Reconstructing Gender Identity through Dressing:

A Study of Transgender and Transsexual People in Amsterdam

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Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between gender identity and clothing among transgender and transsexual people in Amsterdam. The primary objective of this research is to reveal how body decorations, including clothing, accessories, and minor cosmetic alterations of the body maybe combined in a purposeful way to construct gender identity. To achieve this objective, this thesis reveals how gender may be experienced and manifested differently through the process of assembling and the assemblages that participants wore. Furthermore, how the gendered self may be constructed through these processes. This study is a detailed account on how a male body may be presented as feminine, and how a female body may be presented as masculine through a strategic selection and skilful manipulation of clothing and body decorations. The study thus not only illuminates the significance of clothing as a powerful index of gender but also its relationship with the body and the self in the context where gender is often seen as fluid and subversion is a theme.

Individual cases reveal how gender is embodied and reproduced through the materiality of clothing and body decorations. The thesis argues that gender is experienced and lived through the decorated body and thus challenges concepts of gender as rigidly dichotomous and morphologically based.

Table of Contents

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Chapter One

The Conceptualisation of the Research

Introduction

The aim of this research is to investigate the role of assembling and assemblages of body decorations (including but not limited to clothing and accessories) in the construction of gender identity among male-to-female transgender and transsexual people, with the focus on transmen, in Amsterdam. It sets to explore the relationship between body decorations and other supplements that directly modify the body and its appearance, coined as 'dress' by Eicher and Roach-Higgins (1993), and the individual perception and experience of gender identity. This research owes much to various literatures, from traditional cloth to contemporary fashion items (among others: Hansen, 2004; Woodward, 2005, 2007; Rubinstein, 2001; Michelman and Erekosima, 1993; Joshi, 1993; Radner, 2001; Davis, 1994; Crane, 2000; Banerjee and Miller, 2003; Bovone, 2012; Campbell, 2012) that detailed the inextricable relationship between dress and the body, and explored its use as a maker of meaning, a rich visual text that reflects an individual's status, roles, and personal as well as religious and socio-political values. The use of dress extends beyond its practical function to protect the body and is imbued with meanings that rendered its function subordinate to its form, creating a purposeful sign language when combined and worn (Barnard 2007, p. 105-107; Wilson, 2007, p. 21-22; Entwistle, 2000, 2001; Rubinstein, 2001; Veblen, 2007). More than as a sign that is consciously selected and worn, a combination of body decorations becomes an extension of the self (Woodward, 2005; 2007), in that the body under the gaze of others is always a 'dressed body' (Entwistle, 2000; 2001). Appropriate conduct always includes dress (Goffman in Entwistle 2001, p. 47). Eicher and Roach-Higgins (1993, p. 13) first proposed that a 'dressed person is a gestalt that includes body, all direct modifications of the body itself, and all three-dimensional supplements added to it'.

The body in social context is always a 'dressed body' (Entwistle, 2001) whose appropriateness is dictated by relevant decorum and norms (Goffman, 1979; 1990). These inevitably include gender. Indeed, clothing as a marker of gender and a constituent of gender identity is widely understood across cultures and societies (Barnes and Eicher, 1993; Eicher, 2001; Entwistle, 2000; 2001; 2007, Rubinstein, 2001, Michelman and Erekosima, 1993; Young, 1993; Leslie, 1993; Gott, 2007; Becker, 2007; Hegland and Hodges, 2007; Holliday, 2001; 2007; Skeggs, 2007; Kawamura, 2003; Crane, 2000). Barnes and Eicher (1993) have demonstrated how a combination of 'dress' may be worn in such a way as to signify one's gender role and status. The Indian sari (Miller and Banerjee, 2003) tells an intricate story of not only the wearer's gender identity but also her socio-economic status and kinship. Hansen (2004), Lewis (1994), and Schneider (1987) show how textiles, being rich in symbols, are produced, selected, exchanged and worn and how they signify economic as well as gender relations. Rubinstein (2001), and Goffman (1979) examined the development of dress codes for both men and women in United States from the last century. More recently, Woodward (2005; 2007) shows how 'femininity', a desired image of the self, is created through a purposeful combination of clothing and accessories. The function of clothing as a marker and symbol of gender and its embedded meanings are not isolated. It becomes meaningful through the process of production, distribution, exchange and being worn, or in Eicher and Roach-Higgins' (1993) language, when it adorns the body. Hansen (2004) mentioned that clothes are purposefully shaped to construct our appearance, itself an element that is central to gender (Stone, 1972). Indeed, the construction of femininity and masculinity involves to a large extent, a suitable or appropriate appearance (Goffman, 1979, 2013; Stone, 1972) relative to the gender norms. Appearance, as Stone (1972, p. 90) has proposed, is an inherent part of identity as it sets the stage for, permits, sustains and delimits the possibilities of discourse. The other's

gender, he claims, is known silently, and established by appearance (Stone, 1972, p. 90). Thus, the body is situated and becoming identified through appearance (Stone, 1972).

The relationship between gender and the dressed body suggests that dress may be used to craft a gendered appearance, which constitutes gender identity. Within the frameworks of dress, the body and gender, identity is not static but, in agreement with Kuper and Kuper's (2004, p. 479, 578) definition, is dynamically constructed and involved not only individual's assigned roles and status, but also one's perception and image of the self that both inform and are informed by others. Identity is changeable, unstable, and constantly reconstructed. Identity Goffman (1990) argues that identity is constantly negotiated within a frame, in response to an audience. In Stone's (1972) terms, the 'review', matches the performer's intention or 'program', thus validating or affirming the self. Within this framework, identity and the self are always negotiated. Appearance is an element of this negotiation. As a part of the self's presentation, it reflects one's intentionality and effort to manage others' impressions. Dress modifies appearance. The role of dress then extends beyond symbolic and signifying embellishments that reflect status, roles and collective ideals and situate the body in social relations, to become metaphorical elements that construct the self. Woodward (2005, 2007), in her reading of Gell [1998] and through her fieldwork among women in London demonstrated how personhood is modified and distributed through an assemblage of clothing. In other words, the self may be recreated through the act of wearing a carefully selected assemblage.

Woodward (2005, 2007) examined how women recreate the self through the process of selecting and combining clothing and accessories to craft a desired appearance, which she termed 'the wardrobe moment'. The act of dressing up is an act of recreating the self (Woodward, 2007, p. 5). The items in the wardrobe are explored as an extended form of personhood, an externalised aspect of the self that impacts upon others, thus mediating the self and the outside world (Woodward, 2007, p. 5-7). A selected combination of these items—an

outfit—acts as a form of self-expression. It becomes a medium through which one's intentionality is acted upon to influence the minds of others (Woodward, 2005, p. 5-7). 'The wardrobe moment' as a process of self-recreation brings not only the visual aspects of an outfit, but also the experiential aspects of wearing it, which inevitably involves tactile and sensual experiences. Both are vital in the construction of the self through clothing (Woodward, 2007). Echoing Eicher's and Roach-Higgins's (1993) claim that a dressed person is a gestalt, Woodward (2005, 2007) established the role of subjective experiences through the impacts that dress make on the wearer and others in the construction of identity.

