multistage process in which the sense of a transgender identity develops before one can name it."

Transpeople tend to focus more on gender issues when in psychotherapy than gay and lesbian people (Israel, Gorcheva, Burnes & Walther, 2008). Transgender people focus on gender when struggling to conform to society's normative gender construction or as they physically transition to fit their mental body-image (Israel et al., 2008). The transgender person not only deals with questions of gender in an

intellectual, objective and distanced way, but is confronted with these issues on a daily basis as they go through the transitioning phase. They develop an embodied knowledge of gender, including the binary construction of gender, and of the conflict of mental image regarding gender and the physical attributes that one is born with. For a number of transgender people, it is important to move away from the binary form of gender (male/female) and live as “transpeople” (Dietert, 2007; Tauchert, 2001).

Transgender people have gone through the experience where their gender identity did not conform to their born sex. Transgender people attempt to bring their physical/sexual form into congruence with their subjective identity through physical transitioning, as a way of embodying the gender that they believe themselves to be. It is thus a physical realignment of the assigned gender, in order to be consistent with subjective, gender identity.

Although the born “physical gender” is not what the transgender person believed it should have been, it could be argued that no person could inhabit the ideal s/he and is compelled to approximate (Butler, 1997). However, for a transgender person, gender becomes centralised as they experience themselves as being of the opposite gender to their born sex. Transgender people have unique issues and experiences, and their identities are complex (Morgan et al., 2008).

This study focuses on five transgender participants’ life experiences of the development of their transgender identity. Three of the participants are MTF, male to female, also called trans woman, and two participants are FTM, female to male, also called trans men. Furthermore, the study focuses on the influence of their religious experience on the development of their transgender identity and vice versa.

2.5 The influence of religious belief on the development of gender identity and gender identity on religious belief

Religious belief has a strong influence not only on the forming of spiritual identity but also on gender identity. This identity is formed not only through involvement in the religious community, but by being called by the religious community into femininity

and masculinity, being gendered by performing gender (Butler, 1997) within the church. The church calls this gendered identity into being through the sacred text, theological tradition, ecclesial forms and rituals. Repetitive forms of cultural norms that uphold the gender dichotomy, and not the inherent nature of the person, are also supported within the church structure (Armour, 1999). The patriarchal hierarchy is firmly upheld in most mainline churches and religious communities, with strong impact on social norms regarding gender roles and gender identity.

Churches play an important role in upholding and reinforcing the dominant gender and sexual norms, framing non-conformity as deviation and sinfulness. For example homosexuality is framed as unnatural and sin, by most mainline churches (Boswell, 1980; Russell, 2008). Homosexuality is depicted as unnatural in an evolutionary sense, as homosexual people are seen as unable to reproduce and furthermore that it is unnatural as an assumption exists that it is not reflected in nature (Boswell, 1980).

Whereas in the Inuit culture the transgender person would hold the role of the spiritual leader, the shaman, (D'Anglure, 2005) in Christian tradition the person that does not conform to the norms is marginalised and condemned. "Desires must be brought into alignment with biblical teachings (even if it is) ...inconvenient and distressful (as living as a transgender individual) does not match up with the Christian sexual ethic" (Kennedy, 2008, p. 57). As one of the more Evangelical churches states: "Even if science does determine differentiation in the brain at birth ... even if there are prenatal influences, we can't set aside teachings of the Bible because of research findings" (Kennedy, 2008, p. 57).

Furthermore, the mainline churches are of the opinion that people should abide the "God given body" and their "true sex" without question (Baker-Johnson, 2010, p. 46). These churches call for people to live a holy life, based on a particular understanding of gender and sexual identity as apparently revealed in the Bible and taught by the church (Shaw, 2007). According to these beliefs, God created people as either male or female and this corresponds with their natal sex (Baker-Johnson, 2010), with no recognition of any other gendered possibilities. Further, particular roles and responsibilities associated with each sex/gender are supposedly ordained and

revealed by God through the Bible, for example, for men to be the head of households.

But Christianity also tends to bring an alienation from the physical body and its sexual feelings, seeing the body as the mortal aspect encasing the immortal soul (McNeil, 1996). The creation in God's image is viewed that human beings are spiritual creatures (Glaser, 1991) and the highest creation on earth (Green, 2001). But most church traditions view this image of God as male, whereas the Christian feminist movement has taken "women, equally with man, as the image of God" (Reuther, 1995, p. 284). But even through these statements from the feminist theological movement, the binary is upheld and the possibility for other genders reflecting the image of God is not represented.

Images of G/god/dess, as well as the self, take shape in human relationships from an early age, the human context of relationship between child and parents/care givers, being loving and caring parents or limited and harsh parents (St. Clair, 1994). Tradition, as embodied in sacred scriptures, shapes our G/god/dess perception. But G/god/dess as object is also created through our personal experiences. The dominant Christian tradition depicts G/god/dess as male, with "male monotheism reinforcing the social patriarchal rule through its religious system" (Reuther, 1989, p. 151)

The mainline churches mostly base their ethics and liturgy on this tradition. These traditionalist notions are positioned in opposition to the more liberal, queer ideas that wish to affirm the full humanity of women and men, heterosexual, and from the LGBTI community (Shaw, 2007), and the dominant theological discourse that upholds the gender and sex binary (Baker-Johnson, 2010). Although the mainline churches condemn people from the LGBTI community, no academic literature could be found condemning transgender people (Baker-Johnson, 2010). Transgender people are usually grouped with gay and lesbian people when mentioned or would become the unspeakable, not mentioned at all (Baker-Johnson, 2010).

Despite the power of churches and other religious groups in prescribing and upholding gender and sexual norms, theorists such as Loughlin (2007) argue that it

is the church itself that is standing out as queer, as odd, insofar as it does not fit within the culture of the modern world. He argues that queer theology has developed as a distinctive theology that is interested in the “queerness of God, seeing God as not other than strange and at odds with our ‘fallen’ world” (Loughlin, 2007, p. 8). Queer theology engages with the believers and non-believers who are marginalised by the church and society for their sexual and gender difference or non-conformity. “It serves those who find themselves and others to be other ... It marks not by defining, but by taking up a distance from what is perceived as the normative” (Loughlin, 2007, pp. 8-9). However, the mainline churches do not uphold queer theology and its gendered ideas and there is no space in these churches for people that do not conform to their set norms and values.

There are examples of pockets of acceptance within churches and religious groups of people who fail to conform to gender and sexual norms and expectations. The LGBTI, queer community has created spaces for faith and worship for members of this community with religious and spiritual needs and convictions. Alternative ways of worshipping are constructed (Duncan, 2002) and inclusive worship material is developed that affirm their identity (Berzon, 1996). But a “huge schism seems to exist between secular queers and religious queers” and a need exists to engage these groups in discussions (Rudy, 2007, p. 48). The transgender community is beginning to engage more with transgender spirituality especially in the United States of America (Kaldera, 2008). Currently no published material could be found regarding transgender spiritual identity in South Africa, although some churches, for example The Reforming Church and Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, do provide a space for members of the LGBT community to live out their spiritual identity (Germond & De Gruchy, 1997). These spiritual worlds are shaped by the believers that participate in the religious communities. The sacred text is re-read through a hermeneutics of suspicion and new forms of liturgy are developed. Inclusive churches form a resistance to the mainline church (Armour, 1999) but also challenges society’s constructions of normality, gender and sex. The transgender believer can provide new insights in spirituality through the sharing of their wisdoms (Baker-Johnson, 2010).

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

3.1 The research

The literature has revealed that GID is seen by many as a disorder often suffered by a person who wants to change their gender through SRS. The aim of this study is to describe and explore a transgender person's subjective experience of the development of their transgender identity. It furthermore explores how transgender people are influenced by their religious convictions and how these convictions are influenced as they consider going through the process and/or have been through the process of transitioning.

3.2 The choice of a qualitative research design

The research is qualitative in nature in order to allow for rich descriptions of the experience of the development of a transgender identity (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative methods can "provide a 'deeper' understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative data" (Silverman, 2000, p. 89). In this study the focus was on the rich description of the transgender person's experience of the development of a transgender identity, the critical turning points and the role of the spiritual/religious experience in the development of the transgender identity.

3.2.1 The phenomenological approach

Within a qualitative paradigm, there exist a number of different methodologies. In this study the researcher used a phenomenological methodology as the research focussed on the description of the lived experience of the participants. This methodology values the meanings that the person ascribes to his/her own experience and his/her own existence (Taylor, 1993). In phenomenological psychological research, the researcher attempts to describe the everyday lived world through various phenomena (Giorgi, 1985).

Phenomenology as a philosophy has been largely attributed to the work of Edmund Husserl and was further developed by Giorgi, Van Kaam, Keen, Spiegelberg and Colaizzi (Mayers, 2000). The phenomenological movement flowed from contemporary existential phenomenology which focussed on the creation of methodologies for the studying of human experience (Kruger, 1979). The phenomenological approach concerns itself with a person's awareness of the world and furthermore how a person discovers meaning in the world (Kruger, 1979).

Phenomenology is best understood as a radical, anti-traditional style of philosophizing, which emphasizes the attempt to get to the truth of matters, to describe phenomena, in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that is as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experiencer (Moran, 2000, p. 4).

In phenomenology, the subject is the point of departure (Spiegelberg, 1982). In this research, the subject is the transgender individual.

This research incorporates the following phenomenological focuses:

- human bodiliness;
- spatiality;
- lived relationality; and
- time.

These form part of the lived experience of the person within his/her world (Keen, 1975; Kruger, 1979). The experience of the person with a transgender identity reflects in their experience of human bodiliness, their spatiality, their lived relationality and their experience of time.

3.2.1.1 Human bodiliness

Phenomenology has as one of its key aspects human bodiliness (Kruger, 1979). It compliments this research as human bodiliness is one of the central aspects in the transgender person's being within the world.

Humans "stand out toward the world in being a body" and this bodiliness ordinarily does not unduly trouble a person (Kruger, 1979, p. 40). Only when the body becomes an object for the person, thus becoming aware of the body, does the

person become conscious that s/he “has a body as an object, rather than of his [her] pre-reflective mood of being a body” (Kruger, 1979, p. 40). For this person, talking about his/her body would also mean talking about him/her-self (Van den Berg, 1972).

One of the central notions in the phenomenological discourse is that “the body shapes itself in accordance with its task in the world” (Kruger, 1979, p. 41). This research focuses on the lived experience of bodiliness of the transgender person in the lived world where the person moves from being a pre-reflective body to becoming much more aware of her/his own bodiliness within the lived experience.

3.2.1.2 Spatiality

Kruger (1979, p. 48) states: “To be ourselves, which means the same as being thoroughly at home in our own bodies, we must have a certain space in which we can move, act express and gesture.” This space consists of more than just the physical space; it is also occupied by the lived space (Keen, 1975) - the space in relation to other, to objects, to fantasy. Furthermore, spatiality has an intimate interlocking with man’s bodiliness, forming a human spatiality. The individual’s human spatiality is set within his/her personal horizon but this is also set at a particular time (Kruger, 1979).

Spirituality also requires a form of spatiality, either by the reflection through architecture or the creation of a space for worshipping (Kruger, 1979). This study will also focus not only on the transgender person’s experience of being within space in relation to objects, but also their experience of spirituality in this spatiality as it influences their lived experience and their own perceived influence on spirituality. Furthermore this study will be explore how the world is experienced by the transgender person as it is lived in a specific time.

3.2.1.3 Lived relationality

Being in the world in relation to objects, human beings’ existence also manifests in their interactions and their relationships with other human beings. “Our world is a world which we share with others of whom we have an ordinary knowledge of being in the world in the same way as we are. Being human means being in relation to others.” (Kruger, 1979, p. 81)

Lived relationality refers to a person's experience of being in a relationship with another, whether a close relationship or a relationship that only has some distant connection. Even the experience of loneliness can only exist if human beings did not in essence relate to one another (Kruger, 1979).

To be with another is to share the world, the space, the objects and the time with another. People experience being with others differently, and being with one person differently to being with another person.

3.2.1.4 Time

"Man is not in time, we should rather say that time is in man; it characterizes his existence" (Kruger, 1979, p. 69). The lived time of transgender people will be explored in this study as it unfolds in the here and now as the person's history unfolds in the retained data, the irreversible lived time, showing itself in the specific spatiality of the interview (Kruger, 1979).

3.3 The research process

In order for the phenomenological method to remain faithful to its purpose, it needs to be reflective in its nature and intent. Each phenomenological research methodology thus needs to be developed in relation to the particular phenomenon (Kruger, 1979). Giorgi (2008) states that consensus does not exist regarding the use of phenomenology in research and that different methods are utilised in data analysis and the research process.

3.3.1 Sampling method

3.3.1.1 Gaining access to the study population

It was a challenge as researcher to interview transgender people, and the researcher believes that it was only through being part of the marginalised gay community that access became more possible within the transgender group. Being part of the queer culture, where shame is one of the premises on which this culture is built, dignity in shame is created (Warner, 1999). Shame is projected by the dominant culture onto marginalised subgroups as being 'the other'.

Kirsch (2000, p. 16) states the following from Foucault's work: "discriminatory labels are vehicles for the construction of alliances that can serve as a basis for liberation." This leads to a participatory consciousness, as the researcher merges with the research participant through language and meaning, leading to knowledges being communicated even through silence (Heshusius, 1994). Embodied knowledge is created where the researcher knows with the participant. Thus, "knowledge of the other becomes knowing with the other" and not the dominant western perspective "of knowing the other or about the other" (Kotzé, 2002, p. 6). "And this knowing with the other does not need language in order to form knowledges" (McLachlan, 2007, p. 83). But it needs an acknowledgement of dignity and worthiness.

Embodied knowledge needs a voice, a way to be communicated. Using the narratives became a way to embody transgender people's knowledges and understandings but also a way to share these knowledges with the reader. Adopting a phenomenological methodology enables the researcher to investigate the essence of the individual's experience, "to interpret knowledge at the point of perception" (Bricker, 2009, p. 104).

3.3.1.2 Criteria for selection of subjects

Research subjects were selected to meet the following criteria:

- The participants had to be adults (above 18) in order to be able to give informed consent and as a GID diagnosis entails that the person is above 18 years of age.
- Participants had to be transgender - either through self-report or through a clinical assessment.
- The participant must have gone, or was busy going through SRS or lived as a person from a different sex than s/he was born.
- The participant must be able to communicate thoughts, feelings and perceptions related to research phenomena.
- The participant should be self-defined as religious and/or spiritual.
- The participant must be from Southern Africa.
- The participant must be willing and able to communicate openly to the researcher on a voluntary basis.

- The participant must be able to communicate in English so that the subtle semantic nuances are not lost through translation. (Kruger, 1979; Mayers, 2000).

3.3.1.3 Invitation to participate in the study

A convenience sampling method (Kelly, 1999) was used. The researcher sent a letter of invitation (please see Appendix A) via Gender-DynamiX, a non-profit organization that focuses on transgender people. This letter was distributed among people in this organization and transgender people who were interested in participating in this research were invited to contact the researcher via e-mail or phone. The participants participated on a voluntary basis and participants' identities are kept confidential.