Woodward's (2005, 2007) ethnography and her idea of 'the wardrobe moment' provided the basis for which this research was conceived. Her study thoroughly detailed how the self is created through 'the wardrobe moment'. Miller (2005, p. 5) however, noted that Woodward's research revolved around women who have 'strong desires as to who they want to be and a clear sense of themselves'. Rephrasing this within a wider context of gender means that the study was conducted among participants whose self-identity and gender expression matched the gender—and its stereotypical appearances— assigned to them at birth. Successfully textualising a seemingly mundane, daily dressing practice into a complex and meaningful attempt of recreating the self and establishing identity, Woodward's (2007) study aroused my curiosity about how her theory could be applied in queer studies where gender is often regarded as fluid and subversion of gender norms is a theme. There are few studies that focus on queers' dressing practices, or to be more exact, those whose gender expressions are seen to subvert the gender dichotomy, which may or may not include homosexuality and the theatricality of drags[1].

[1] Usually understood as men who dress and present themselves as women for the purpose of entertainment. The term may often be used interchangeably or linked to transvestism.

Although dressing practice, fashion, and styles have not been as discussed and researched in queer studies as they have in the wider context of gender and material culture, a few scholars (Holliday, 2001, 2007; Schrock et al, 2005; Boellstorff, 2004; Davidmann, 2010; Bullough and Bullough, 1993; Sears, 2013; Hegland and Hodges, 2007; Davies, 2007) have established the importance of clothing, body decorations and modifications in the creation of the gendered self through their exploration of the body as paramount in the construction of queers' identity. Plemons (2010, p. 320), an ethnographer of trans-surgery who explored transsexualism and transsexuals' construction of identity through social and medical lenses went so far as to likening the problem of transsexualism to 'the problem of the body'. Sex, he explained, is located in the body, and its locatability becomes the basis of differentiation to build a host of expectations of ourselves and others (Plemons, 2010). Earlier theorists such as Goffman (1977, 1979, 1990), and West and Zimmerman (1987) made the same point. The medical creation of sex is all about gender (Plemons, 2010, p. 326). Sex is materialised onto the entire surface of the body and indicated through the size, shape, and texture of an array of body parts; sex characteristics are in the body details (Plemons, 2010, p. 323). This view of the pervasiveness of sex, which Plemons aimed to describe, not only becomes the ground of oppressive views toward transsexualism but also justifies the necessity for sex reassignment surgery. For transsexuals, as long as the body does not change, gender remains hopelessly immutable. The aim of transsurgery extends beyond genital reconstruction to creating a gendered body which bears relations to the internal space of feelings and self-perceptions; subjective experiences (Plemons, 2010). In this manner, Plemons (2010) places the body at the core of transsexualism and transsexuals' attempt to reconstruct gender identity. Secondly, by viewing transsurgery as more than just a genital reconstruction and suggesting that sex is materialised through the entire body, Plemons (2010) highlights the importance of the structures and appearance of the body. In this respect, constructing an appearance, whether

through surgery or superficial modifications, is at the heart of transsexuals' struggles. A person, he argued, does not need to ask to see others naked to decide which pronoun to use to refer to them (p. 324): gender is identifiable through the structures and creases of the body. Or, if theories of clothing and dress are correct, gender is the manner in which the body is supplemented and embellished that constitutes its visibility.

In line with the theory of appearance as central in the construction of gender identity, Sears (2013) has examined the problem of transsexualism and transgendering as relying on the public visibility of the body. As Fraser and Greco (2005, p. 12-13) argued, transsexuals' identity is always situated in a politics of identity that privileges visibility. Situated in the binary gender system, the visible transgender body (Halberstam, 2013, p. 129) represents a fantasy of fluidity, which encourages the audience to police and unmask the fraud, thus inadvertently serving to confirm the enduring power of the binary gender system (Halberstam, 2013, p. 129; Moi, 2010). The visible transgender body is disturbing as it is clothed, adorned, and styled to assume the appearance of the opposite gender yet, as Plemons (2010, 2017) noted, sex is recognisable and visible in the minutiae of the body. In identity politics, the problem is precisely that: a visibly *trans* body. In other words, the problem body is the cultural body, a dressed body. Serano (2013, p. 233) has claimed that we classify each person we see as female or male based more on a gram of small visual clues and a ton of assumptions than on a person's biology and reproductive organs, in other words, through appearance. This perspective emphasises the cultural body over biology in determining gender identity. The question that arises is thus: can these small visual clues be manipulated to impact others' assumptions in such a way that secures a successful negotiation of gender identity? Serano's view and Sears's clarification of the visible body tempts a proposition that the correctness of the body in regard to gender identity relies on its success in assuming an appearance. In the context of transsexualism, while the chosen dress may reflect intentionality and recreate the self, it does

not guarantee the desired responses of others, much less a successful negotiation of identity. Though less about recreating gender identity than about constructing a desired self-image, Woodward (2007) herself has shown, through her numerous examples of 'failed' cases, that wearing a desired item produces an image and impressions that are often at odds with the self and its desires. However, this also implies that desired responses—hence a successful negotiation of identity—may be elicited through a winning assemblage, a correct appearance. Its role as a gender marker (Eicher and Roach-Higgins, 1993) and in recreating the stereotypical image of gender (Goffman, 1979; Serano, 2013; Woodward, 2007; Holliday, 2001) makes clothing, by extension dress, a large part of the 'small visual cues' that affect others' impression.

The non-medical, temporary alteration of appearance through make-up and clothing to reconstruct a new gender identity has been well documented among transgender and transsexual people (Davidmann, 2010; Sears, 2013; Serano, 2013; Holliday, 2001; Boellstorff, 2004; Schrock et al, 2005; Hegland and Hodges, 2007). Dressing in the opposite gender they strive to be identified with remains a practice of transgender and transsexual people, perhaps as a compromise, a temporary solution that offers them the opportunity to 'align their soul', as Boellstorff (2004) suggests, with their body and a chance to be validated. The significance of manipulating the appearance in transsexuals' attempts to reconstruct their gender identity have been well documented by Davidmann (2010) and Schrock et al (2005, p. 321) maintained that 'if their physical bodies or comportment betrayed them when they presented themselves as women, they risked embarassment, fear and assault'. While the physical bodies inevitably include biological characteristics, it is the manner in which they are presented that significantly affects transsexuals' recreation of gender identity. The dressed body becomes an important locus in transsexuals' reestablishment of identity. Their research suggested that body decorations are significant and heavily used, and that their role extends beyond creating a passable appearance to the creation and validation of the self. Schrock et al's (2005) central

argument is that adorning the body with certain decorations evokes the feeling of authenticity among transsexuals. They feel authentic when wearing women's clothing. This finding extends the framework through which dress may be studied in transsexualism to include transsexuals' subjective experiences.