3.3.1.4 The sample

Although six participants were interviewed, only five participants' data could be used, as one of the participants identified himself during the interview as being a cross dresser and stated that he was not a transgender person.

The participants were from varied cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Both FTM (Female to Male) and MTF (Male to Female) transgender people were interviewed. The youngest participant was 20 and the oldest 67. Participants were from Southern Africa and only one participant lived for a while in the United States of America. Five of the participants identified themselves as transgender and came from a Christian background. One of the participants had already had a sex change, one had a partial sex change, one was in the process of transitioning and two were beginning the process.

3.3.2 Data Collection

3.3.2.1 Establishing rapport

As a phenomenological approach aims to understand events and their meanings within their natural setting (Keen, 1975) it becomes of the utmost importance that good rapport is established at the onset of the interview. In order to establish rapport the researcher constructed a space where physical and emotional safety were present and the research participant was educated about the interview process

(McWilliams, 2004). The participants were also free to ask questions at the onset of the interview and participated on a voluntary basis with the option to leave at any time if they felt they needed to. For the researcher, it was more important to seek the truth than to confirm her own hypothesis, and this enabled the researcher to be more sensitive and self-critical while focussing on the research participants' experience (Keen, 1975). Making use of communication skills and encouraging spontaneous and candid emotionally expressive speech (McWilliams, 2004), rapport was easily established in the interviewing context.

3.3.2.2 Nature of the interview

As the phenomenological researcher attempts to "make sense of a particular aspect of human existence" (Mayers, 2000, p. 25), the interviews were qualitative in nature. This enabled the researcher to access the rich description of the person's narrative of self-identity (Morgan, 2000) but also the way in which the transgender person sees his/her development of a transgender identity, the turning points during this development and the role of spirituality/religion in the development of the transgender identity.

The researcher interviewed six participants individually. Open ended questions were used during these semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviewing method is often used in qualitative research as it can be adapted to suit a particular situation (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Furthermore, open ended questions allow respondents to voice their opinions and experiences without any restrictions (Kelly, 2002), contributing to the phenomenological approach that was used in the analysis of the data.

3.3.2.3 Formulation of the questions

The interviewing method used was based on a phenomenological approach. The participants were invited to describe their present and past experience of being transgendered and the influence of religion on their development of a transgender identity.

Some semi-structured open-ended questions were used as prompts, for example:

- How did you become aware that you were transgender?

- When was the first time that you knew you were transgender?
- What were others' reactions towards you being transgender?
- What do you regard as turning points in the development of a transgender identity?
- How do you experience living as a transgender individual in society?
- What is your spiritual/religious background?
- How did your religious and/or spiritual understanding change as you were going through the stages or repositioned yourself as a transgender person?
- How did you experience your religion influencing the development of your transgender identity?

3.3.3 Data Analysis

3.3.3.1 The methodology process in phenomenological psychological research

The phenomenological researcher moves from “a natural attitude to a transcendental attitude through a process of phenomenological reduction - a process of suspending, or bracketing, personal preconceptions and presuppositions by making them explicit” (Kruger, 1979, p. 142). The researcher thus attempts to bring the experience of the participants into focus without his/her own bias regarding the experience or worldview, or what the researcher expects the participant to say (Mayers, 2002). In moving through this bracketing process, the researcher dialogued with her supervisors and with people with an interest in transgender/genderqueer, dealt with her own experiences in therapy, and wrote up her own reflections and counter-transference that she experienced during the interviewing process.

3.3.3.2 Scientific phases of explication

Giorgi (1985) and Kruger (1979) present the following four essential stages of phenomenological research that were incorporated in this research:

- Holistic view and intuitive grasp of the data;
- Emergence of meaning units;
- Transformation and rigorous reflection and
- Synthesis and reflection.

3.3.3.2.1 Stage 1: Holistic view and intuitive grasp of the data

Each transcript was read several times to gain a holistic view, general sense and intuitive grasp of the entire interview (Giorgi, 1985; Kruger, 1979; Mayers, 2000). The researcher found that listening to the interviews in conjunction with reading the transcripts provided richer data as the nuances of language use became more explicit and more subtleties appeared. (See Appendix D)

3.3.3.2.2 Stage 2: Emergence of meaning units

The researcher re-read the protocol in order to discriminate and delineate natural meaning units/central themes as they spontaneously emerged. The specific aim during this stage was to discriminate “meaning units from within a psychological perspective and with a focus on the phenomenon being researched” (Giorgi, 1985, p. 10). These meaning units were then organized in a workable and manageable form (Thorpe, 1989). Although these meaning units were identified and conceptually differentiated, they were inseparably related through the individuals’ lived experiences (Kruger, 1979). (See Appendix E)

3.3.3.2.3 Stage 3: Transformation and rigorous reflection

The central themes/natural meaning units were rigorously reflected upon and transformed as the psychological insight that was contained in them was expressed. Through imaginative variation and reflection (Giorgi, 1985) the researcher arrived at a “psychological statement which accurately expressed the subject’s intended meaning” (Kruger, 1979, p. 154).

3.3.3.2.4 Stage 4: Synthesis and reflection

The meaning units/themes were synthesized and integrated into a consistent statement that reflected the participant’s lived experience (Giorgi, 1985). The meaning units were regrouped into a consistent description of the individual’s development of a transgender identity. Where discrepancies arose, the researcher worked from the conviction that although some themes seemed logically inexplicable, they could be existentially valid and real, (Kruger, 1979) finding meaning within these contradictions. The meaning units of the various protocols were then integrated and synthesized forming a consistent description of the development of a transgender identity by the participants.

These sub-phases do not operate independently but they form part of an ordered set of “abstractions describing the complicated mental process that the phenomenological scientist experiences as a natural totality” (Van Kaam, 1958 in Dreyer, 1979, pp. 152-153). The phases flowed into one another but did not necessarily have a linear progression as the researcher found herself going back to certain stages at various points during the process.

3.3.4 The research report

The research incorporates quoted phrases from research participants as the researcher attempts to explain the phenomenon and lived experience of the participants (Mayers, 2000).

In the write up of the research, the researcher used five pseudonyms for the participants namely: Bridgette, Felicity, Justin, Thabisile, and Thapelo.

3.3.5 Scientific rigour of the research

3.3.5.1 Reliability and Validity

Validity in phenomenological research is not achieved when more than one researcher describes the phenomenon with the same words or expressions or arrives at an identical description.

Rather, validity is indicated by the extent to which such differences in wording and expression are intersubjectively understood to reflect an identical meaning or to indicate similar themes to those which emerged from the data as explicated by the original researcher (Kruger, 1979, p. 155).

The researcher included a research assistant in the analysis of the data as well as the input of the supervisor and reflects these similar themes that emerged through the analysis in the findings.

A study can furthermore be considered auditable if another researcher or reader of the study can clearly follow the decision trail followed by the researcher (Mayers, 2000). Reliability and validity is thus achievable “when rigor in the research enquiry is

maintained” (Sandelowski, 1986 in Mayers, 2000, p. 27). The researcher enables the reader to follow this decision trail in this study maintaining validity and reliability.

3.4 Ethics

3.4.1 Ethics approval

Ethical approval was granted by the Humanities Research Ethics Committee from the University of KwaZulu- Natal in 2008.

3.4.2 Ethical considerations

The research was transparent, accountable and ethical (Kotzé, 2002). Before the potential participants decided to participate in the research, the study’s purpose was fully explained to them. To ensure transparency participants were made aware of the focus of the study and were told that the questions would be open-ended in order to allow for topics to emerge within the discussion. Written informed consent was obtained after the person agreed to participate. (See Appendix C)

The participants were made aware that there would be no direct benefit from this study although the participants will have full access to the research findings as it is written up in the dissertation and any articles. The process was made accountable by ensuring that objectivity was maintained.

Participants agreed that a recorder could be used during the interviews. The interviews were transcribed and the research data was kept in a locked cupboard to which only the researcher, supervisor, co-supervisor and research assistant had access.

Pseudonyms were used and the identity and identifying data of participants were only available to the researcher to ensure confidentiality. The research data will be destroyed after six years.

3.4.3 Minimization of potential risks

Participants' identities were not revealed and confidentiality was maintained. Fox (1976 in Mayers, 2000) states that if the potential exists that unexpected feelings and memories can be aroused or triggered during the interview, the researcher needs to remedy the situation. Although participants were not subjected to high levels of stress through the interviews, the numbers of local psychologists were made available to the participants to contain any stressful outcomes from the interviews. The researcher also linked participants to available support structures if needed - for example church groups and support groups. At no time during the research did any of the participants ask for debriefing or further information.

3.4.4 Accountability through reflection

This particular research was conducted by a specific researcher and supervisor and was situated in a specific context, space and timeframe with a certain group of participants. The account that is presented in this research is just one among several possible defensible accounts (McTaggart, 1997).

As phenomenological research is praxis-based, the "fundamental worldview of the researcher determines his [her] attitude toward phenomena and thus guides the nature of the methodological excavation of a particular phenomenon which ... is destined to reveal itself according to the researcher's excavation procedures" (Kruger, 1979, p. 141). The researcher attempted to approach the research from a position and/or place of conceptual silence (Kruger, 1979). In addition, the researcher reflected, in writing, on her own experience through the research process (see Appendix B). This reflection was not added in as a chapter but positioned outside the main body of the research text, symbolically reflecting the researcher's move from a more natural attitude to a transcendental attitude (Kruger, 1979).

3.5 Concluding comments

Phenomenological research is based on a philosophy that research can never arrive, it is always in process, the investigation into the phenomenon can never be

exhausted and the research can never be complete (Kruger, 1979). This research attempts to add to the knowledge of the phenomenon, the phenomenon being the lived experience of the transgender individual, their development of their transgender identity and how religion influences this development.

This chapter focussed on the rationale for the use of the phenomenology as research methodology, explaining the research process and fore fronting the ethical considerations. The following chapter will focus on the findings of the research.

Chapter 4

THE TRANSGENDER PERSON'S EXPERIENCE: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This section presents the different subjective experiences of transgender individuals pre-transitioning, at critical turning points, during the experience of transitioning and the experience of religious influence on the development of their transgender identity.

4.2 Subjective experience of transgender identity

4.2.1 A brief introduction to the participants

The participants consistently experienced themselves as either male or female but opposite to what their born, anatomical sex was. Although all the participants did state that they were transgender/transsexual/trans man, Justin (FTM) conveyed that he was not willing to define himself as transgender as he did not want to accept the label. He questions: *"When does one stop being transgender, and become the man, woman that you are?"* Justin is in his forties and is on hormonal treatment while he is awaiting top-surgery (breast removal - he does not see it as a mastectomy). He stated: *"I am just me"*, as he identifies himself as *"a man"* and *"a trans- man"*.

Thapelo (FTM) introduced himself as follows: *"You know my name, I am Thapelo. I am transsexual. I came out to my family from the age of about 14 years, when I have realised I don't see myself as a homosexual, as people might see that or I don't see myself as a lesbian person, I see myself more as a transgender person"*. Thapelo stated: *"I know I was a guy...boer seun"*. As a man in his early twenties, he is in the beginning phase of hormonal treatment and is considering top-surgery. Although he sees his existence as a product of rape and has had little sense of his own historical

identity, because he never knew his father, he finds his identity with his grandfather and through his call from Ancestors.

Thabisile (MTF) is also in her early twenties. She has a sense of herself as born out of a relationship where an *“imbalance”* existed, because her father and mother were from two different African countries and two different cultures. She experienced conflict regarding her cultural heritage: *“So I went to my mother’s side and I just did everything in a way and I sort of like abandoned my dad’s side.”* She has gone through the psychological evaluation and therapeutic process that is a prerequisite for having the sex-change operation, and is awaiting an appointment with the doctor to begin with hormonal treatment. She sees herself as *“feminine”*, *“transgender”*, *“a woman”*, and stated: *“I am a female”*.

Bridgette (MTF) describes herself as: *“I see a nice and friendly, middle aged woman, sense of humour can be quite wicked and also although bubbly at certain stages shy, strangely enough, shy in company. Four cats, classical music, internet, computer - that is me.”* She is in her sixties and a pensioner. She sees herself as being a *“genuine mother”* and a grandmother. She has had top surgery but not a complete sex-change, leaving her with belief that she is *“in-between”* the genders, although she contradicts this by saying, *“I am a woman”* and *“feminine”*. For her the physical body is between genders but her eternal aspect, the soul, is feminine.

Felicity (MTF) is in her forties and has transitioned physically from male to female. She describes herself as: *“I am soft, I am gentle, I am quiet”*. Her experience from early on was that she enjoyed the company of other females more, and also the activities, clothes and even the presents that they were getting. Felicity came to a point in her thirties where she could identify herself as transsexual. For her it was important to *“live as a girl”* by the age of forty, a goal that she feels she has achieved.

4.2.2 The transgender person’s world

The participants experienced the world as being strongly defined by gender. These worlds of gender are characterised by certain symbols and activities and experienced as requiring certain ways of being.

4.2.2.1 Public gendered worlds

The FTM transgender participants experienced that as people with a female natal sex, they were originally expected to be part of a feminine world characterized by nurturing and bearing children.

“I want to have children, but I don’t want to bear them. My partner is willing to go for the scientific route ... I will cook and wash dishes but I will not bear children. A man is a man.” (Justin, FTM)

“I would feel I don’t feel feminine or belong with the females, I am a boy, I am a man. I have started being rough and being among boys, because I felt more comfortable around them. That was at a very young age.” (Thapelo, FTM)

The MTF participants felt that they were expected to belong to a world of power, aggression and strength, a masculine world, where they had to dominate. The MTF participants felt displaced from this masculine world and experienced themselves as belonging more to the nurturing feminine world.

“Okay so then mom gets very worried about this little boy child in this house full of women... She decided that there needs to be male influence so she sends me for boxing lessons I hate, absolutely hate! I don’t mind if it is practising and you smack a little bit of bags or something like that but when I have to stand up against my friend and I have to lightly get him with a hook, I don’t want to hurt him and I never went back again.” (Bridgette, MTF)

For all the participants, their transgender identity did not fit into the gendered world that their anatomical body constituted them towards. The participants’ first feeling of difference tended to be early in life, when they realised that specific views and constructions of gender were imposed on them and that they were expected to behave in ways congruent with their anatomical sex. The participants lived in an uncomfortable way with aspects of these ascribed gender identities e.g. clothes, activities, games and toys.

“Ehm at a very early age probably at 4/5 years of age I realised that ehm, I was different. I was not very happy with the kinds of gifts I was getting because I was always getting little boys gifts and my sister was getting little girls gifts and I would have preferred the gifts she was getting.” (Felicity, MTF)

One of the participants, Thabisile (MTF), describes how, as a boy, she identified more strongly with her mother. Although she was anatomically male, she experienced herself as being more like her mother, her mother being one of the most important others in her world. She accepted her mother’s culture as her culture, rejecting her father’s culture and modelling herself to her mother.

All the participants experienced a time of ambivalence and confusion as their transgender identity emerged.