Among scholars of queer studies, Hegland and Hodges (2007), Boellstorff (2004) and Schrock et al (2005) examined the role of dress in the construction of *waria*[2] and transsexuals' identities through the effects dress produces on transsexuals' subjective experiences. These researches explored how body decorations and modifications may shape and influence subjectivity, which in turn, affects mannerism, behaviour and self-perception, affecting not only the visibility of the body, but how the self is created and projected. In their study of transsexuals' journey into womanhood, Schrock et al (2005) show that changes—alterations, manipulations, decorations—in the corporeal style always shape subjectivity, which then informs social conducts: 'Bodywork shapes not only authenticity but also self-monitoring, role taking, practical consciousness and other emotions…' (p. 320). In fact, a male-to-female transsexual in Schrock et al's (2005) study said that walking like a woman was easier when she wore women's shoes (p. 324). This became the basis of Schrock et al's argument that behaviour and mannerism as constituent elements of gender identity are influenced by an individual's subjectivity, which may be shaped and manipulated by the use of body decorations and modifications. In this manner, body decorations are 'a kind of cultural text that also accommodates and retrains the material body' (Schrock et al, 2005, p. 324).

The role of body decorations through their impacts on subjectivity in the construction of gender identity is also explored by Boellstorff (2004) in his study of waria. His illustration of the importance of dendong (a Javanese slang for applying make-up or dressing) in a waria's

[2] A common abbreviation of Indonesian words; 'wanita pria', usually understood as women who are (actually or also) men. Boellstorff (2004) defined waria as male femininity. This term is often used to refer to male-to-female transgenders in Java, which may include cross-dressers, transsexuals and transvestites.

concept of authenticity revealed an even stronger role of body decorations and established the dressed body as pivotal in waria's identity. In this case, authenticity means having a woman's soul despite being in a man's body (Boellstorff, 2004). 'Having a woman's soul' is expressed through the act of dressing; one is not a waria if he did not dendong (Boellstorff, 2004). The waria of eastern Java wear women's clothes to bring the body into alignment with the soul (p. 167) in a way that enables people to recognize their identity as waria, which Boellstorff redefined as 'male femininity' (p. 161). The emphasis on dressing as a waria and on expressing the self as a woman in a man's body highlight the act of dendong and dress as pivotal in waria construction of identity: they are a 'pre-requisite' to be a waria (p. 170). A feeling of authenticity, thus subjectivity, in this case is largely shaped through the act of modifying and embellishing the body, the goal is not to pass, but to look like a waria (p. 167). 'Dendong' thus allows one to identify and be identified as a waria. Schrock et al's (2005) and Boellstroff's (2004) researches show that an assemblage of body decorations and modifications is significant not only in creating an appearance that conforms to gender norms, but also in shaping the subjectivity that is central in the recreation of the gendered self. Further, both studies illuminate gendered behaviour and mannerisms and the importance of adopting the practices that are considered to be stereotypical of the desired gender as constitutive of gender identity.

Similarly, Hegland and Hodges' (2007) study explored the effects of wearing certain intimate items such as lingerie, hosiery, panty hose, on cross-dressers' experiences in assuming another gender identity. Compared to Boellstorff's and Schrock et al, their research focuses more on the sensorial experiences and emotional responses produced by body decorations on the wearers. It is the tactile experience of stockings on their skin, the feel of lipsticks on their lips, the emotional memory attached to items, and the sensation of being on heels that, Hegland and Hodges found, validated and enforced cross-dressers' identity as women. In their work, these items not only become important, but fundamental to cross-dressers' efforts, in particular

as a group of people who do not elect surgery. As if extending Schrock et al's study on subjectivity and body decorations, Hegland and Hodges's research, perhaps being among the first within queer studies to detail the sensorial effects of clothing in the reconstruction of gender identity, presents an interesting framework for viewing dress as an element through which subjective experiences maybe understood.

These researches identify the interplay between clothing, decorations, subjective experiences, the body and gender identity. They demonstrate how gender may be studied with a framework of clothing and its materiality in the context of transsexualism, transgendering and the queers. The researches explored the effects of wearing certain items, established their roles in the creation of gender identity, and investigated the embodiment of transsexuals' subjectivity. Boellstorff (2004) has established the significance of the act of dendong in waria's reconstruction of identity and feeling of authenticity, and Hegland and Hodges (2007) gave an insight into what may underlay cross-dressers' choice of wearing stockings, for instance. Furthermore, Woodward has made a strong argument about the importance of the process of dressing in an individual's embodiment of femininity and womanhood. Similarly, other previously cited researches within queer studies have agreed on the role of 'dress' in constructing gender identity, all the while seeming to imply the potential of 'dress' in manipulating visible sex characteristics.

However, the literature lacks a detailed account of the actual process of selecting, building, and adorning the body with the purpose of creating a new gender identity. Detailed accounts of how this may be done, the extends to which an assemblage may manipulate a visibly trans body into a passing one, and the role that assemblages may play beyond creating a desired appearance in a successful negotiation of identity are scarce. Just as Woodward showed the kind of self that is created through an outfit and demonstrated the process of distributing personhood through selecting and wearing clothes, the investigation of

transgender's and transsexuals' assembling process should reveal how an assemblage constructs an appearance that satisfies normative requirements, and how the self is negotiated—to be then presented—within the limits imposed by these requirements. It is commonly agreed that most male-to-female transgenders want to pass as a woman when presenting themselves as one. However, the kind of woman they want to be perceived as is yet another rarely explored question. Stoller ([1964] in Moi, 2010) used the term 'gender identity' and referred to its 'complicated development' to explore what can be referred to as self-image: 'one may sense himself as not only a male, but a masculine man or an effeminate man….' (p. 22). If clothing, body decorations and their assemblages indeed create the self, distribute personhood, and mark gender identity, in the context of transsexualism: then how do they create a woman or a man? How do male-female cross-dressers create their desired self as a woman through a choice between a long or a short skirt? How do they create a 'sexy woman' through a selection of jeans or silk in combination with heels or boots? It is these questions that this research aims to answer, not necessarily through how heels may symbolise femininity and affect emotional responses but, more importantly, when in combination with other items that makes an assemblage as a whole, as a part of a gestalt. After all, somewhat distinguished from objects as status symbols, clothing and body decorations, as metaphorical elements that construct the self (Woodward, 2005, 2007) function in combination.

Building from these various researches and adapting Eicher and Roach-Higgins's definition of dress, this research aims to investigate how gender identity may be constructed not only through the symbolic meanings of body decorations, but also, specifically, through the process of assembling them. It seeks to understand how gender may be constructed through the process of creating a dressed body. Researches[3] have demonstrated the importance of

[3] For example, the Sari in Miller and Banerjee (2003), the Jewish kippa sruga and kippot in Baizerman (1993), the Ghanaian women waist beads in Gott (2007), the 'transsexuals' lipstick and heels' in Serano (2013)

certain pieces of decorations or clothing, cloth or textiles, fashion and outfits in marking gender and social roles. However, notably in queer studies, few direct their attention to the act of selecting and wearing dress or the process of assembling, particularly with the purpose of creating a new gender identity. This thesis examines not only certain selected items and their dynamics with the ideal self and gender, but also the experiences of selecting and wearing an assemblage as a coherent, whole, and unique representation of the self in the pursuit of a new gender identity. By focusing on the process as well as on the result and their effects on transsexuals' and transgenders' subjectivity, this research hopes to offer a closer look on how a dressing practice, a process of assembling an outfit and temporarily modifying the body, becomes a meaningful part of both transgenders' and transsexuals' lives and a significant element of the symbolic processes that produce gender.

Key Terms: Framework and Conceptualisation

Transgenders and Transsexuals

The words 'transgenders' and 'transsexuals'[4] are often used as umbrella terms to refer to people who aim to enact an opposite gender role or dress, and live the opposite gender. The term 'transgenders' in this research specifically refers to male-to-female transgenders or men who aim to live as women in a particular context: they present themselves as women in a particular place and time as a part of their daily life. This means that transgender

[4] For instance, the works of Whittle (2000) on gender identities, Plemons (in Moore and Kosut, 2010) on transsexual identities, and other essays (in Hines and Sanger, 2010). Laurel Westbrook (2010) in particular wrote about the term 'transgender' as an identity category separate from 'transsexual' and 'transvestite'. Though her work focuses on the US, bearing resemblance to participants' understanding of their gender identity, I have found it to be relevant both in the field and in the thesis. Further, there are numerous scholarly works on transgender and transsexual identities, for instance, the volumes compiled and edited by Stryker and Whittle (2006), and Stryker and Aizura (2013) that not only examine the crisis surrounding transgender identities, but also highlight their historical, socio-political contexts. In media, contemporary arts, and architecture and with regards to transgender youth identities and sexual orientation, see, for instance, the works and talks by Norway's physician and sexologist, Esben Esther P. Benestad (2009, 2016), who redefines the tendency to be trans- as a positive talent (instead of a disease).

participants still live as men, often for the most part of their life. The terms ‘cross-dressers’ or ‘transgenderist’ are occasionally used by some participants in this research to identify themselves. It is noted that the word ‘transgender’ here should not be confused with the term ‘drags’, which connotes performance, entertainment, and theatrical art, or ‘transvestites’, which usually refers to men who dress as women or wear women’s clothing for sexual or erotic excitement. In other words, male-to-female transgender participants aim to temporarily become women while having secondary male sex characteristics.

Male-to-female transgenders are differentiated from ‘transsexuals’ in this research as the latter refers to people who aim to enact and live the opposite gender permanently. Thus, a transman is a female person who desires or aims to be a man, or lives as a man continuously, consistently, and permanently. The word ‘permanently’ here means that unlike transgender participants, transsexuals in this research do not live their desired gender one day and enact another gender role the next day. In other words, a transman does not present himself as a man during a Christmas party and then dresses as a woman the next day. In order to fulfil their needs and desires to live their desired gender indefinitely, in contrast to transgenders, transsexuals in this research are characterised by their willingness and commitment to undergo invasive procedures to change the sex characteristics of their physical bodies, commonly understood as sex or gender reconfirmation or reconstruction surgeries.

It is important to note, however, that this categorisation is not rigid and is only done for an analytical purpose, and to mark different sets of patterns in transgenders’ and transsexuals’ dressing practices. The two categories often overlap as a male-to-female transgender participant may desire to live as a woman indefinitely but is unable to do so for one or many reasons. Thus, ‘transgenders’ and ‘transsexuals’ as categories in this research do not necessarily denote participants’ desires and intentions but mark the different patterns through which gender is lived and manifested. Last but not least, this research draws a clear

line between an individual's sexual orientation, which is outside the limitation of this research, and how an individual constructs his or her gender identity through the practice of dressing, which is the focus of this research.

The Self and Identity

The function and role of clothing and other decorations in creating a desired appearance, the latter's significance in the construction of gender identity, and the potential of dress in creating the self in the manner in which they have been explored here raised a question about the concept of the self. Can the self[5] truly be created through the process of selecting and wearing clothing, as Woodward (2005, 2007) has claimed. This is perhaps a question that entails a further phenomenological and ontological analysis beyond the scope of this thesis. The wide-ranging use of the word across disciplines and its various conceptualisations, however, warrant a brief description of how it is understood within this research, especially as it may raise a doubt about what Miller (2005a, p. 3) has summarised as the problem of 'the morality of surfaces'. Miller (2005a) observed that the western idea of being perceives the real person, myself, as that which is deep inside, and my surface as superficial. Attention to clothing as that which creates and is on the surface, is superficial, trivial and self-indulgent. The self that is refracted through our appearance is thus, superficial, as oppose to real and authentic. This would challenge Schrock et al's (2005) and Heglan and Hodges' (2007) suggestion on the

[5] This research is aware of the problem of conceptualising the 'self' as well as its derivatives: 'self-image', self-expression, and self-identity' within Anthropology and social theory. In an early conceptualisation, Mauss ([1938] 1997) distinguished among the categories of a 'role' (personnage), a 'person' (personne), to a name, to an individual, to a whole being with metaphysical and moral values, thought and action. In recent development, the OED (2019, online) has defined 'self' to mean, among others, 'one's particular nature or personality; the qualities that make one individual or unique' as well as 'one's own interest or pleasure'. Its usage in Psychology is wide-ranging, and the APA (American Psychological Association) dictionary (2019 online) has maintained its meaning as 'the totality of an individual consisting of all characteristic contributes, conscious and unconscious, mental and physical'. Despite these definitions, there has not been a single consistent, universally agreed definition in gender studies and its usage remains wide-ranging. In the study of gender and fashion theory, the term is occasionally used in correlation with the term 'personhood' (such as in Woodward's 2007 study), 'identity', 'personality', 'authenticity', and even the concept of 'styling'.

concept of ‘being authentic’ through adorning the body, and reverberates the familiar idea of transgenderism as ‘an imitation of an imitation’ (Morris, 1995, p. 580). This conceptualisation of being would render Woodward’s ‘the self’ created through clothing as, at best, merely a clear, somewhat singular, sense of intention. Miller (2005b) (as well as Kuchler [2005] and Keane [2005]), however, argued that the material forms of clothing constitute the self, in part through their enclosing and giving shape. It is through dressing that one confronts who one is. Trinidadians, he claimed, consider the real self to be on the surface for it is there that one can honestly appraise or find out who they are (2005a, p. 3; 2005b). His central argument is that ‘the subject is the product of the same act of objectification that creates clothing’ (2005b, p. 32). Here, ‘the self’ is not mere ‘subjects’ potentially covered in superficial forms: it is a product of social relations which exist in and through our material world, manifesting in ways that cannot be traced back to a clear sense of will (p. 32).