“In primary school I was a bit confused. I didn’t even know what to do. Yah, sometimes I would feel like, okay maybe I should play 6 months with the girls and 6 months with the boys. It was a shifting thing. Sometimes I would feel more like this and sometimes I would feel more like this. It was a shifting thing, cause I didn’t know what to do and I was just getting confused. So sometimes even friends will tell me I am confusing them, cause sometime I am a girl and other time a boy. So I was a bit confused and didn’t know what to do.” (Thapelo, FTM)

Although all the participants had a strong feeling that they did not fit in the gendered worlds ascribed to their born anatomical sex, some did try to comply with these gendered worlds while simultaneously experiencing strong resistance to these worlds.

After school Bridgette (MTF), and Felicity (MTF), worked in very masculine spaces in an attempt to destroy their private feminine self, but they experienced this as foreign and failed in it as there was no space for their subjective sense of being female. Bridgette (MTF), and Felicity (MTF) also tried to comply by moving into heterosexual

relationships where they attempted to live out their male sex, but these attempts also failed, causing anxiety and depression.

4.2.2.2 Private, hidden gendered worlds

The participants experienced strong resistance to the gendered worlds associated with their anatomical birth sex and for most of them this led to the creation of a second more private, hidden world. Parallel to Thabisile's (MTF), Felicity's (MTF), Bridgette's (MTF), and Justin's (FTM) public world, shared with family and others, they lived in a private gendered world.

"I started, well not really dressing, dressing, but kind of experimenting with female garments, while I was a boy at school. My mom went and bought this beautiful dress and I tried to get into one of the garments. But I had to find a time when nobody was around and that was difficult." (Bridgette, MTF)

In Thabisile's (MTF) private gendered world, she lived out her subjective sense of gender by dressing up in feminine clothes that made her feel comfortable and walking around the house when others were not around. This she achieved by volunteering to stay at home and look after the house in order to *"go through her feminine stuff"*. Felicity (MTF) secretly borrowed and stole from the world of females. When her subjective sense of herself as a female became publicly seen, this was framed as unacceptable and criminal. She also *"started borrowing some of my sister's clothing which I would dress up in or wear on occasions or even sleep in at night."* Bridgette (MTF) also lived out her feminine identity in secret by dressing up when others were not around. She commented that her transgender identity led her to pretend *"to be a guy that I was not really"* when she had to go to work while she would *"put her feminine identity in the cupboard"*.

The participants experienced that, as their transgender identity developed, they wanted to share this hidden, secret world with others. The identity that they lived in this hidden world, they wanted to live out in the dominant world, the space shared by the community, leading to attempts to invite and allow others to become part of this secret world. And as others became more a part of this world, they felt that this secret expression of gender could become more open and they could express this

gender in the dominant world more freely and more publicly by cross-dressing. Some of the participants experienced this as very affirming. All the participants were dressing according to their lived gender fulltime during the period the researcher was conducting the interviews.

4.2.2.3 Being between worlds, living in different worlds

While all the participants recognised two categories of sex/gender, they describe themselves as living between these.

Thapelo (FTM) spoke of “*a third thing*”:

“Okay, eh, I was, eh, I know I was a guy, like a ‘boer seun’, eh, those kind of thing eh ya, that was what I knew, I didn’t know that there was a third thing that could come eh, and I saw myself as a boy, although my body did not correspond to the way I believed I was. So one could imagine, one could think I was a female because I had a female body which was wrong. So it was just something that was happening.”

At times he saw himself as a person with two genders: “*... not a calling as only to be a sangoma but also to be a normal person and a person experiencing two genders at the same time and I thought I was fortunate to be able to do that.*”

He described the experience that he exists in the gendered world in a very ambivalent way: despite being born female he has always saw himself as a male, but ironically would not choose to be a man. During the interview Thapelo (FTM) conveyed when asked if he would still want to be a woman if he could choose:

“Yes, I would prefer to be a woman because I would make a good mother. So that would not be difficult. That is why I am telling you my body gave me confusion because I would really want to be a woman. My body, my mind and my soul are not, you know are not one thing. If it was one thing I would want it to be something I would want to be. So it is just difficult for me to be a woman if I fake it ... I am just a man and like I said gender doesn’t really matter to me. I am just a man yah, but I am a human being and doing what other people do. So it is not because I am a man. I am just living my life as positive as I can.”

For some of the other participants, being unable to physically transition completely left them with the experience that, although they were presenting their lived gender, they still did not belong in that group or alternatively that they belonged in between the two genders.

For Bridgette (MTF), feeling that she did not belong in either gender as she presents with “*a male bottom and a female top*”, left her wondering if she has moved herself “*beyond gender*”. Later, however, she contradicted herself and stated that she is feminine. For her, the masculine is aggressive, powerful and destructive. The feminine is nurturing and she experiences herself as being more nurturing and more at home in a nurturing environment. But being physically between sexes has left her with the experience that she is “*in between*” and does not “*fit anywhere*”.

4.2.3 The experience of self in relation to others - lived relationality

4.2.3.1 Experience of self as different

The subjective experience of being different from others stood out as central in the life of all of these transgender participants. This experience of difference led them to feel alienated, alone and not understood by others, being separate from the dominant society and even alienated from self.

Four of the participants were already aware at the age of five years that they were different from others with the same birth anatomical sex.

“I would feel I don’t feel feminine or belong with the females, I am a boy, I am a man ... that was at a very young age.” (Thapelo, FTM)

Only for one of the participants in this study did the feeling of being different present itself later.

“One thing I remember about my childhood, there was nothing about gender. We all played together, all the boys and girls, all played the same games. I think that is why it took me so long to figure out that I am different because nothing was made about the fact that I was ... a tomboy.” (Justin, FTM)

Some of the participants tried to conform and belong to the group with the same sex as their born anatomical sex, while still experiencing themselves as being different. Felicity (MTF) attempted to make her brother her role model but she *“could not live up to it”* and for her, this was a failure. She felt more at home with her sister and other girls, feeling as though she belonged with them and as part of their world.

“Ehm I also discovered that I got on better with my sister than my brother, ehm despite the fact that there was a four year age difference between my sister and myself and only a two year age difference between my brother and myself, ehm now ehm I used to go and sit with my sister on her bed and just spend time with her talking and what have you. I really got on better with her.”

(Felicity, MTF)

The participants, as children, experienced a struggle in identifying with and participating in the traditional normative gender activities, as they felt different from the other boys and girls. These differences from their peers were felt most intensely during puberty by all the participants as their bodies started to change. As the gender roles and expectations became more marked during adolescence, the participants experienced that “being different” was accentuated, forcing some of them to try and identify with the homosexual population.

Four of the participants - Thapelo (FTM), Justin (FTM), Bridgette (MTF), and Thabisile (MTF) - explicitly defined their identity in opposition to being homosexual although they are grouped within the LGBTI community. Most of the participants are heterosexual but all went through a stage where they were perceived as gay by others.

“During school I had gay guys hitting on me, left right and centre, but I was not gay. I didn’t know what I was. I was obviously giving them messages ... I suppose gender is between your ears and sex is between your legs. Gender wise I was much more girl than I have realised. Ehm, I was not gay.”

(Bridgette, MTF)

“I was uncomfortable being a lesbian, although there was a time when I thought I might be a very butch lesbian, that was not who I was.” (Justin, FTM)

Bridgette (MTF) experienced that her sister recognized, affirmed and validated her feelings of being different, but her sister defined this as being gay, an identity that Bridgette found foreign and unacceptable. She felt that she could not belong to this group.

For most of the participants, it was important to date heterosexual people, although this created some intimacy problems as most of them had not gone through the whole transition. Only Thapelo (FTM) and Justin (FTM) had had more affirming responses from partners, although neither of them have had bottom or top surgery, and are only using testosterone injections.

The participants experienced that they could live their chosen gender identity more in the company of others with this gender, and that they felt more comfortable expressing their gender in those situations. For them, interacting with people with the same gender as their lived gender was experienced as being more comfortable and that they could relate better with them. But they still saw themselves as being different to people of this new gender and that they do not belong completely to this group.

Thapelo (FTM) sees himself as being like other boys/men, but he also feels that he is different to them. Even though he is busy transitioning physically to being a man and experiences himself as being a man, he claims that he has not chosen this as he would have preferred to be a woman. For him, living as a man is difficult, full of problems, a choice that he would not have made. And although he is living in this world as a man, he also sees himself as is different from other men, but nonetheless believes that he has been constituted to be a male.

“I am not powerful. I’m not / I’m not / I’m not very powerful. I think, I wouldn’t want to be a man if I had a choice. I would not want to be that because I never had a good, perfect relationship with a male person, even if I look at my mother who was married with a male person before. My uncles were not

great guys and the men I was always around were crazy or something. I never had a good reason just to be man. The men were always criminals in front of my eyes ... being a man is very-very difficult today on this earth because of black men are criminals. I wouldn't want to be on a bad side, I would always want to be on the good side. So I am not proud to be man. I am just trying my best to be a good man, but it is very difficult to be that.”
(Thapelo, FTM)

4.2.3.2 Experiencing of others in relation to self

The participants shared different experiences regarding the reaction of others to them being transgender. Furthermore, they experienced different reactions from different people within their own worlds.

Most of the participants felt that people saw them as different, or not conforming enough to their own anatomical gender from a young age. They felt that people were able to ‘see’ this difference from others of the same birth anatomical sex, and would react to it in different ways.

Three of the participants’ subjective experience was that their parents tried to force certain sex/gender roles onto them that fitted with their anatomical sex. As a child, Bridgette’s (MTF) mother classified her as a boy and attempted to strengthen her maleness through exposure to more male influence. She experienced this as being in opposition to her sense of self as being soft and gentle, whereas Thabisile’s (MTF) parents realised that she was different and *“just let it go”*. As with Thabisile’s parents, Thapelo’s (FTM) parents also noticed a difference when he was a child but *“they wouldn’t talk about it”*.

“My parents have noticed that as well, although they wouldn’t talk about it, but they have noticed. They have noticed it in pre-school and even in crèche, yeh, they would say some things so they have noticed it from a very young age that I am very different to what they think I was.” (Thapelo, FTM)

Later in life, Bridgette’s (MTF) mother could not relate to her as female. She regarded her as sick, criminal and not her child. Bridgette felt that her mother *“could*

not find a place for me with her”, did not acknowledge her as her child but stated that she was “*a cousin from Cape Town*” and was worried that Bridgette would become a paedophile. Bridgette experienced this as rejection as she tried to include her mother into her life, but up to her mother’s death she still refused to see her child as being her daughter. This experience of her mother’s rejection left Bridgette feeling more alone in a world where she was not supported by her mother, her family or the community.

The participants at one time or another experienced the community as hostile. This hostile world was unfriendly (*“I know what it is to be laughed at”*) or unfamiliar. Some of them felt out of place in this world and most encountered rejection and ridicule by others. For some, it was more intense and over a longer period. Most still face these aspects in their lives as they feel that society does not accept people who do not conform to the “*norms and rules*” put forth by society.

Although Thabisile (MTF) experienced acceptance from her mother, after her mother’s death, her world became a very hostile space to live in. In standard 10 she was treated as a criminal for living out her subjective identity as a female: she got jailed after she was caught out presenting as female while having a passport that identified her anatomical sex as male. She felt that this environment was dangerous and humiliating, and feared that the guards would expose her in the broader community and world by publishing the photographs that they took of her. Not only did she feel exposed by this experience but she also felt vulnerable living in this world. She experienced, at times, living out a transgender identity as highly traumatic.

For some, the experience of being rejected and ridiculed by others as a transgender person left them feeling fragmented: *“it is picking up the pieces and putting them all back again”*. For Justin (FTM) it was important to put himself *“together again as a man, as a person”*. These encounters were very difficult for the participants, but they also felt that it made them stronger people.

Furthermore, the participants’ subjective experience was that although some people saw them as being different from others of the same sex, there also existed a

constant contrast between what others perceived them to be and what they knew privately. People would see them as the gender of their physical, anatomical body where they knew that they were of the opposite gender and sex.

Later in life, some of the participants were seen by others as gay, despite knowing themselves that they were heterosexual and some would be identified as transvestites or cross-dressers, when they viewed their cross-dressing as a way to express their lived gender, rather than for the sake of cross-dressing.

Felicity (MTF) and Bridgette (MTF) also faced the break-up of relationships, engagements and marriages due to being transgender. The loss of these intimate connections was experienced as overwhelming as they experienced the rejection of their partners leaving them as they tried to explore and develop their transgender identity. Although some of the partners did try to accept the cross-dressing aspect, they found it difficult to relate to their partner experiencing themselves as female but presenting in a male body. Bridgette and Felicity felt that they were not only being hurt themselves but that they also hurt their partners, leading to further experiences of guilt. They tried to deal with these rejections through suicide attempts and other self destructive acts.

“During the whole time we were married the more and more time I spent with her, the more and more I realised that is actually what I want to be like. I want to be a woman. I started dressing up more and more obviously in private and secret. On occasions I would put make-up on and when I take the make-up off I didn’t take the mascara off properly and there would be black lines under my eyes and she would notice it and she would confront me about it and I would breakdown. Eventually it got to a stage where she turned around to me one day and she said to me ‘Sorry, but I am not a lesbian I don’t want to be with another woman you need to go and get some professional help.’ We separated and I went to see a psychologist.” (Felicity, MTF)

Although most participants encountered rejection and some ridicule and scorn, they all shared experiences of some acceptance as people with a transgender identity. This will be discussed later in the chapter.

4.2.4 The transgender person's experience of their body

All the participants were very aware and conscious of their bodies. This awareness was from an early age, mostly pre-school. Even the participant who has gone through the complete transitioning is still very conscious of her body. Their bodies as objects have been fore fronted as they have experienced that their anatomical body and lived body are not the same. But they also experienced their anatomical body and lived body in relation to self and other.

4.2.4.1 Anatomical body versus lived body

All the participants experienced that they were either a male trapped within a female body or a female trapped within a male body. This awareness was from an early age as they experienced themselves as being different from the children who had the same anatomical body as they had. But during this time, some of the participants also faced confusion. Felicity (MTF) tried to follow in her brother's footsteps and tried to identify with him. Their anatomical bodies were the same but her lived body was more similar to her sister's. Thabisile (MTF) felt that her physical body would take on the shape and gestures that were feminine when she was forced to participate in male activities. Thapelo (FTM) felt confused as he tried to fit in with one group and then again with the other, acting for a time in accordance with his anatomical body and for a time in accordance with his lived body. Justin (FTM) found it difficult to navigate the concept of the different genders participating in different activities at school, as he found himself identifying with the one group (male) while struggling to fit into the other group (female). For Bridgette (MTF) it was navigating the boarding school that consisted of boys, while trying to understand why she felt so different and out of place.

Two of the participants believed as children that they would automatically change as they became older. Bridgette (MTF) describes that as a child she experienced herself as female, despite her male body, and believed that her body would automatically metamorphosize into that of a female at puberty:

"I felt that I was a little bit like a butterfly. I was going to change automatically. I was not going to have any surgery or anything; it was just going to happen like that."

During adolescence, the participants' lived experience was that they became more alienated from their bodies as their bodies developed. And although pleasure was achievable through this (anatomical) body for some of the participants, this created even more confusion.