This conceptualisation of the self as that which is constituted by clothing, as the surface, the only place where appraisal can be done and social relations are manifested echoes—Stone’s (1979) early conceptualisation; ‘ when one’s dress calls out in others the “same” identifications of the wearer as it calls out in the wearer, we may speak of the appearance as meaningful. It turns out, in fact, that this is the self…’ (p. 101), (italics added). For Stone, the self is negotiated, and created through appearance, it is the result of an appraisal that matches the appraised’s desires. Clothing evokes others’ responses in that it works beyond manipulating the visibility of its wearer to formulating a kind of text. That text situates the self in social terms as identity. This interactionist approach echoes Goffman’s conceptualisation of identity and performance. Stone goes further to conceptualise identity as ‘the meaning of the self’ (p. 93), it is constructed and materialised through donning and wearing clothing. Thus, clothing materialises the self. While ‘identity’ and ‘the self’ are not the same, Stone describes the relationship between these two ideas within the context of appearance, and clothing. Stone’s

conceptualisation, and indeed Miller's and Woodward's, becomes significant in this research's formulation of both concepts. Furthermore, the significance of Stone's theory in this thesis can be described by recapitulating the interplay between his and Goffman's ideas in the same context. A collection of roles constitutes identity (Goffman) but to enact one's role, first, according to Stone (p. 91), one has to 'appear' because 'discourse is impossible without appearance', and as it follows, one appears clothed as 'dictated' by one's role.

This seemingly, overly simplistic cycle of mixing both theories together describes one of the central tenets of this research. First, to assume a new gender identity, one needs to create an appearance expected from one playing a particular gender role. Second, the self is constructed and reified through a successful negotiation of a new gender identity, formulated by clothing through assembling and its assemblage. These theoretical works served as the basis upon which 'the self' is conceptualised and understood in this thesis.

Taken from the context of gender and queer studies, the thesis adapts Whittle's (2000) and Stoller's ([1964] in Moi, 2010) conceptualisations to refer to 'gender identity'. 'Gender identity' is the total perception of an individual about one's own gender, which includes one's self-image and identification of the self as a man or a woman, as well as personal judgment about one's level of conformity to the societal norms of masculinity and femininity. 'Self-image' in this case means a basic perception of self as belonging to a sex or a gender and includes one's own experience in identifying with a certain gender. The total perception of an individual designates a person's subjective experiences, which is embodied. The terms 'masculinity' or 'masculine' and 'femininity' or 'feminine', when used in this thesis, denote participants' own perception of the society's ideal qualities, or the stereotypical qualities, attributed to gender.

Gender, Subjectivity, and the Body

The concept of 'the self' that is materialised through and constituted by clothing is central in this thesis. This inevitably raises a question about how the body may be conceptualised in this theoretical framework. Engaging in a theoretical debate on the embodiment[6] of gender is not the aim here. However, given its context and theoretical framework, the research itself is inevitably placed in the broader theoretical works on gender and its relationship with the body. In fact, the significance of appearance in the research's conceptualisation attests to Schrock et al's assertion of the body as a material for gender. Subjectivity is yet another concept that has sparked many discussions and has been embedded in the theory of gender since de Beauvoir's argument for the body as a situation. Indeed, the scholarship to which this research owes its conceptualisation, uses the interplay between gender, subjectivity and the body at the core of their analytical frameworks. It thus becomes necessary to illustrate briefly how these three concepts are perceived in this thesis.

This research is built on Schrock et al's (2005) suggestion that the body matters as a material of gender and Eicher's conceptualisation of a dressed body as a gestalt. This means

[6] Butler's (1990) proposition of gender as a discourse and gender performativity has sparked debates about the role of the body and subjectivity and how they may be understood within the theory of gender. Moi (2010) for instance, as well as Schrock et al (2005) have discussed how her theory, albeit offering a premise that may further feminist interests and the interests of those whose identity falls outside the binary (Morris, 1995), dismisses the significance of the body, reducing it as a yet another discourse; sex as an 'object', which eventually suggests gender as disembodied. Many scholars in queers study doubt this view, suggesting instead that the body, while objectified, is more than an object and a discourse, and thus matters in the construction of gender. Plemons's (2010) study of trans-surgery, for instance, promotes a discussion on how much transsexuals' self-image and identity; their experiences of gender, change with the transformation of their bodies. Often contrasted with Butler's analysis of the body as a discourse is de Beauvoir's (2009) conceptualisation of the body as a situation and Merleau-Ponty's (in Salamon, 2010; Moi, 2010; Halák, 2016) assertion that the body is no longer an object among other objects: it is always with us and stays with us until we die. In other words, the body as a lived experience, an agent of existence (subjectivity is embodied). As Salamon (2010) has noticed, the concept of the body, and particularly in transsubjectivity, is still a topic of continuous discussions and explorations.

that the body's facticity[7]8 becomes important in transsexuals' subjective experiences. The body becomes the way through which they experience and create gender, which means that it imposes certain limitations and freedom, or in de Beauvoir's (2009) term, the situation, that shapes experiences. This is not to say that biological facts ground cultural values, but to assert that the body is a lived experience which is both situated and a situation in its own right (de Beauvoir, 2009; Moi, 2010). It is, as Moi has claimed in her reading of Merleau-Ponty, 'a historical sedimentation of our way of living in the world and the world's way of living with us'. The body is thus both a physical object with all of its properties, material and biological, and also a sedimentation, a nexus of meanings. As a lived experience, it is shaped by its dialectical relations with its outside situations. In Eicher's conceptualisation, meaning is produced through adorning the body with clothing and accessories. The adorned body produces meaning and the dressed body becomes a gestalt when it becomes a lived experience. The dressed body is always situated socially, in relation with others, and is constructed intentionally. Eicher's idea of 'dress' and a dressed body as a gestalt, as her students (see *Dress Sense* [2007]) have explored, encompasses subjective and objective experiences. The dressed body, as Schrock et al's (2005) and Woodward's (2007) have shown, becomes the site where cultural and social situations and an individual's intentionality are reflected and negotiated. As such, the body, as Schrock et al (2005) have claimed, becomes a part of gender and, consequently, the 'reworking' of the body as in the manipulation of its visibility is inherent in transsexuals' reconstruction of gender identity.

Boellstorff (2004), Schrock et al (2005), and Heglan and Hodges (2007) perceive the body, the physical and biological, as paramount in the construction of gender identity among

[7] The term 'facticity' of the body here refers to de Beauvoir's conceptualisation which indicates all concrete attributes of the body, including but not limited to, for instance, biological characteristics and environment, which becomes the background of human freedom and limitations.

transsexuals. While Schrock et al (2005, p. 317) identify the body as the material with which gender is created and experienced, in Boellstorff (2004)'s study it is the embellished, dressed body that constructs gender identity. Just as appropriate conduct always includes clothes (Goffmann, 1979, 1990), the body as a material of gender involves the use of 'dress', whether forming a gestalt by which a person is identified (Eicher and Roach-Higgins, 1992) or as an external part of the self that distributes[9] personhood (Woodward, 2005, 2007). Subjectivity then becomes the conceptual link that consolidates the body and dress, a concept through which the creation of the self becomes understood through the act of dressing, changing and matching clothes and thus modifying the body. Transgender and transsexual's subjectivity is embodied through the crafted appearance of a dressed body.

In this framework, the dressed body becomes the material of gender not quite in the sense that it becomes the ground of its institution (West and Zimmerman, 1987), but because it embodies subjectivity; it is the material through which gender is experienced and enacted, an active agent. By highlighting subjectivity (in this research defined as emotional responses, particularly feelings of validation and authenticity, sensorial experiences and practical awareness) Schrock et al underline gender as a lived experience, thus affirming de Beauvoir's classic notion of the body as a situation. As Moi (2010) has noted, and Schrock et al (2005) and Hegland and Hodges (2007) implied, the significance of de Beauvoir's notion in gender theory, and queers study particularly, is that it avoids the trap of the sex/gender distinction[10],

[9] Woodward (2005, 2007) applied Gell's (1998) theory that objects have agency in and of themselves, but also because they distribute the agency of people: objects transmit the intentions of the creator in absentia. Hence, objects impact others. In the context of dressing, dressing items/clothing are thus 'objects' imbued with the intentionality of the wearer to impact others, which in Woodward's framework is understood as a manifestation of an aspect of the self or personhood.

[10] Originally theorised in the 50s and 60s by medical professional working with transsexual and intersexed persons (Moi, 2010, p. 115). The sex/gender distinction however failed to explain the transsexual experiences as one needs to accept the standard concept of sex and gender, and at the same time acknowledge that the relationship between sex and gender is arbitrary for a gender/sex confirmation surgery to have any meaning (p. 115). This led to a polarity in gender theories. On one hand, the sex/gender distinction facilitates biological determinism in viewing sex as the basis of gender. On the other hands, it leads to a divorce between sex and gender as Moi (2010, p. 76) explained, 'woman' is an effect of 'power' and the female body is assumed as 'sex'. Assuming sex and gender as separate, Butler's theory on gender as a performative discourse however, reduced the importance of the physical

that is taking the body as a mere discourse or the body as the legitimate ground for the institution of gender and thus cultural values.

Subjectivity becomes a conceptual tool to explore how the body might be a situation and gender as a situated practice. Seen from the perspective of subjectivity and experience, Stone's concept of the self that relies on the 'program' and 'review' of appearance (1972) may seem to be far removed in that it seems superficial due to its heavy focus on the 'surface' and framed interaction. However, in asserting that clothing establishes values and moods, Stone has provided a foundation for its relationship with subjectivity and the body: clothing as a constituent of identity is experienced. In a larger framework, this idea of the body raises the question of how clothing and dressing as a practice may reshape transsexuals' subjectivity, and their subjective experiences of gender. A study of transsexuals' and transgenders' experiences in recreating their gender identity will no doubt also shed light on yet another topic generated within this framework: the relationship between body decorations and the body in the context of object agency. Eicher's and Roach-Higgins's conceptualisation of a dressed body as a gestalt and Entwistle's assertion of the body as always dressed begs a question: does clothing, more specifically, an assemblage of body decorations of which it is a part of and as a form of creative endeavour illustrated by Woodward, really have its own agency in creating gender identity? Or does it have agency only when it is worn?

This thesis aims to contribute to the study of gender, material culture and the queers. By exploring the human story of struggling to fit in a system limited by binary categorisation. This thesis seeks to provide an understanding of transgender and transsexual people for it is by knowing their struggle that we may feel compassion. By showing how an assemblage and the

body in the construction of gender identity. It begs a question of how 'sex' is to be understood, particularly in transsexuals' construction of gender identity. Sharing Merleau-Ponty's view of subjectivity, Beauvoir's proposition of the body as a situation and gender as an experience, Moi (2010) claimed, solved this theoretical issue. While Butler's contestation of 'sex' as inherent in the construction of gender may not be ignored, scholars of queer studies (Schrock et al, 2005; Hegland and Hodges, 2007; Salamon, 2010 among many) expressed a similar view that gender is experienced through embodied subjectivity.

process of assembling may reconstruct gender identity at a given time and space, and the complexity and the ambiguity of the idea of 'gender' itself, it hopes to challenge society's deterministic view of gender as binary and based on sex, which has led to discrimination, alienation and violence against transgender and transsexual people. This thesis serves as the first step toward a long-term goal of the researcher to produce a work that supports the position of transgender and transsexual people in Amsterdam, in particular, and at large toward equality and greater public understanding, a goal that I believe is worth working toward.

Chapter Two

Methodology

The Field

The research was designed to be conducted among transgender people in public and private spaces in Amsterdam and began in September 2015, shortly after the annual Transpride[11] events. The city was chosen because of its reputation for promoting the integration and wellbeing of LGBT communities and for its relatively liberal attitude toward transgenderism which is evident through well-supported and publicised activities and events throughout the year, particularly Transpride. Several places that were well-known to attract the LGBT community were located. One of these was The Lellebel, a bar and nightclub with long and well-established LGBT patrons in the centrum of Amsterdam. The place was chosen in the hope of establishing contacts and observing potential participants' behaviour and mannerisms in a public space. However, most of the clients encountered at the time were drag queens, gays and lesbians. While this research did not initially exclude them, it was directed more toward examining the dressing practices of those who want to assume a different gender identity in a daily context.

The research was conducted in English due to my lack of knowledge of the Dutch language and with the awareness that most Dutch people, especially those encountered in Amsterdam, communicate fluently in English. While the language was not a barrier, communication with people encountered at The Lellebel was not effective. This was probably because of my position as both a foreigner and an outsider to the LGBT community. I quickly

[11] Amsterdam TransPride is a city-wide festival to celebrate and promote equality for those who do not conform to the conventional gender roles, including but not limited to transgender and transsexual people, the LGBT communities, and their supporters. In 2014-2019, Stichting Amsterdam Gay Pride holds the license for the festival. In the last couple of years, Transpride has become a global event.

learned that using the terms ‘transgender’ and ‘research’ tended to produce a long and awkward, though not unfriendly in any way, silence. The situation did not affect the cordiality and good humour of the people, however, there was a noticeable reluctance to refer me to a transgender friend as they probed the word ‘transgender’ and proudly claimed ‘gender does not matter’. Recognising potential participants in the study was unfeasible in The Lellebel because the place was crowded and dimly lit. However, the experience at The Lellebel highlighted the diversity of gender expressions and ideals, and the complexity of the field that had been conceptualised based on the binary categorisation which places ‘transgender’ as an all-encompassing, umbrella term. Learning from this situation eventually prompted a better strategy in building a network of research participants.