“During this whole time I was struggling with my masculinity and femininity and I was / I didn't know what was going on. All I know was when I went in to puberty I was starting to hate the fact that I started getting erections and I didn't know what they were about. I discovered eh, that could eh, get a lot of pleasure but I didn't really know what was going on.” (Felicity, MTF)

For most of the participants, this led to critical turning points in their development of their transgender identity.

4.3 Development and critical turning points in transgender identity

4.3.1 The experience of the body as critical turning point

All the participants experienced that some parts of their anatomical body were foreign to their lived body, that these parts were like foreign objects attached to the body, not belonging to their bodies. They sensed that who they are was not reflected in the body that they were born with. Some of them felt that the reflection in the mirror was not the same as the mental image that they had of themselves, and if they would have drawn a picture of themselves, it would not be the same as what the physical body was presenting. This led all of them on the quest to change their anatomical bodies to become more congruent with their lived bodies, or experiences of themselves as belonging to opposite sex/gender.

Thapelo (FTM) often experienced his body as a problem or obstacle, as he experienced it confronting his dominant identity.

“It [menstruation] gives me the idea that my body is confused and I am the one that is confused, my body knows it has to. I started getting confused with the female body. I started asking myself if I am doing the wrong thing, why is my body not confused, because if I am a boy I actually need to be confused.”

That means I will not go through other stages like other guys at school. It was something that made me to think I am just, I am just crazy or something because I am doing the things that every guy do...” (Thapelo, FTM)

4.3.1.1 Non-surgical/non-medical attempts to change

As adolescents and young people, most of the participants attempted to bring their anatomical body in alignment with their lived body - for example, by binding their breasts or “*putting some things in my pants*”.

“I started binding at a very young age. Some people even asked if I have breasts. I didn’t do what some persons do. Some people bind, others don’t bind, they just leave their body as it is but I started binding and started doing things, I started putting some things in my pants. I started doing things to feel more man. They took me more as a boy rather than a girl.” (Thapelo, FTM)

The MTF participants mainly added artificial breasts.

“That time I was doing the artificial, having breasts, putting in my fake breasts and all that, it was just like simple me; I was just wearing unisex clothes.”
(Thabisile, MTF)

As Felicity (MTF) started understanding the “*condition*” more, she wanted to do something about it - understanding led to action. She started going out to clubs as a trans woman, wearing women’s clothing and make-up. *“I started slowly but surely transitioning, growing my hair out, I had both my ears pierced ehm, I started growing my fingernails longer, I started wearing androgynous clothing ehm and I started buying jewellery ... I am doing this for myself, because I have decided I am a woman trapped in mans body.”*

But the participants’ attempts proved to be unsatisfactory and inadequate, and they embarked on a transitioning process that involved medical intervention.

4.3.1.2 Transitioning - medical/surgical intervention

The participants live as people of the opposite gender to their born sex. Only one participant has had a full sex change, one a partial sex change, one is in the mid-phase of transitioning and two participants are in the beginning phase of transitioning. One is awaiting her first appointment for hormonal treatment; all the others are on hormonal treatment.

For Felicity (MTF) and Bridgette (MTF) their natural sense of their female body was revealed following an orchiectomy (surgical removal of testes). Bridgette felt that her male face required electrolysis to be consistent with her sense of self as female. For her, it was as if these procedures allowed the unknown female person to emerge.

“The orchiectomy got rid of the testosterone allowing the female hormones to have benefit. I am very proud to say what you see is me. That is no implant whatsoever. In fact I got bigger boobs than my sister. (Laughing) It is a huge boost for my self-esteem. It took about 100 hours of electrolyses, painful. I would have it done on a Friday and hope by Monday morning the swelling will be down. Then there was a question mark you know, getting to know Bridgette.”

It was important for Felicity to have a penile inversion as she wanted to “*get rid of the penis*” that she experienced as “*a foreign object*” on her body. Felicity struggled to find a hospital and doctors willing to perform a sex-change operation in South Africa. This was for her very frustrating and she found the medical world as unsupportive and unfriendly. Although she did find support from a psychologist who wrote a referral to an endocrinologist when she started with hormone replacement therapy at the age of 40, she had to venture overseas for the operation. When Felicity woke up the morning after the operation:

“It was like I am whole now I don’t have to hide anything. I can go to the beach in a bikini and can go and join a gym and go in to the showers not worrying when anybody is going to make a scene and can go anywhere and if I get killed in a motor accident and I am in a hospital they will look at me and as far as they can see there is no difference. Yah, it was one of the most amazing feelings.”

Justin (FTM) started in 1992 with hormone therapy and had his reproductive organs removed in 1994. He struggles to afford the testosterone injections. His pharmacist is very understanding and tries to help him. He feels that the dominant society does not support his transitioning (cannot get free healthcare), but that there are individuals who are supportive and understanding. His experience of the transitioning process has been of frustration as he is still awaiting top surgery but also that every change has brought him *“closer to the real me”*. As he is getting older, he is finding that the chest surgery *“is not so important to me anymore”*. When he was in his twenties, it was much more important to have his breasts removed, *“it was all I could think about. Now it’s not the most important thing. The most important thing is finding somebody that can live with me as I am, relationships became more important than how I physically look.”*

As the participants experienced their anatomical body coming into alignment with their perceived lived body their tasks in the world became more bearable, and their lives were experienced as becoming meaningful.

4.3.2 Self acceptance

Another critical turning point experienced by the participants was where they accepted their transgender identity and started coming out as a person of the opposite gender/sex than their born anatomical sex.

Thabisile (MTF) and Thapelo (FTM) came out as trans-people already in their teenage years. They moved into the public space as people of the opposite gender/sex than their born sex by making public disclosures and presenting themselves to the world through their clothing, a new name and other chosen gender markers e.g. binding of breasts, make-up.

For some of the participants the introduction to the term ‘transgender’ or ‘sex change’ played an important role. Being unable to identify as transgender, *“I didn’t know the term transgender”*, and feeling that he was different from his peers, led Justin (FTM) to be confused as a young person. When later in life he was able to identify this

experience as being transgender, he experienced that the “*confusion lifted*” and he felt that he was not the only person having this experience.

Bridgette (MTF), while still at school, came to the realisation that it was possible to change her body to live out her female identity, through identification with others who had done this. She saw an article in the Sunday Times with a picture of a beautiful woman and as she was reading she realised that this woman was first born as a male and she had an “*aha-moment*” where she could identify with her. She did feel sorry for her because she had to have all the operations to become female, while Bridgette believed that she herself would turn female naturally. When Felicity’s (MTF) sister mentioned a sex-change operation, she knew that is what she wanted but she also felt that she had to “*push it out of her mind*” as her environment at that time was not supporting this possibility. At the age of 13/14, Thabisile (MTF) came to the realisation that there could be a change in her anatomical body to match her lived experience when she read a You magazine about “*a male to female sex change*”, and I just said to myself: “*No, this is what I really want. I am not really comfortable with whom I am but like that time I didn’t know the term transgender*”.

Another critical turning point for most of the participants was when they accepted themselves as transgender, even if it meant that others would still be critical about their transgender identity. Coming to the realisation that being transgender has a physiological component facilitated in most participants’ acceptance of their transgender identity.

“For the first time in my life I realised what I was, I am a transsexual, I realised that this was not a spiritual problem I was dealing with, I realised it was not a psychological problem I was dealing with and I realised it was not a sociological problem I was dealing with. It was not because my father and mother did not love me enough and did not show me enough affection. It was not because I didn’t have any girlfriends when I was in high school it was a physiological issue I was dealing with. For the first time I was able to accept myself for whom I really was and suddenly it was / I don’t have to struggle.”
(Felicity, MTF)

Bridgette (MTF) experienced that she had to claim her identity and who she was, even if others would not understand or ridicule her, or even if she could lose her children, as she wanted to *“live authentically”*.

For most of the participants, the experience of self acceptance as a person with the opposite lived gender than their born anatomical sex became a critical turning point in their development of their transgender identity. This enabled them to move from a hidden world to the public world where they could express their chosen gender. The participants also experienced that, through self acceptance, they had the courage to change their own bodiliness.

For others, the turning point was when they joined support groups. Being comfortable, accepted and being self in public led to a realisation that they wanted to live permanently as their lived gender.

4.3.3 Acceptance and support from others

Thapelo (FTM) experienced acceptance early on, as he started living as trans man in the community when he was in secondary school. This feeling of acceptance also led to an experience of freedom in which he could explore his transgender identity and develop his identity further as he engaged with others as a boy/man.

“The school was fine because they saw I was not comfortable / you could feel that this person is different. My grandfather also spoke to them, luckily my grandfather had a shebeen, so he had a very good relationship with the teachers and staff. They have allowed me to wear trousers like the other boys. I started expressing my gender at secondary school.” (Thapelo, FTM)

Justin (FTM) on the other hand, believes that: *“Somebody else realised for me that I was transgende”*. He was cross-dressing and he joined a support group for transvestites, where they explained to him what was happening to him and after hearing the explanation he felt that *“this is what it is all about”*. By having others name and identify his lived experience, he could claim this as his. Bridgette’s (MTF) world also began to expand and open to new spaces of understanding, as she

started to use the internet. This new space enabled her to construct a new sense of herself as transgender.

As the other participants found groups and people accepting their transgender identity, their subjective experience was that they could explore this identity more fully. A relational space was created in the world where the participants felt more recognized, accepted and affirmed, not only as transgender people, but also accepted as a *“normal person”*. This acceptance, not only brought more freedom to explore masculinity and femininity, but also, invigorated them to explore their transgender identity.

Some of the participants also found acceptance within their work space. As Felicity (MTF) found support at her work, she could live more freely and openly as a woman and found herself dressing more boldly as she started living as a woman.

As they found acceptance within groups as transpeople, the participants started inviting their family into their worlds. And although most went through a period of rejection, the families started finding space for most of them. Bridgette’s (MTF) one sister accepted and related to her as female, although with some amusement. Her other sister resisted Bridgette’s female identity, but finally *“found a space for me”*. *“They said I am not their brother or sister, I am their ‘blister”*. Her daughter accepted her into her world only in the last couple of years and her grandchild calls her Aunt Bridgette and is aware that she is her mother’s biological father who presents now as female.

4.3.4 Changing bodies, changing worlds, changing relationships

As their bodies changed, they also found it easier to fit into the dominant world, which then became friendlier as they were mostly accepted into the world as people of the opposite gender than their born sex. Justin (FTM) lives as a man in society with most people not knowing that he was born anatomically female. He feels that he is himself, and that he does not have to explain to anybody who he is, but that there are times when he feels vulnerable and exposed and afraid that people might realise

that he is not anatomically male and that they might violate him. When he is with other transgender people, he lives as transgender and identifies with them.

Thabisile (MTF) experienced that she had to find a new space within which to live out her emerging sense of herself as female. Her encounter, where the community did not accept her as female in her birth country, led her to move to South Africa in her standard 10 year. Here she created a space where she could live out her emerging transgender identity.

The participants experienced different intimate worlds. Bridgette (MTF) feels for example that she cannot have an intimate relationship *“because I do not have the equipment”*. Her anatomical body does not reflect her lived and public gender, and she believes that having an intimate relationship would have to be *“non-traditional”*, a relationship that she prefers not to have. She thus chooses loneliness and lives with her cats rather than being in an intimate relationship, despite longing for human companionship. The claim *“that everything goes”* is in conflict with her own belief system and *“that still blows my mind”*. The two FTM participants experienced that they could also share their transgender, trans man world on an intimate level with females and that it has been possible to date women. But for the MTF participants, this has been a much more difficult world to share as they experience that they cannot connect on an intimate level with others.

As reported earlier in this chapter, as the participants became more familiar with their transgender identity and lived out their subjective gender, their secret worlds became much more visible as they allowed more people into this world. Some of the participants identify themselves as transgender in the community and are spokespeople for the transgender community. Their hidden world has moved to a public world as they have transitioned. Most of the participants actively work within the transgender community and they experience this as bringing meaning to their lives. For most, this transgendered world has become part of their public domain where they can live freely and support one another.

Felicity (MTF) believes that being transgender and having gone through the whole transition has made her more tolerant towards others and difference, and her world has changed to a world of tolerance.

“I had to be able to understand what I believed as a Christian in the light and through the glasses of the fact that I am transgendered. I think people who are despised due to who they are, being gay or lesbian or transgender or physically disabled people, blind people, deaf people, dumb people immediately are a lot more tolerant and a lot more accepting and non judgemental and non-critical and non-discriminatory than people that consider themselves to be normal.”

4.4 Role of spiritual experience

One of the aims of this study was to explore how transgender people experienced the influence of religion and spirituality as they developed their transgender identity, and how their transgender identity in turn influenced their spirituality. All the participants perceived G/god/dess as being the most important other in their lives.

4.4.1 Religious upbringing

All the participants experienced that the church was very central in their upbringing, and that their families placed a high value on Christian morals and principles. Most of the participants were also very involved within the church as children and teenagers. Although the participants come from different denominations most of them experienced their religious upbringing as strict and conservative. They all tried to conform to strict Christian morals as an extension of their family's religious worlds.

Bridgette's (MTF) family was strongly religious (Anglican) and they sent her to a religious boarding school as an extension of the family's religious world. As a child she struggled with her sense of self in relation to God. She tried to be religiously devoted e.g. being an altar boy. As she struggled with her gender identity, she would pray to God to make her “normal”, as she believed that she was abnormal, and even perverted.

Most of the participants were involved in church activities in their youth and three stated that they were “*born again Christians*”. One participant studied theology in her early twenties and became very involved in the religious world. But she felt that she had to hide her feminine world from the church as she believed that the religious community wanted her to present as male and conform to her birth sex.

4.4.2 Religious conflict before coming out as a transgender person

For Thabisile (MTF), Bridgette (MTF), Felicity (MTF), and Justin (FTM) being transgender and being Christian were experienced as a conflict. For them, experiencing themselves as being a person of one gender “*trapped*” in the body of the opposite sex led them to experience themselves as sinful and guilty for not accepting their God-given body/gender. They felt that they could not be transgender and a Christian at the same time and that being transgender was against G/god/dess’s will. Two of the participants went for exorcism as they wondered if their transgender identity could be caused by demon possession. This caused anguish and they struggled to become what they believed G/god/dess wanted them to be. However, most felt that they had failed in this quest whilst repenting for being transgender. They furthermore experienced feelings of guilt and felt that they did not conform to what they understood a believer should be. Felicity also believed that her cross-dressing was in conflict with her religious values, “*the battle I was fighting the whole time between my spirituality and being a Christian doing the things that I was doing.*” For most of them “*being different*”, led to their sense of being sinners.

“The whole time I was struggling with this thing of what I am doing is sin. Ehm, I repented again and again and again and again and it was a case of that I will go and confess of what I am doing and would just repent.” (Felicity, MTF)

Furthermore, this led to feelings of depression and were unable to change how they felt, despite their “*repenting*”. They also felt that God did not help them to change and become “normal”.

“I used to go through very serious bouts of depression because of the dressing up I would then feel guilty thinking I was in bloemen sin and it is not for me worth living anymore.” (Felicity, MTF)

Most of the participants believed that the mainline churches did not support them as transgender people, adding to this experience of conflict. Bridgette (MTF) experienced *“a lot of negative input”* from the church and furthermore felt that her religion constructed her as *“bad”*. She, like most of the other participants, felt that the church condemned her as transgender person and regarded transgender as sinful.

Felicity (MTF) also experienced the mainline church as unsupportive, and although she turned towards them for help, they just insisted that she repent and change her ways. This contributed to her living her preferred gender in secret, adding to feelings of guilt and shame. In general the participants held the opinion that the mainline churches were conservative, strict and judgmental.

“I don’t go to church because most of the mainline charismatic, evangelical, fundamentalist churches can’t accept me for who or what I am they can not accept me as a transsexual person, they believe that what I have done is wrong.” (Felicity, MTF)

Most of the participants felt that the church was questioning and oppositional to their transgender identity. Thabisile (MTF) experienced that the church labelled her feminine identity as *“very hideous”*. She and Justin (FTM) experienced rejection from their family’s churches as the churches saw them as *“immoral”* for living as people of the opposite gender than their born sex. The participants predominantly saw the church as an impediment towards self acceptance of their transgender identity. Furthermore, religion also influenced Justin’s (FTM) family and his mother was not willing to let him into the house while he was living as transgender person, because she was afraid that if she condoned it, *“God would punish her”* and he was *“put out of the house”*.

Thapelo (FTM) stood out in marked contrast. While others may see his transgender identity as sin, he knows he is blessed and loved by God. He has never felt that

transgender is a sin but sees it rather as a gift and a challenge from God. He lives in a religious world, with a strong sense of God's presence throughout his life and has a close relationship with God. God is the most important other in his life; *"God is with me"* and his spiritual/religious world gives the most important meaning to his transgender identity. For him, God has always accepted him as trans man. He has experienced his church, as well as his community and family, as supportive.

"I am not going to stop praising Him because of what I am experiencing because what I am experiencing is that this is a calling and God wants to see from me. I am taking this as a test. He wants to see if I believe in Him and if I believe in Him, people are going to see it as a sin I live in but if it is a sin I live in, I am living in that sin knowing God loves me."

4.4.3 Critical religious turning points

Most of the participants experienced a critical turning point in their religious lives where the conflict between religion and their transgender identity was resolved. These critical turning points were situated within their different religious worlds.

Two of the participants experienced these turning points on a metaphysical level. A critical turning point for Thapelo (FTM) was when, at the age of fourteen, he got a call from the Ancestors, where the Ancestors construed this as a calling of *'a male person'*. The experience of developing a transgender identity became one which took place in the transpersonal space of the Ancestors, *"a gift from my Ancestors"*, and *"support from the Ancestors"*, leading to the blessing on his maleness from family and community. He experienced his transgender identity *"as a calling"*, so that he sees himself as fortunate, despite sometimes feeling overwhelmed (*'eaten up'*) by the call from the Ancestors. Furthermore, he believes that God called him to be a man, a prophet, a healer. Bridgette (MTF) came to the realisation that she consists of a *"temporal- and an eternal body"* and that her spirit was feminine. This led her to realise that she could change her anatomical body to align with her lived body, as this consisted of her feminine spirit. This awareness came in the sacred space of the church while praying.

“Things came to the head one day finally when I was in the Cathedral here attending mass. I was praying you know, please I have tried my best, I have tried to get rid of this it is not happening, what must I do? If I am not going to claim angels spoke but there was this eureka moment. I thought hang on a second, we are thought we mortals consists of the two aspects; a temporal aspect where the body dies and a spiritual aspect. And I said well, my spiritual aspect is feminine, fe-mi-nine. That is a permanent aspect of me. So who cares if I change the temporal aspect of it and I actually realised that it is okay I can go ahead and do what I wanted to do.” (Bridgette, MTF)

For Felicity (MTF) the critical turning point came when she realised through her own research and speaking to other transgender individuals that it was a *“physiological issue”* and not sin. Because she came to realise that she was born transgender, she could accept herself and her spiritual battle thus dissipated. Justin (FTM) spoke to a very progressive *“hippie priest”* and found a place where his spirituality and being transgender could meet. The priest explained to Justin that *“sin is when somebody intentionally hurt somebody else or themselves”*. Justin experienced this as a pivotal moment where he realised that by being unhappy himself for not living what he believed his gender to be, he could not make others happy, and that he had to live for himself and as *“clean and Godly”* as possible. This he felt he could only do by: *“I had to become who I knew I was”*.

The resolution of the conflict between their transgender and spiritual sides facilitated the participants’ own physical transitioning. As the conflict resolved, their transition from one gender to the other became easier and their relationship with G/god/dess changed.

4.4.4 Being in a religious/spiritual world after coming out as trans-person

At the time of the interviews, none of the participants continued to regard their transgender identity as sin, but rather as a gift and/or challenge from G/god/dess. And although some family members and members in the community still view a transgender identity as sinful, most of the participants experience God’s presence, love and acceptance, and see this as more important than others’ opinions.

4.4.4.1 The dynamic relationship with G/god/dess

The participants' subjective experience of G/god/dess being present in their lives varied between them, as well as in each of their lives over time. Some believed that G/god/dess was very present throughout their lives, while others felt that G/god/dess was more absent or distant. Some felt that, as they transitioned, they could draw closer to G/god/dess, while others felt that G/god/dess's presence did not change throughout the transitioning. Most of the participants experience that they are currently in a relationship with G/god/dess.

Most of the participants at the time of the interview thought that G/god/dess created them as transgender. For two of the participants, Thabisile (MTF) and Thapelo (FTM) this conviction came from an early age. Thapelo experiences God as the dominant reality in his world who brought about his transgender state, *"it is something that God brought into my life"*. To be transgender is experienced as *"something that God wanted me to do"*, *"God gave me that thing"*. Thabisile also believes that God made her who she is as transgender: *"God made me who I am because I didn't choose to be what I am."* For her, being accepted by God as transgender is more important than others' acceptance.

For some of the participants, their relationship with a G/god/dess who created them as transgender facilitated their transitioning; for others, accepting themselves as transgender enabled them to be in a closer relationship with G/god/dess.

Felicity (MTF) experiences God as real, and she sometimes feels she can reach out and touch him, as she feels his presence. This evokes a sense of being accepted and loved by God. Justin's (FTM) experience is very similar to Felicity's as he believes that God is real and that God is part of his life. But for both of them there existed a time when they experienced G/god/dess as very far removed from their lives because of their transgender identity. At this time, they felt that G/god/dess rejected them for not living harmoniously with their born sex. Justin now believes that he has *"made peace with God"* and that *"God has made peace with me"* as a transgender individual. He has a strong belief that God has made him in *"His image"*, even if *"He has slipped up a bit"*. He believes that God gave him the means and choice to rectify the *"mistake"*.

The relationship with G/god/dess was experienced in different ways by the participants. For some it is a closer relationship than others, but the relationship with G/god/dess was experienced by all as being dynamic in nature.

4.4.4.2 Changing religious/spiritual worlds

Most of the participants' understandings of religion and spirituality changed as they moved through their own transitioning. They no longer belong to the religious world that they grew up in but have created a new religious or spiritual world. Only for Thapelo (FTM) did the religious world of the ancestors and his church facilitate him in the transitioning and has continued to remain important to him.

All the other participants' views about God changed as they felt others were discriminating against them as transgender people. Felicity (MTF) felt that if others could form opinions about her without really knowing what she was like, people could also form opinions about God without knowing the "real truth". Through their own transitioning, participants moved from a position where they aligned their faith to what others were expecting of them, to a position where their own opinion became valuable.

"I think being transgender definitely changed my fundamentalist Christian outlook, because I think what happened is I was, I was in that box almost of the fundamentalist and what have you of how Christianity should be and what have you and the values and principles and everything like that and I think I was trying to fit into that box I was trying so hard and I wanted to believe it everything that they said and everything that they were teaching was right and I was wrong what I was doing was sin and I had to deal with it until I read and discovered this is not sin and something in me said the box that you are trying to put me in is a lie. It is not reality it is not the truth, the truth is that you cannot box God; you cannot box the truth of what God is about." (Felicity, MTF)

Bridgette (MTF) tries to leave situations improved and not worse of in life. She believes that the pain that she has suffered as a transgender person has made her more receptive to others' pain, and that she can influence people for the better and

create tolerance. That is her understanding of spirituality, rather than a connection with a supreme being. *“I want to be compassionate, inspire others and live outside the box.”*

All the participants described themselves being more tolerant towards others as a result of the marginalisation that they have experienced as transgender people. However, they have also experienced rejection and condemnation by the church. They experienced acceptance by a compassionate G/god/dess at the time of the interviews, and this has inspired them to be compassionate and tolerant towards others.

4.4.4.3 Finding a sacred space

Most of the participants experienced some form of discrimination from their church of origin towards them as people with a transgender identity. Therefore, most of them have moved away from these churches, and one moved even away from the Christian faith, to a space congruent with their new sense of self. Only Thapelo (FTM) was accepted by his church and received validation from his church as being male.

The participants moved to a new sacred space, this space was characterised by acceptance by others and a sense of belonging. This experience of acceptance within Justin’s (FTM) new church furthermore led him to realise that he could be *“free”* to be who he is within this space, whereas before in Christianity he experienced that *“my feelings and thoughts about my body were wrong, it was sin”*.

Most of the participants believe that their parameters regarding their own religious understanding and identity changed as they accepted their own transgender identity, although four of the participants still describe themselves as Christians. Felicity (MTF) experienced that she was trapped in a fundamentalist *“Christian box”* and as she came to the realisation that God could heal her body through the sex reassignment operation and that she couldn’t limit God through her own beliefs, her spiritual world started to expand. Furthermore, as she was transitioning her way of understanding the Bible also changed:

“I so many times see that our concept and ideas are based on what other people has told us or what they would like us to believe and not what God originally trying to communicate to us. So for myself now when I read the Bible I do read it with a completely different pair of glasses on and I read it with the idea ehm, the physical is not what God is really interested in it is the spiritual and that is why he gave us the guide and it is about the relationship with Him and our fellow mates.”

For her, it was the experience of moving away from a God whom she perceived was interested in the physical, to a God who is interested in the spiritual.

Bridgette (MTF) on the other hand, shifted away from religion to spirituality as she experiences as the practice where people act on their dogma and their own beliefs/truths, and this she experiences as negative. For Bridgette, God is outside of dogma, and constructed religious thought is a myth that she experienced as hurtful and dominating. For her to live in harmony with self, friends, and ‘outsiders’ is more important than being religious. She calls herself a searcher as she believes that she can change her mind anytime when something makes sense to her. During the interview as she “explores new territory”, she wonders if the spiritual essence is one gender or the other, or if it goes through stages of one and or the other and ultimately becomes neither, becoming both.

“I think a soul needs feminine and masculine experiences. And I think what might just be happening in people like myself, if I am going to be bold enough to say this, is that the transition from the one to the other happens during the physical incarnation instead of during a stage of de-animation, in the holding stage. I have to allow for the fact the spiritual incarnation could allow for a gender flavour, but I have the right to change my mind regarding this.”

She wonders if the feminine entity would be incomplete if it does not unify with the masculine and only when that unifies it would be complete.

As a result of their transitioning, most of the participants experience openness to other religions and ideas. Although Felicity (MTF) is secure in her being a Christian, she is unsure of other religions but is open “to God can prove me wrong”. She

believes that she cannot judge other religions as she has experienced being judged by others for being transgender.

4.4.4.4 G/god/dess's gender

Although some of the participants still experience G/god/dess as male, most went through a stage where they have questioned G/god/dess's gender. For some as they have queried their own gender they have experienced that G/god/dess's gender became less of a focus point and that G/god/dess became "*more than gender, above gender*".

Most of the participants saw the historical Christ as male although for Thabisile Christ is intersex, as she sees Christ as wearing a dress, although she acknowledged that it formed part of his cultural dress, when she sees Christ wearing a dress "*it sort of relates to the female side of which that is in-between*" the male body of Christ and the dress that symbolizes for her the feminine.

Four of the participants experienced G/god/dess still as a parent figure to them. Thapelo (FTM) experiences God as a father and male, although he allowed for the possibility of a genderless G/god/dess. His world of religious belief is one founded in biblical authority which affirms God as male. Justin (FTM) also experiences God as powerful and thinks that is why others see him as male. However, for him, God also has tender and loving aspects that he sees are more typically feminine. The most important aspect of God and of relationships, for him, is love. He believes in '*Mother-Father God*' and although he uses "*he*", for Justin that does not indicate gender as he sees it as a general pronoun used by western society in conjunction with God. Felicity (MTF) has a different experience. She experiences conflict regarding God as father. Her understanding of the father role is that of a protector and provider, but she experienced her father as very different, as '*a wimp*', and therefore finds it difficult to relate to God as a father. "*Ehm, so I don't project those things unto God, I don't see God as a father He is way above of what my dad could ever be.*" Thabisile (MTF), as with Felicity, relates easier to God as mother, as she experienced that "*I never got close to my dad as I got closer to my mom*".

Bridgette (MTF) having moved away from Christianity sees that “*men create God in his own image and that is an underlying truth*”. For her God is above everything and neutral and God is uninvolved with people and their “*pettiness*”. For her God is also above sex and gender. She found herself “*deconstructing religion*” as she could not grasp the religion that she grew up with. She constructed God as a benign, uninvolved, genderless God.

4.5 Concluding comments

This chapter focussed on the results of the data analysis and the major themes that presented themselves. It looked at the development of the transperson’s transgender identity, important turning point in this development and the influence of religion on this identity, as well as the influence of the transgender identity on the spiritual identity. Chapter five discusses these findings by incorporating other research and published literature.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to describe a transgender person's subjective experience of the development of a transgendered identity. Furthermore it explored the transgender person's subjective experience of how religion/spirituality influenced this development and how being transgendered influenced their spirituality. A phenomenological approach was used, with the lived experience of the transgender person as the focus. Central themes came to the forefront as the data was analysed.

In this chapter, the researcher discusses the themes that emerged in the context of the literature review. Furthermore, limitations of this study are discussed and further research possibilities are recommended.

5.1 Discussion of the results

The results are discussed under the main aims of this research, namely the subjective experience of transgender identity, the development and critical turning points in transgender identity, and the role of spiritual experience.

5.1.1 Subjective experience of transgender identity

5.1.1.1 The transgender person's world

Most of the participants lived in two separate worlds before transitioning: a hidden, secret gendered world and a more public world. They engaged with these worlds in different ways, in how they presented themselves and interacted with others. But as they developed their transgender identity and experienced spaces where they were accepted as being transpeople, they experienced themselves merging their hidden world more with the public world, expressing their gender identity more freely within this dominant world. However, most of the participants experienced the world as hostile and un-accepting of them as individuals who cross-dressed or as transgender individuals. Although none of the participants shared experiences of being physically harmed, they did share the fear of being attacked. Thapelo (FTM) was the only

participant who had never lived in a hidden, secret world. He was constructed as male from an early age, not only by his own experience but also supported by his Ancestral calling that led to an acceptance by his community and church. This enabled him to live out his preferred gender identity.