Preliminary research during Transpride 2015 yielded several contacts who eventually gave me access to the closely-knit community of transpeople who would become participants in the research. Access to this community was gained by becoming involved in an organisation[12], as a volunteer when needed and as a participant in their monthly meetings and events that aims to support transgender people, their families and friends. The organisation strives to provide a safe and secure place to support transgender and transsexual people. More importantly, it aims to represent and improve their inclusivity in the wider community of LGBT, which was often problematic, and the national and global society, through art and cultural activities. While the organisation is open to the wider public and LGBT, at the time of the research, it consisted mostly of transsexuals. The organisation drew its strength from the voluntary works of its active members, who were also the regulars of monthly meetings and events. They became the main transsexual informants in this research.

[12] This is an official organization and its name has been purposefully removed to maintain the privacy and anonymity of participants. While as an official organisation it has received much attention from the media, many participants in this research are long-term, active members, and given the nature and focus of the thesis that gives a detailed description of their appearances and styles, further details of the organisation may risk identification of individuals.

Given the few number of willing participants, however, there remained the need for a wider network, which eventually led me to find a group of people who were almost exclusively male-to-female transgenders and their close associates, many of whom identified themselves as cross-dressers. Contrary to the organisation and its more political orientation, members of the group were drawn together by the desire to relate and connect to fellow transgenders for support, and to create a space in which to to express their gender in a supportive environment. This group scheduled a monthly gathering which usually included a nice meal and a few servings of alcohol. The gathering was smaller with a more intimate atmosphere compared to the meetings and events held by the organisation, and thus felt more exclusive and challenging to access. Many transgender participants in this research were active in this group.

In addition to monthly meetings and gatherings in Amsterdam, which were held in cafés and restaurants, both the organisation and group organise events and parties, such as those at Christmas and New Year, and participate in Transpride. Despite being organised and located in Amsterdam, many of the active members and participants of the organisation and the group did not live in Amsterdam and were active in other events and communities outside of the city. For instance, a male-to-female transgender participant, Sally, was active in both Amsterdam and her local transgender community. Consequently, observation and interviews did not only take place in Amsterdam but also during events, such as a Christmas party or dinner, held outside Amsterdam. In addition, I attended other events such as the 'Transmission'[13] exhibition at the Amsterdam Museum to gain more contacts. While this made the geographical demarcation of the research less well defined, it situated the fieldwork within an extensive,

[13] An exhibition held by the Amsterdam Museum (17 October 2015-13 March 2016), showcasing the portraits of a transgender woman named Miep by photographers Koos Breukel and Milette Raats as its primary exhibit. Transgender and transsexual people were invited to contribute an item of choice such as a pair of boots, or a coat, that tells their personal story. Contributors were then invited for a sharing session with the audience. Despite many transgender participants expressing that the exhibition painted an inaccurate, theatrical image of transgender, the exhibition seemed to have fulfilled its mission in providing 'a podium for Amsterdammers who make the city what it is, but who as yet not often seen or heard in its museums' (Amsterdam Museum, 'Transmission' webpage).

closely knit network of transgenders and transsexuals that went beyond the boundary of Amsterdam.

While access to the community was relatively easy, building sufficient contacts and gaining trust sufficient to observe an assembling process required patience. Similar to the experience at The Lellebel, gaining contacts through referrals was unfruitful. Participants were reluctant to refer me to a friend. I began to receive referrals only a year after making acquaintances and near the completion of fieldwork. Access to meetings and making the acquaintance of the organisers did not guarantee contacts, much less sufficient trust for further interviews. There were only very few instances in which I was introduced to a potential participant in a meeting. Contacts were gained through direct, face-to-face encounters with every potential participant and sufficient rapport was often only established in the course of several months. Even so, many interviews did not occur for some time because of participants' schedules. Most of the participants worked full-time and specific circumstances, such as going through surgery, led to delays. This significantly lengthened the fieldwork from its original design of three months to approximately one year, reaching its completion with the end of Transpride in August 2016. Gaining contacts and establishing rapport in the field were truly a process of building friendships.

The research and its aims were communicated gradually to participants, and disclosure was often partial until sufficient trust was established. In a few cases the researcher's role was undisclosed. More importantly, many who came to the meetings or events were newcomers or people who had just started to come out presenting themselves as a transgendered woman or man. According to advice given by a key informant, newcomers often experience anxiety and uncertainty with regard to their gender identity and self-presentation in public. With them, I was told, direct questions about their gender identity could provoke anxiety, feelings of discomfort and intimidation which would have an adverse effect for both the people who were

involved in a meeting and the research. The reluctance to discuss gender or matters pertaining to gender identity among some people in the community was confirmed by early experiences in the field. Thus, gaining contacts, building rapport and collecting data in the field, especially in public spaces, had to be done cautiously and at times discreetly to avoid conflicts of interest between the group or the organisation that organised the gathering, its participants, and the research. Casual conversation became both a way to establish trust and a method to collect data in public spaces. This situation raises an ethical consideration which will be explored further in the next section.

All participants who are quoted and whose information is used in this thesis were informed of the research, its objective, and the researcher's active role in the field. Participants were within the age range of mid-20s to mid-40s, and several were older than fifty-five years. In total, there were nineteen participants upon whom I have relied most, ten male-to-female transgenders and nine transsexuals of whom two were transwomen and seven were transmen. Other members of the organisation and the group enriched the experience in the field and indirectly contributed to the research. I attended the assemblings of four of the nineteen participants. Among others, difficulties of scheduling, locations, and participants' personal circumstances did not allow access to their assembling processes, but they provided scheduled interviews and a peek into their wardrobes. Furthermore, at the time of fieldwork, three transsexual participants were undergoing gender reconfirmation procedures[14] that involved hormone therapy and surgery, and one was interviewed at an early stage of this procedure as the fieldwork was ending. The rest were interviewed several times in the one-year period, during which they were in pre- and post-surgical phases. The information provided by the

[14] See the previous section, 'Key terms: Framework and Conceptualisation', chapter 4 on transsexuals, and appendix 1 for a general outline of gender/sex reconfirmation procedure as understood in this research.

participants in transition contributed especially to a deeper understanding of transsexuals' dressing practices.

Methods

Qualitative methods were used throughout fieldwork from gaining entry into the community to securing willing participants for the collection of data. Informal interviews, casual conversation, scheduled and in-depth interviews, observation, participant-observation and audio-visual recordings were used. The method or a combination of methods to be used at a given moment in the field were constantly adjusted and adapted to suit the settings, thereby maintaining their appropriateness and effectiveness throughout diverse social and personal circumstances. As is common to qualitative methods and participant observation, data were collected in multiple interviews and regular contacts with participants.

Data collection in public was done mainly through informal interviews and observation. Observation in public was focused on general mannerisms during social interactions and not necessarily on selected individuals/participants. Most of the interviews, given the situations outlined in the previous section, were not audio-visually recorded in order to avoid conflicting interests and potential ethical problems. Photographs were taken in rare instances, with participants' permission. In-depth interviews were scheduled and produced most of the research data. These interviews were of one and a half to six hours in duration. Some were done over a dinner or a drink, others occurred during a wardrobe tour and or an assembling process. Interviews were conducted in an unstructured and informal manner, preserving the casualness of the atmosphere. Given participants' caution and research that touched on topics concerning complex emotional and bodily experiences, maintaining the informality of interviews was the most effective method both to protect participants' interests and to further the research. This approach also provided flexibility to describe and share experiences,

concerns, interests and ideals with regards to research topics. This flexibility proved to be significant in data gathering as participants viewed an assembling process as a habitual procedure, particularly among seasoned participants with years of experience.