Other studies show that transpeople tend to be marginalised by society (Sanger, 2008) and are at greater risk for sexual assault, rape and physical assault exists (Lawrence, 2008). But there are also indications in the literature (Morgan et al., 2009) that as transpeople start living their preferred gender identity, they tend to relinquish the more hidden, secret world where they had to live out their preferred gender and start living this gender identity within the dominant society. As society accepts transgender people more as part of the world, the necessity for private, hidden worlds diminishes. As transpeople live out their transgender identity more they experience that they can emerge from this hidden world and live their gendered identity within the dominant world (Sanger, 2008). But it would be a “utopian conjecture” creating another world where transgender people could live without transitioning (Green, 2001, p. 65) as most migrating transgender people do not see transitioning as a choice they make, but rather a necessity (Sanger, 2008).

In South Africa, transgender people's voices have been silenced, only becoming more visible the last couple of years as organizations started lobbying for equal rights (Morgan et al., 2009). Literature (Lawrence, 2008) supports this study's finding that as people accept their transgender identity, they merge their hidden gender world with the dominant world, living more freely and openly the gender that they believe they are. Many transgender people live in '*stealth*' in South Africa, stealth being the “refusal to publicly identify with trans issues or to disclose the fact that one is a trans person”, as they experience that people treat them differently when they know that they are transgender (Morgan et al., 2009, p. 236). Thus, although they live their preferred gender identity, they hide their transgender identity, furthermore silencing the transgender person's voice in South Africa. This research indicates that there is a need for the creation of space where transgender people can live out, not only their gender, but also their transgender identity.

The findings of this research furthermore reveal that the participants' lived world is strongly defined by gender. The participants' lived experiences were that gender and sex dichotomies played important roles. This involved a transitioning from their natal sex to the gender that they felt they belonged to and who they really are. For all the participants, however, it was still a process, or a being 'in-between', as they experienced that they could not transition completely and thus tried to conform to the gender binary. All the participants experienced themselves being the opposite sex than their birth sex and shaped their body accordingly. Although the participants made attempts to conform and belong to this chosen gender identity, the findings in this research suggest that the participants found themselves not belonging to either group within the gender binary, even after transitioning or after attempts to transition. Although they felt that they did not belong completely to this new gender group, they experienced a freedom living as the person they believed they were. Although they were not able to change their physical sex completely to the opposite sex, by expressing their gender through clothing, a new name, activities and ways of presenting in the public world, they were able to experience more freedom.

Literature reveals that some transgender people try to carve out a new space of their own outside the restrictive boundaries of the gender binary, particularly in the United States of America and the United Kingdom where some transgender people classify themselves as genderqueer or fluid gender (Baker-Johnson, 2010; Sanger, 2008). Some people move to a more androgynous world (mAl-welby, 2003), while others move into a world where metagender (Bernhardt-House, 2003) is embraced. As discussed in chapter 2, different modes of "transgendering" exist namely: "migrating, oscillating, negating and transcending" (Ekins & King, 2001, p. 125). Tam Sanger (2008, p. 79) is of the opinion that the widespread assumption that "transpeople desire to alter their genitalia" is untrue, as not all transpeople want to alter their genitalia and a great diversity exists within the trans community (Baker-Johnson, 2010). For transgender people, it is often more about a transitioning to the place where they can express their gender identity in such a way that coincides with their mental image of their bodiliness and their lived identity. And this does not necessitate moving to one of the poles of the gender binary to present their gender identity within the world (Dana-Talbet, 2001).

For other transpeople, the gender binary is very important (Ekins & King, 2001). They prefer to still conform to the strict boundaries of this gender binary (Sanger, 2008). Green (2001, p. 69) warns that the dichotomous gender constructions manipulate gender conventions, denying “the incredible potential of gender variance and its natural diversity, and we categorically deny individuals’ agency in experiencing or freely expressing their own genders”.

Judith Butler and Marjorie Garber, for instance, view the gender rule-breakers as proof that gender is a variable, and not a constant, that one can change one’s gender, construct, construct one’s sex, or maintain a status not directly identifiable as that one or the other classic gender (Gilbert, 2001, p. 41).

A re-emergence of interest in the alternative sex/gender roles of non-Western societies’ indigenous people has resulted in new areas of research as we move towards a “cultural renaissance in the context of modernity” (Nanda, 2008, p. 459). Not all cultures construct gender as binary or asserts that only two forms of sex and gender exists and through globalization a new awareness regarding sex and gender is forming (Wiesner-Hanks, 2001). This globalisation through the internet, new areas of research, cross-cultural influence and so more has influenced and challenged the dominant discourse regarding sex and gender.

This study only focussed on transpeople who were in the process of migrating or who have migrated in their transitioning. One may ask whether the transgender community in South Africa is still adhering strongly to the gender binary? Although this study did not aim to investigate this area, it emerged very strongly as a theme during the results. It could be speculated that the gender binary is not strongly challenged in the South African context and that the discourse of the gender binary is firmly upheld by society. Sanger (2008) states the increasing number of people who are problematising the confines of the gender binary tends to be influenced by the queer conceptualisation of gender. In South Africa, Queer Studies are not very common but in 2009, the Caster Semenya case, although an intersex case, highlighted sex and gender within society. As organisations for example, Gender-DynamiX lobby more publicly, advocating for tolerance within society for transgender people, gender as a construct is becoming more prominent.

However in South African society gender is still being seen as either masculine or feminine, with a strong indication of splitting between the polarities. But this research indicates that sex and gender are not easily definable or constructed as is suggested by some theories, but becomes much more complex and fluid. This is supported by some literature (Baker-Johnson, 2010). The transgender community challenges the category paradigms as their “behavioral contents are limited at best, since they always reflect an artificial rigidity and delineation that is not realised in human experience” (Dana-Tabet, 2001, pp. 56-57). In this study, the transgender person’s experience challenges the confines of the gender categories, thereby challenging society to rethink gender and sex.

5.1.1.2 The experience of self in relation to others - lived relationality

Being in the world also means sharing this world with others and being in relation to others (Kruger, 1979).

The participants experienced the world differently from one another regarding being in relation to others. All the participants experienced from a young age that they were different from people of the same birth anatomical sex, and although society tried to place them within this group, they resisted these societal constructions. Some participants did make attempts to conform but experienced these as failures. This difference was also felt towards homosexuals, as some participants defined themselves as being in opposition to having a gay identity but simultaneously had an experience of being different to people of the gender group to which they preferred to belong. This difference was also encountered by others as they tried to define or normalise the participants.

Thapelo (FTM) had a very different experience to the other participants regarding acceptance within the community, his family and church. For him, the call from the Ancestors by a male person, thus indicating him as male, made transitioning for him easier. Thabisile (MTF) encountered rejection from her community where she lived in another African state. But, for her, transitioning at an earlier age is possible because of the availability of information and support networks. Thapelo and Thabisile have found acceptance as transgender individuals. The other three participants suffered rejection and humiliation within society, family systems and their religious

communities. Some of the participants still felt that they were in relationships where they could not present as a trans-person. However, all the participants are now living as people of the opposite gender than their natal sex.

To feel different, to be seen as belonging to the queer group or as genderqueer leads to the notion that queer people are fundamentally alienated from society politically, economically and socially (Hodges, 2008). The challenge is to create spaces where queer people can live openly and freely. Although some transgender people join the gay and lesbian community, they do not identify as homosexual (Morgan et al., 2008). The experience of being different is echoed in literature as being part of the life experience of a transgender person (Morgan et al., 2009; Sanger, 2008). Although political advocacy and activism are challenging discriminatory practices against transgender individuals (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2001), their inclusion into society is a slow process (Morgan et al., 2008). People who are accepted within their cultures as transgender individuals experience a lesser degree of gender dysphoria and find support within the community to live out their known gender (Baker-Johnson, 2010).

The younger participants in this study have been able to live out their transgender identity more freely from an earlier stage within society because they have experienced acceptance from an earlier stage. Although they did experience being different from others with the same natal sex and even different from others with the same preferred gender, they did not encounter as much discrimination as the older participants. Literature (Baker-Johnson, 2010; Morgan et al., 2009) supports this move within society as information becomes more readily available. But the feeling of being different still forms part of the transgender person's experience, since society is still constructed in the two fixed biological forms of sex and gender (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2001) and children from a young age are required to fit into one of these binary categories, leaving transgender individuals with the experience of being different to what they are constituted towards by society. In Thapelo's (FTM) case, being accepted by society as being a male created the opportunity to live out his transgender identity. The beliefs of his community allowed him to be male as he was called by Ancestors. Again these findings challenge society's constructions regarding

gender and sex and argue for the deconstruction of the gender binary, allowing space for individuals to live out their own gender identity.

This study also found that only Justin (FTM) and Thapelo (FTM) have had intimate sexual relationships since embracing their trans man identity. Although Felicity (MTF) and Bridgette (MTF) were both married, both divorced due to being transgender. Not one of the three trans women had intimate relationships.

Sex-reassignment and transitioning tends to lead to divorce as the partner of the transgender individual has to deal with questions of their own sexual orientation and the relationship construction (Lawrence, 2008). Complexities arise within transpeople's intimate partnerships as transpeople are often seen as a "peculiarity, and reasons are sought for anyone choosing such a partnership" (Sanger, 2008, p. 80).

Although the aim of this research was not to investigate the intimate relationships of transpeople, through the interviews the pursuit of intimate relationships was highlighted. Literature (Lawrence, 2008) indicates that although some people are attracted to transgender people, the majority of transpeople tend to be uninvolved in intimate relationships. More research needs to be done in this area.

5.1.1.3 The transgender person's experience of their body

To see human bodiliness as completely controlled by bio-chemical processes creates a restricted view of the human body, and to only place it as an anatomical, physical entity is constricting the experience (Kruger, 1979).

The participants experienced their bodies as much more than just a physical, biological entity. All of them experienced that their lived body and their anatomical body did not correlate from an early age. The participants became very aware of their bodies from an early age as being different to what it obviously appeared to be.

Literature reveals that transgender people have a heightened sense of their body from a very early age (Hausman, 1995). This awareness usually comes into consciousness as a discrepancy between their lived gender and their natal sex.

Whereas the body is usually not centralised in the lived experience of human beings, awareness of the body usually comes into existence when illness affects the body and/or the body does not function as it usually does (Kruger, 1979). The transgender person has a similar experience, with bodiliness coming into awareness as the person's body does not fit the mental or social image of how it should look. "The body is central importance to many transpeople" (Sanger, 2008, p. 79).

"To be ourselves, which means the same as being thoroughly at home in our own bodies, we must have a certain space in which we can move, act, express, and gesture" (Kruger, 1979, p. 48). The transpeople experience themselves as being a man trapped in a female body or a woman in a male body (Morgan et al., 2009) and their inner conviction of their own gender identity is that of the opposite sex than that into which they were born (Benestad, 2002). This gender dysphoria causes distress and anxiety and a high number of transgender people attempt suicide, with studies indicating that this may be between 19% up to 53% of the transgender population (Lawrence, 2008). Furthermore, some engage in self-mutilating and self-harm behaviour as well as the reshaping of the body through self-mutilation (Lawrence, 2008).

According to this research only two of the participants did attempt suicide but none disclosed any self-mutilation behaviour. The lack of possible disclosure may be because transpeople find it too "traumatic to talk about" (Morgan et al., 2009, p. 230).

This research and literature suggests that transgender individuals centralise their body in their life experience as they experience gender dysmorphia, leading to cross-gender living and "cross-sex treatment" (Zucker & Cohen-Kettenis, 2008). The myth that transgender people transition from one gender to another is dispelled by this research and supported by other research studies (Morgan et al., 2008). Instead, transgender people tend to see themselves as already being this gender and just changing their bodies or appearance in such a way to fit this gender.

5.1.2 Development and critical turning points in transgender identity

5.1.2.1 The experience of the body as critical turning point

Becoming aware of their body and their sex during adolescence became a critical turning point in all the participants' lives. For the participants in this study a process of transitioning started from this critical turning point. As they became aware of their own anatomical body that was in conflict with their mental image of their body, most of the participants tried to conform to their anatomical natal sex. This led to them trying to shape their body through perceived gender signifiers' e.g. clothing, make-up, fake-breasts, binding and then finding that these attempts were not enough and started changing, or were contemplating to changing at the time of the interview, their, body through surgery and hormone therapy. These stages reflect the development of their own transgender identity. None of the participants saw it as a choice to be transgender but rather as a gift, challenge or a physiological 'problem'.

"The Gender Identity Disorders comprise a heterogeneous group of conditions involving dissatisfaction with the body, the sexuality, or the gender role associated with a person's natal sex, or any combination of these" (Lawrence, 2008, p. 451). Transgender individuals become aware of the body-mind dissonance from an early age, leading to an acute awareness during puberty (Morgan et al., 2008). Lawrence (2008, p. 437) mentions the following stages for people who choose to transition: "questioning and information gathering, disclosure to significant others, cross-living, surgical reassignment, and post-transition identity evolution." However people with GID do not necessarily go through all these stages. According to Lawrence (2008), 50% of people who undergo evaluation for gender dysphoria leave treatment. Furthermore, not all transgender people go for SRS but rather live part-time cross-gender behaviour.

The group that participated in this study lived as people of the opposite gender to their natal sex. It could be argued that this group is more accessible as they have already accepted themselves as and/or claim to be transgender rather than third gender or genderqueer. Furthermore, in South Africa, people that identify as transgender tend to be diagnosed through the DSM IV category as having a Gender Identity Disorder. There exists a great need for support of people living between the

gender categories as third gender, genderqueer and fluid gender people. More research is needed in this area in order to inform support programmes and interventions.

Furthermore, the participants in this study were very aware and conscious of their bodies and how they physically present. Their lived experiences have been to change their bodies in accordance with the way they perceived themselves to be and their lived sense of being. But for the older participants, the quest to change their bodies became less over time, whereas for the younger participants, Thabisile (MTF) and Thapelo (FTM), the urgency of transitioning was much stronger. Justin (FTM) described that, over time, the breast removal has become less of an issue and relationships have become more important. As their transgender identity developed it encompassed more than just their bodiliness, it influenced also their ways of being within the world and relationships.

It has been suggested in literature (Morgan et al., 2009) that some transgender people become more body conscious as they are in the process of transitioning and that it is even more difficult for the trans men to accept feminine aspects and trans women to accept masculine aspects.

The findings of this research, supported by literature, suggest that transpeople tend to become focused on physiological and gender markers e.g. facial hair, breasts, and become even focused on the genitals “as the most important indicator of gender” (Sanger, 2008, p. 75). Their embodiment, their being in the world through their gendered body, shapes their existence. Their lives become more centred on transitioning and their bodiliness becomes an important part of their being in the world. Where the body would shape itself in accordance with the tasks it needs to perform in the world (Kruger, 1979). The transgender person shapes their body in accordance with their lived experience of their sex and their own chosen gendered tasks within the world.

Rutherford (2003) states that transitioning is not a choice that the transgender person makes, but rather a need that is driven but also inhibited by fear. But Jeffreys (2003), on the other hand, is of the opinion that to support FTM transitioning is to

support the destruction of lesbianism. For her, too many lesbians are moving over to manhood in order to achieve the status and power of the patriarchal society.

The participants in this study confirmed that, for them, it was not as much a choice to transition physically as it was a need to be able to live authentically. In contrast to Jeffreys' (2003) argument above, most of the participants experienced their identity as in opposition to a gay identity and for the FTM participants it was the knowing that they are a man, and not a lesbian, that led to them beginning the transitional process. In this research, Thapelo (FTM) indicated that it is difficult for him to be a man and that he would have preferred to be a woman if he had a choice. Justin (FTM) did not see any benefits from being a man in society. For them, it was the experience of being male and not "*a butch lesbian*" that made them identify as trans men.

Although bodiliness becomes centralised, as suggested by this research, one might ask whether transitioning has become a way of conforming to society by changing the body and thus buying into the gender dichotomy. By gendering oneself, a person takes on the roles of a certain gender, attains certain sex markers, positions themselves within society as this gender, and is perceived as this gender. It could be argued that the dichotomous nature of gender may be further upheld through these actions. In contrast, a more fluid understanding of gender would open up new areas of being for the transgender person, but also for other people that experience themselves as not fitting completely within the constructed male or female/masculine or feminine categories. This understanding could lead to expressing one's gender as one experiences oneself, embracing the feminine and masculine aspects as they present themselves, and being able to move within the continuum of gender. This also raises the question as to whether a person with a transgender or fluid gender identity is pathologised on the basis of normative shortcomings (Benestad, 2002). Perhaps the question here is ultimately, "do unusual expressions and experiences of gender and/or sexual orientation predispose suffering on their own account, or are the problems experienced by those in question due to lack of affirmation?" (Benestad, 2002, p. 208).

5.1.2.2 Self acceptance and acceptance from others

The findings of this research suggest that self acceptance and acceptance from others formed important turning points in the participants' lives. Being able to name themselves as transgender and/or trans man/trans woman, they could claim their lived space as a person with a transgender identity in the world, and they could live this identity more freely within the public world. For these participants, it was also important to find support groups and people who accepted them. Through their experience as being transgender, they have become more accepting of others who are different from the dominant norms.

Literature (Sanger, 2008) suggests that support groups form a crucial part in the treatment of transgender individuals. Transgender people tend to experience a lack of positive belonging and an almost total lack of affirmation (Benestad, 2002). Furthermore, they struggle to accept themselves as they experience their bodies, "rendering them a denial of their inherently experienced gender" (Benestad, 2002, p. 217). Transgender people tend to perform an "alternative fictional gendered and sexual self in order to 'pass', or they may selectively present/perform only certain aspects of their self to an audience of peers..." (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2001, p. 91). As the presentation of the social identity changes and becomes more in harmony with the private identity or desire the transgender person needs support in developing this "performance" in public (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2001, p.91). Furthermore, individual psychotherapy can assist the person with gender dysphoria with these ambivalent feelings and self acceptance (Lawrence, 2008; Zucker et al., 2008).

Self acceptance and finding a support network formed critical turning points for the participants and this is similar to other studies' findings (Lawrence, 2008). This leads to a further development in the trans-person's transgender identity and furthermore enables the trans-person to live this identity in the dominant world.

5.1.2.3 Changing bodies, changing worlds, changing relationships

The participants' worlds changed as they have gone, or are busy going, through their transitioning. Not only have they experienced the world changing in relation to them but they also experienced that they have changed in relation to the world. As their

transgender identity developed, their interaction with the world became different, more masculine or feminine, as they were changing to this preferred gender identity. Although the participants experienced that the world changed it did not necessarily become an easier world to live in. All the participants experienced that many of their problems before transitioning were still there after transitioning. For example, some of the participants experienced being lonely before transitioning and this experience is still part of their relationship dynamics and lived experience. Although some issues were resolved through transitioning, the findings indicate that the participants still have unresolved issues and have also found themselves challenged by new problems and concerns.

Human beings inhabit space in a unique manner (Mayers, 2000), and for the transgender person this space has specific characteristics shaped by their lived experience. As they experienced their lived world change, the gender horizons of this world also changed, as their transgender identity developed. These identity changes continue for years after SRS, post transitioning on a psychological and emotional level as transgender people experienced that they still have identity changes post transitioning (Lawrence, 2008).

Although some literature sources, especially biographies of transgender people (Morgan et al., 2009), argue that as the transgender person moves through transitioning, problems get resolved, this study's findings indicate that the participants still experienced many of their problems during and post transitioning. This could be that these sources tend to focus on the experience of gender dysphoria, whereas the life experience of the transgender person is much broader than this, and not all problems can be resolved through transitioning.

5.1.3 Role of spiritual experience

The findings show the religious world has had an influence on the transition of the transgendered participants in this study. However, most did not experience it as supportive but rather as not accepting, condemning and being rejected from their family's religious world. Furthermore, most of the participants struggled with the idea that being transgender is sin and that the experience they had was unacceptable to

G/god/dess and against G/god/dess's will. Only as they started accepting their transgender identity could they reconnect with their spiritual identity. In turn for some of the participants only by experiencing G/god/dess's acceptance could they claim their transgender identity.

Previous research (Levinson, 2002) reveals that people who have a strong identification with religious teachings often struggle to integrate their religious identity with their queer, transgender identity. Furthermore, the religious world depicts them as sinners, since transgender people do not conform to accepting their body as it is but want to change it. But through the literature review no published academic work could be found that condemns transgender people and this is supported by Baker-Johnson's (2010) research.

Although most of the mainline churches do not make clear statements of condemnation towards transgender individuals in South Africa, through their teachings the participants experienced condemnation and experienced that the church was an impediment to their developing transgender identity.

Thapelo (FTM) had a different - and positive - experience of acceptance within this religious world. All the other participants experienced that they had to move from this world, outside the boundaries of the church, but also to disentangle their own spirituality and relationship with G/god/dess from these religious worlds. They either joined new communities of spirituality where they were accepted and supported, or moved away altogether from religious communities to their own space where they could experience spirituality, since for all the participants G/god/dess played an important role in their lives. This different form of spirituality required a different form of spatiality and the transgender participants created this new space where they could experience a connection with G/god/dess. They furthermore experienced that, in this new space, they were able to accept others who were labelled as different or queer. Some of the participants also experienced a shift regarding G/god/dess's gender, believing G/god/dess is male and female, or even "above" gender.

Literature (Kaldera, 2008) indicates that there is a movement towards new ways of incorporating spirituality with the person's transgender identity, but also towards

creating new spaces to live out their spirituality. By creating a space where transgender people are welcomed and accepted by a religious community (Levinson, 2002), the transgender person could experience affirmation of their transgender identity. Transgender people also find that they have a greater openness to other people who are marginalised as they can identify with these groups (Baker-Johnson, 2010). The LGBTI community tends to form new religious communities together using inclusive worship material (Duncan, 2002).

The participants' experiences were that it became important for them to find new ways of living their own spirituality. They experienced their relationship with G/god/dess and their developing transgender and spiritual identity as dynamic in nature. Research in this area is still very thin and more research is needed regarding the lived experience of religious transgender people.

5.2 Implications of this research

The aim of this research was to describe the lived experience of transgender people. It specifically aimed to describe transgender people's experience of the development of their transgender identity, the critical turning points that they experienced in this development and the influence of religion and spirituality on the development of transgender identity. This research contributes to available data regarding the lived experience of transgender people but also raises important new areas of research.

This research has an important theoretical implication, giving the finding that transgender people exist in an in-between state. It challenges not only the gender binary but also the understanding of gender and sex discourses and how society constructs and upholds this gender binary. The findings suggest that gender is much more complex than the currently accepted dichotomy, and to move from one sex to the other is thus very difficult, maybe even an impossible task as echoed by Petra D (Morgan et al., 2009, p. 77), a trans woman:

There are always elements in your life that define you what you were and so, physically, you can never claim to be the gender of your choice because you aren't! You've never had the same body as a female, you are a transgendered person, or as someone put it, "You are a trans man or a trans woman, you're never just a man or a woman. Not completely".

Finding a space for transgender people in society and re-visioning gender as much more variant than a binary construction, either by acknowledging the possibility of more than two genders or celebrating the in-between states of genders, creates the possibility of a greater fluidity in society. To be able to live authentically, a person needs to live with their body in space, time, and relation to others. For the marginalised transgender person, this holds many challenges and this research contributes in the exploration of these challenges. Normalising the in-between state, living between genders, or creating awareness of more than two genders, creates the possibility for people to live their own experience of themselves in their own unique gendered terms.

Furthermore, SRS seems to be only one possible phase in the treatment of the transgender individual. The findings suggest that although it contributes to the person being able to live more their authentic self, further therapy and support is deemed necessary as not all the problems are alleviated through SRS. New challenges were experienced by the participants during transitioning and post SRS and some problems continued to exist after SRS.

This study also highlighted that research in the theology and ecumenical field is thin and that more research is needed incorporating the spiritual experience of the transgender individual.

5.3 Limitations of this research

This research used a qualitative design and the aim was not to generalize the results to the larger population of people that identifies as having a transgender identity. This could pose as a possible limitation to this study as this study focuses only on the life experience of the five participants.

It is possible that it is a biased sample as the sample composition consisted of people linked to transgender support groups. Their experience might be very different to people who are not linked to any support group. Furthermore, the sample consisted of people who identified as transgender but also formed part of the group that transitioned, or migrated from one gender category to the other. The experience of transgender people from the oscillating, negating and transcending group are not

included. People who would identify as transgender and furthermore as genderqueer or fluid gender are also not represented within this study.

5.4 Directions for future research

As this research focussed only on the life experiences of five individuals that identified themselves as transgender further research could incorporate a larger sample. This sample could also contain transgender people that find themselves' not necessarily migrating from one gender and sex category to the other but identifies themselves as genderqueer, third gender, fluid gender or represents the categories where the person oscillates, negates or transcends gender.

The findings of this research highlighted that sex and gender are not easily definable. Placing gender and sex within a dichotomous construct and attempting to move transgender people from one pole to the other pole is unattainable and the findings suggests that transgender people find themselves in a in between state. The experience being in between the two gender and sexes opens up new research possibilities. More in depth research is needed in this area. By incorporating the lived experience of the transgender community the gender and sex binary, as put forth by western society and constructed by various discourses, can be deconstructed and further research in this area can hold valuable new ways of understanding gender.

The sex and gender binary categories are blurring (Nanda, 2008) and as society is constructing new views and understandings on gender and sex, more research is needed in this area. As transgender individuals, genderqueer, third gender, fluid gender, and people believing in multiple gender individuals, deal strongly with gender in their lived experience, they are contributing valuable insights in the area of gender. As dominant society's discourses change, it also influences the lived experience of transgender people. This could already be seen as presented in these findings and further study into this phenomenon could be valuable.

According to Sanger (2008), transgender people's history has been one of stigma, 'medicalisation' and 'pathologisation'. In this research, the subjective lived experience of a group of transgender people was presented. The rich descriptive

narratives of these participants provide possibilities for further studies for example the experience of being transgender in dominant South African culture, self identity projections on G/god/dess and so on. As GID is regarded as a disorder the “medical discourse on trans also tends to be dissociated from transpeople themselves” (Sanger, 2008, p. 73), leaving the medical and psychiatric field with a narrow understanding of the lived experience of a trans-person and a disempowerment of the trans-person regarding their treatment. “Over time, a more fluid, post-modern conceptualisation of trans has superseded the arguably traditional emphasis in psycho-medical and mainstream sociological studies” (Sanger, 2008, p. 83) and more research in the subjective lived experience of the trans-person is needed to broaden the understanding of the lived experience of this group. The notion that GID is curable through SRS has been displaced by the findings of this research and more research is needed in the field of therapeutic support for transgender individuals.

Religion has influenced the development of a transgender identity. But transgender individuals also challenge the church’s understanding of gender. More research is needed in this area. Religion that has been built on very patriarchal notions needs to be evaluated and the church challenged in their own understanding, not only of the Bible but also their praxis based faith. More in depth research is needed into the power that the church has over people’s development of identity and the churches abuse of this power.

5.5 Conclusion

Qualitative research does not aim to provide findings that can be generalised to the population. By using a phenomenological approach, this study aimed to provide greater insight into the transgender person’s lived experience regarding their development of their transgender identities. Paucity exists in the published literature regarding the development of a transgender identity and the influence of religion on this development. It is hoped that this research will contribute to this body of knowledge. More research is needed in this area and, as the transgender community becomes more empowered, the experience of being voiceless is also changing.

There has been an explosion of transgender resources and activists over the last decade (Kaldera, 2008) and this research contributes to understanding the lived experience of transgender individuals in Southern Africa. Transpeople's issues and experiences are unique and their identities are complex (Morgan et al., 2008) and this study highlighted the uniqueness of these participants' experiences and the complexity of their lived world.

The lived experience of transgender individuals not only challenges societies' constructions regarding sex and gender, but also conveys how gender influences relationships, the relationship with self, with others and with G/god/dess. This research aimed to describe transgender people's experience of the development of their transgender identity, the influence of religion and spirituality on the development of the transgender identity and critical turning points that they experienced regarding the development.

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Appendix A: Letter of invitation

School of Psychology
P/Bag X01 Scottsville
PIETERMARITZBURG, 3209
South Africa
Phone: +27 33 2605853
Fax: +27 33 2605809



Good day

I am a Clinical Psychology Masters student doing research with transgendered individuals and their perception and relationship with G/god/dess. I am inviting transgendered people or people that have gone/are going through a gender reassignment process, people that regard themselves as forming part of the third sex, or people that live in gender roles that are not their birth sex, to participate in the study. I will meet 2-3 times with the participants individually and interview them. The discussions will be recorded for further data analysis. The data that will be collected will be kept confidential and the participants will receive pseudonyms, and these will be used during the data analysis but also when research findings are made available. No identifying data will be made available.

You are free to withdraw at any stage during the study, with no implications to you. In the unlikely event that you do experience distress during the interviews or distress related to this research, a list of psychologists' and support groups' numbers will be made available to you. There will be no monetary or any other reward for participation.

The results of this research will be submitted as a thesis to the School of Psychology, KwaZulu-Natal University and may be used in future in other publications and academic presentations.

You are welcome to contact me if you are interested in participating in this study or for any further details. My telephone number is: xxxxxxx and email address xxxxxxx.

Kind regards

Christine McLachlan
Masters' Student in Clinical Psychology

Prof G Lindegger
Supervisor

Appendix B: Reflections

Reflections

When I started with this research, my constructions of transgender, gender, the development of a transgender identity and how religion influences this transgender identity development and vice versa, were radically different to the constructions I now have as I am completing this research. This research has not only challenged my constructions and perceptions, but even my embodied understanding of gender – my own experience of gender, emotionally, spiritually and intellectually. It has been a journey as I grappled with my own being. Questioning the objectivity of research and questioning myself, I felt myself becoming emotionally involved in the research and becoming aware of the pain and marginalisation that transgender people experience.

This appendix focuses on the experiences of the researcher being engaged with this research.

Constructions that were challenged

Transgender: The way I perceived the transgender diagnosis was that a person moves from one gender to the other gender. A person that is not comfortable being a wo/man and then moves to the opposite gender, because that is more what the transgender person perceives themselves to be. Through the research I became aware that it was much more about changing the physical aspects to be congruent to the person's self perception. In other words, not a change from one category to another category but more a metamorphosis of the body to fit the person's embodied knowledge of their gender. Furthermore, not all transgender people change their bodies through surgery or by using hormones, but through playing with gender, moving in the binary or transcending the gender binary.

Gender and the binary construction:

This research made me aware of the power of the gender binary and how we are enticed into conforming to this binary. The experiences one has as child where one

would prefer to cross the 'big divide' or just not conform, are structured so often as rebelling against the norms put forth by the school and the dominant society. Becoming aware of some of the influences of the gender binary, the power within this construction also influenced my own view on gender and not only challenged my way of being within the world of gender but also how I present myself within dominant society. Through my own time spent in therapy, I was able to begin to disentangle some of the gender binary constraints that I experience as suffocating. My search at this stage led me to an experience where I see gender as more fluid, which is something I am continuing to explore.

The journey

This research has been a remarkable journey. I thought, somewhat self righteously in the beginning that I wanted to give a voice to transgender people. Looking back on that, I think it is quite patronising. I was in the privileged position, although at times I thought in the most horrid position, to have struggled and learned through this research. I do hope that I can give something back to the participants who were so willing to open up their lives and experiences to me. This research journey was filled with pain and confusion for me. While interviewing the participants, the countertransference I experienced was overwhelming.

Countertransference

I spent a certain amount of time in a city interviewing the participants. This time was filled with so much anguish. Listening to their stories and their lived experience, I became aware of some of their struggle through my own countertransference reactions. There was a voice of strength and creativity that came through their life stories, but so many of the experiences of rejection they shared were filled with their pain. What also stood out for me was the anguish they experienced as they were confronted by their own experience that their physical body did not fit their mental image of who they were before transitioning. I also experienced confusion, depression, and so on. It hooked some of my own wonders and own experiences. I identified with some of the experiences and feelings. But what also stood out in their

stories were their amazing inner strength and drive, their quest to be, and their creative energy to create a space where they could be their authentic self.

Becoming engulfed by the research

For a number of months, I felt like I was on a roller coaster ride, feeling very overwhelmed by the research. There are times when I still feel overwhelmed. I mused: “Why does this study feel unsafe to me? It questions my own understanding of gender. Where do I place myself in gender-land? I do question the idea of binaries and how the community construct themselves around these binaries regarding roles and power distribution. But it also challenges my own spiritual understanding. I query my own construction of G/god/dess and I question not only God’s gender but also G/god/dess relationship with human beings. I find it difficult as some of the interviews reflect my own struggles and sometimes I think I am still struggling with G/god/dess and my perception of G/god/dess. I don’t even know what I believe and I become this voyeur in others’ perceptions.”

To stay objective through this process while experiencing it as overwhelming emotionally and intellectually was a difficult task.

Research subjectivity/objectivity

The times when I felt overwhelmed and felt that it was difficult to stay focused on the experience of the participants and not how it was affecting me, also challenge the ethicality of this research. I felt that I had to ‘divorce’ myself on an emotional level at times from my research, but also to acknowledge and become aware of what was happening in me. Supervision, discussion groups and voicing my experiences to friends and colleagues made it possible to focus on the participants’ lived experiences. Using a research assistant during the process of analysis also enabled me to reflect on the objectivity of the themes that emerged. Furthermore, to be in therapy, to disentangle my own experiences from the research and my own issues and wonders, was very helpful. Beginning a genderqueer group where we could meet and discuss our own experiences was also a helpful process.

Becoming emerged in the research enabled me to work with vigour and energy, although it sometimes also led to depletion of energy. It enabled me to explore the lived experiences of transgender people but also to experience some of the questions and struggles that they face. It enabled me to be passionate about this research and I do hope that it gave some voice to transgender people.

Challenges during the write-up of the research

I found it very difficult when I realised that some of the findings would not be easy to accept for all the participants. For example, the finding that transpeople seem to find them selves being between genders, where some explicitly stated that they wanted to be seen as a person from the other gender than their natal sex. But to stay ethical and true to one's research is the main focus. As researcher, that was my task.

The way forward

As I am in the final stages of finishing this research project I am realising that this research has also changed me as a person. It has challenged me, but also opened up new areas that I would love to explore in future. Our genderqueer group is still meeting on a regular basis and the *Facebook* group has grown to over twenty people. I hope to work more in the interface of theology and psychology, deepening my understanding of the lived experience of the LGBTI community.

Appendix C: Consent form

School of Psychology
P/Bag X01 Scottsville
PIETERMARITZBURG, 3209
South Africa
Phone: +27 33 2605853
Fax: +27 33 2605809



I (Full name) (Identity number)
hereby give consent that the interviews may be recorded and used by Christine McLachlan in the research she is conducting. I do understand that the researcher will be discussing the interviews with her supervisor Prof Graham Lindegger and co-supervisor Prof Gerald West and that the interviews will be transcribed.

I have been informed that my personal details will be protected to the best of the researcher's abilities and that the interviews will be kept in a safe and locked cupboard. The interpretation of the data in the interviews will be made publicly available but anonymity will prevail through the using of pseudonyms and identifying data will be changed.

I do understand that feedback will be made available at the end of the research project but that no financial reward will be made available. My participation is on a voluntary basis and I will not hold the researcher responsible for any damages that I might experience during or after the research. I am aware that I am provided by a list of psychologists/therapists that I could consult if I experience any emotional support.

Signature of participant

Date

Appendix D: Example of a section of an interview transcription

/ Correction or Stumbling;
(.) Short pause;
() Unclear speech;
(2) length of a pause in seconds
Increases in tone of voice underline
the words
- Researcher
* Participant

Name: Thabisile

Age: XX

TG: Male to Female

Race: Black

- So it was not a crisis but rather you that brought yourself to South Africa?

* "Yah, I first moved to Malawi and in their terms not be acceptable in the community for which I got arrested for ehm / well actually they call it trying to indicate being a female. Because there was this other guy, it's actually ehm, he was trying to be friendly and all that, what happened like during the first 3 days I was staying like at a lodge so he was visiting me and what happened is this other day was very hot and I just like laid naked on my bed and like I did not lock my door and he just came out of nowhere. He did not call me or did anything and in the () he thought I am a female because during that time I was doing the artificial breasts, putting in my fake breasts and all that, it was just like simple me; I was just wearing unisex clothes. So, he came in and like he saw me and I was like lying on my stomach and I felt his hand and he just covered me and the next, 3 days later the police came to my room and actually I was not there. I was like ehm, ehm at another guest lodge. I was like sort of interacting / there was Zimbabwean lady staying there. So the police came in and they were actually looking for such and such person and I almost collapsed you know because of that shock and the next thing I was like in a police car and when I asked them they said they've arrested me for being an illegal immigrant and I said but how can that be because I have all my documents so they said "oh okay that will be dealt with at the station." So when I was there I produced my passport and I was

actually a male not a female and how come it is happening and I was like embarrassed so I was put in a cell and after just a couple of days later I got moved to another station. It was just like a station closer to the airport and from there on I felt scared and I said to myself let me take out a braids and there on / like I was almost like half way through and I didn't know that these guys have arranged reporters and all that and I was called in and they took photos of me without my consent and everything. I was thinking "but what will happen if they publish this thing?" and I was like so terrified because I knew that the picture was not going to be supported and how will I be able to live in a community where all my photos have been splashed out and use it for newspaper or magazines or what so ever they planned to put it. So fortunately I think the editor must have like said no about publishing such a thing. A week later I was sent to a traditional court where that was my first experience of like a kind of a traditional thing."

- How old were you then?

* "I was standard 10. So I was like there and I sort of like eh / there was an official who came up to me and said "You know it is going to go like this so if you are willing to / to pay me I can do something about the fact and I didn't have any other option because one thing for sure if either they are going to deport me or it could have been much worse in Zimbabwe than being there. SO I paid my ticket, I think I paid about 2000 Malawi couture and eh, the case was just like that because I was found not guilty because there wasn't any evidence before them, they could've investigated it themselves. But it didn't work because he tried to touch me and I was like / actually I had that kind of eh eh, this person needs to be investigated because he told me that he was coming from Jo'burg going to Tanzania because he was form Tanzania. So he was caught because he was smuggling drugs. One thing that made me be more suspicious about that he was going out of his cell any time when he wanted to go out. So with his reports he didn't find anything. The case went on like that so I stayed on for like 3 months."

Appendix E: Example of emergence of meaning units (Justin)

Name: Justin

Age: XX

Female to male

Race: Coloured

Subjective experience of TGI

- As child he experienced that all the children were playing together and girls and boys were not playing separately. *‘One thing I remember about my childhood there was nothing about gender.’* He experienced that this caused - *‘it took me so long to figure that I am different because nothing was made about the fact that I was / a tomboy’*. His experience as child that all the children were playing together and that they were not playing separately according to gender, this enabled him to live out the masculine, tomboy side. His understanding why he only came out later as trans man was linked to this as he only experienced feeling different at a later stage.
- He lived in an uncomfortable way with aspects of ascribed gender identity, for example clothes. He tried not to wear dresses and would wear jeans to school and would then dress into school uniform when he got to school.
- He did not know about the term transgender as a young person and did not know how to understand what he was experiencing. His experience was that he could not identify what he experienced as difference.
- Defines identity in opposition to being gay, *‘I was uncomfortable being a lesbian, that was not who I was’*.
- The school where he was teaching at knew that he was transgender and they supported him even when a parent of a child wanted to take their child from the school.
- He sees that being FTM is not a decision that he has made, he experiences it as a given, God given. As something that he has to deal with.
- He wished that he had an organisation of Gender-DynamiX behind him when he was young, *‘I might have been further, I might have had the resources’*.

- He has experienced being ridiculed by others, rejected and *'put out of the house'*. He experienced the world as hostile and rejecting him as he lived his lived body. *'I know what it is to be laughed at'*.
- He was not willing to claim himself as transgender as he did not want to accept the label. He questions: *'When does one stop being transgender and become the man, woman that you are?'*
- Family and social group do not come together, first time next week. He is apprehensive. Immediate family accepts him but some of the other family still sees him with pig tails although they are *'used to him'*. Although most of his close relatives accept him as male, others became more used to the way he presents.
- He experienced times of despair and suicidal ideation and he sees that there must be a reason why he did not die and a purpose for going through a transgender experience *'God must have a purpose with this'*. He sees that he can teach others from the experience that he has had. But at the same time he is also open to be taught by others.
- He experienced that being rejected and ridiculed by society as a transgender person left him fragmented, *'it is picking up the pieces and putting them all back again'*, but that he was able to put himself together again as a man, as a person. He experienced that it made him strong as a person.
- He experienced freedom after the first operation. For him not to be able to have a child anymore biologically brought freedom. Although he wants children, he does not want to bare them.
- He lives as a man in society with most people not knowing that he was born anatomically female. He experiences that he is himself and that he does not have to explain to anybody who he is, but that there are times when he feels vulnerable and exposed and afraid that people might realise that he is not anatomically male and that they might violate him. When he is with other transgender people he lives as transgender and identifies with them, other times he lives as male.
- He is afraid that his family would *'slip up'* and call him by his previous name in the community and expose him, thus avoids inviting them into his life where he lives as male. His immediate family accepts him as male, and the younger generation is open to asking him questions about it. He experiences surprise how

his family is now supporting him especially his mother *'it is nice to know that they are there for me, all of them'*.

- He dreams of getting married and having children and being a father to his children. His partner is willing *'to go the scientific route'* that they can have children, although he would have preferred having his own children. As transgender person he faced the reality that he is unable to be biologically the father of his children although he would have loved to pass on his genes.
- He experiences that people get confused about sex and gender, and sexuality and sexual orientation. He experiences that people struggle to understand why some transgender people are gay.
- He was troubled by the trans man that became pregnant *'men don't have children'* (Thomas Beattie). For him it is difficult not to see *'a man as a man'*. He experiences that the binary is very important and that *'when a person transitions to be a man he can not bare children'*. He experiences that he (Thomas Beattie) made a mockery by transitioning and then becoming pregnant. He sees maleness not in roles but in the ability to bear children. *'I would cook and wash dishes but I will not bear children'*.

Critical turning points

- *'Somebody else realised for me that I was transgender'*. He was cross-dressing and he joined a support group, transvestite group where they explained to him what was happening to him and after hearing the explanation he felt that *'this is what it is all about'*. His experience was that by the others naming and identifying his experience, he could claim this as his. He was then 22yrs old. They referred him to doctors and psychologists that could help him.
- 1992 he started with hormones. He struggles to afford it. His pharmacist is very understanding and tries to help him. He experiences that the dominant society does not support his transition (can't get free healthcare) but that there are individuals that are supportive and understanding.
- 1994 he had all his reproductive organs removed but he is still awaiting chest surgery / breast removal. *'But it is not so important to me anymore'*. He experiences that when he was in his twenties it was much more important to have his breasts removed *'it was all I could think about. Now it's not the most*

important thing. The most important thing is finding somebody that can live with me as I am. Relationships became more important *'than how I physically look'*.

Role of spiritual experience

- He loved the church and was very involved in the church. God is the important other in his life and he states that he loves God
- His family was a very religious family and was not willing to let him into the house for a while living as transgender person. His mother was afraid that if she *'condones it God would punish her'*. His family used to judge him that his way of life does not please God. Two of his siblings accept him now as a brother, but his eldest brother does not accept him.
- He has been very involved in the church. He sees himself as being saved as he builds his life on Christ as foundation.
- He saw God as a very cruel being, questioning why God created him as transgender. He experienced that he was very angry towards God. But when he started to tell God that he was angry with Him and did not experience guilt for being angry with God, it became for him like a mother being angry with a child, not rejecting the child, still loving the child but able to be angry with the child. *'I can get angry with God, that doesn't mean I don't have God in my life, and God can get angry with me, that doesn't mean that He is rejecting me'*.
- He finds it difficult to pray and finds it difficult to sort things out with God through prayer but found that through writing he could communicate with God. Where his mom would have prayer meetings he prefers to write *'Dear God...'* letters.
- He believes in *'Mother-Father God'* and although he uses he, for Justin that does not indicate gender.
- For Justin when he was baptised there was a god-mother and god-father and that he claimed into his life for God, seeing God as the dominant parent with his parents being the *'nannies'*.
- Justin does not think that he would love God more or worship God more if he was not transgender. He believes that God created him as transgender.
- For him reconstructive surgery is like shaving, it is making himself more acceptable to God and to self. He experiences that many people are not happy with their bodies and as they are just changing certain aspects, he is changing

certain aspects. For him God would not reject him for changing certain aspects of his body.

- He experiences God as powerful and thinks that is why others see God as male. For Justin, God also has tender and loving aspects that he sees are more portrayed by the feminine. For him the most important aspect of God, and of relationships, is love. This he experiences as a two-way street that needs to be balanced.
- He moved away from his church of origin and moved to Christian Science where they celebrate God as Mother-Father.