Topics of interests, exceptions, similarities and differences were noted and mobilised into interviews. While keeping with the research's objectives and primary question throughout fieldwork, questions during interviews were continuously adjusted and developed. Scheduled interviews were audio-visually recorded. The recordings provided primary data on behaviour and mannerism and were especially important during an assembling process, which sometimes required the researcher's help with minor tasks such as fitting a corset. Over a half of participants were interviewed multiple times, in both public and private spaces such as participants' homes. One was interviewed digitally via Skype. Emails were also used whenever the need for confirmation or further clarity arose.

The assembling processes I attended were done at participants' own homes and were scheduled, often within the same appointment as the interviews. Data collection of assembling processes was done via observation. I participated neither in their attempts to create a new gender identity nor in building any outfit, and questions focused on items, mode of assembling, and participants' subjective experiences. I observed changes in behaviour and mannerism before, during and after assembling processes and attended most importantly to the impressions that they created and projected. My own perceptions of these impressions, and reflections on the experiences became part of the field notes. Whenever possible, I recorded audio-visually participants' assembling processes for documentation. I made full audio-visual records of the assembling processes of two participants that showed all the major steps of assembling and disassembling. Two others were partially attended, half-way through and for several steps only, which resulted in partial audio-visual recordings of the processes.

The process of assembling was central to the research but access was limited, and so I developed a strategy to gather more information on participants' mode of dressing and preferences. When participants invited me to see their wardrobes during interviews conducted at homes, I encouraged them to select and try on items, such as a wig, shoes, scarves, jackets or tops, and describe and select the things that would go together. I asked them to describe and select their preferences: favourites and least favoured items, favourite combinations in the past, ideal combinations as well as their dissatisfactions or concerns over particular looks, parts of their body, or overall appearances while wearing certain items. For example, upon being shown a favourite dress, I would ask a participant what she would—or did—pair it with, in different contexts or events, the reasons for such preferences and her experiences wearing it in the past. This was repeated for several different items in the wardrobe including but not limited to shoes, skirts, wigs, make-up, jewellery. This approach amounted to a mock assembling that involved wearing or fitting certain items as a part of a whole or existing assemblage and which was limited to actual items in the wardrobe. I also asked participants to describe their experiences with different outfits that they had worn in the past. Many participants documented their early experiences wearing menswear or womenswear in the form of photographs. They had pictures of themselves wearing their assemblages, which proved to be useful for the research. The aim of this approach was to understand participants' mode of assembling, subjective experiences and to detect a tendency toward a preference for certain items. While this could not replace the actual experience of observing, and occasionally assisting, an assembling process, the resulting data provided significant information about aspects in assembling that may not have been readily observable while attending the process itself.

Lastly but importantly, in addition to observations, I noted my experiences in the field. The research deals with subjectivity, behaviour and mannerism in the context of constructing identity through the process of assembling. Much of what I learned came not only from

observation of participants' behaviour, mannerism and emotions, but also from the impression that they made on others. I, as researcher, inevitably became engaged as a part of a participant's audience, particularly in a one-on-one, face-to-face interactions. My own reactions to assembling were invaluable as an analytical tool for discerning biases in the data and for assisting the process of interpreting and analysing it.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Interviews, field-notes, photographs, and audio-visual recordings were analysed qualitatively, and all audio recordings were transcribed. As the data largely consisted of individual methods and experiences with assembling and assemblage, participants' data were first separated and compiled into a profile. Profiles consisted of individuals' interview transcripts, photographs, visual recordings (if any), field notes, and questions. Profiles were then analysed and compared. Differences were suggested between the modes of assembling of transgenders and transsexuals and these were then considered separately for further analysis before being consolidated.

From the comparison of all of the profiles, common themes and topics of interest emerged as well as differences between individual cases. As the research aimed to explore the relationship between assemblage, its wearer, assembling and gender identity, it was inevitably concerned with a practice that is personal. Thus, understanding participants' subjective experiences was of paramount importance. To do this, first, a participant's transcript was read thoroughly and repetitively, and the interview recordings were replayed to identify the ethos of a participant's personal experiences, perceptions and impressions about the interview topics and the research's objective. Further analysis focused on other factors that informed and constructed participants' subjective experiences, including expressions of emotions, ideals, events, circumstances, descriptions of items or personal interactions, perceptions, and attitudes.

As the research was conducted in English, which is neither the researcher's nor participants' native language, doubts that arose with regard to the meaning of specific terms or words were noted and clarification was sought with participants. At this stage, individual themes could be identified. This process was repeated with all participants' profiles in both of the transgender and transsexual categories. From the individual themes that emerged, general commonalities and patterns were identified, and collective themes started to become apparent. Exceptions, differences and particularities were noted and interpreted, and commonalities were examined. The result was data ready to be organised as chapters in a coherent text.

This thesis presents the data on transgenders and transsexuals in separate chapters, reflecting the proportion of male-to-female transgender and transmen participants, with the aim to highlight the differences in their dressing practices as well as in their understanding and embodiment of gender. Furthermore, the case of male-to-female transgender represents the feminine way of dressing, and the case of transmen, the masculine way of dressing in the context of transgendering. The data on male-to-female transgender is presented through profiles of individual cases with the hope to better capture individual variations in styles, techniques, skills, and experiences which produce diverse expressions of gender, and how different identities may be constructed through the process of assembling. The data on transmen are organised based on pre- and post-gender reconfirmation procedure to highlight the significance of this procedure in both transmen's mode of dressing and self-identity, and to underline their changing experiences of clothing, the body, and assembling during this period. Due to the constraint of this thesis, a note on transwomen's assembling, which reveals how a transwoman dresses and constructs gender identity through dressing, can be found in the appendix.

Ethical Considerations

This research aims to reveal the dynamics between the process of assembling and the construction of self-identity using participant observation and interviews as its primary methods. The level of trust needed to gain access to participants' wardrobes, assembling processes and to become a part of the community itself demanded the researcher to take the role, not only as an interviewer but also as a friend. As such, research in the field inevitably revealed private aspects of participants' lives, that regardless of how it informed and influenced the research, needed to be protected to avoid inflicting harm to participants in particular and the community in general. This research has taken several steps to ensure that participants are protected without jeopardising the integrity of the research and compromising the knowledge that it produced as much as possible.

First, participants' privacy is protected and maintained throughout and beyond the completion of fieldwork. This means that in the field, following participants' own examples, mentioning of names and giving referrals were done with utmost care. As I moved within a closely-knit network of interpersonal relationships, it was necessary to minimise intrusion that may upset interpersonal dynamics among participants. A clear line between what was considered private and confidential and what was public thus was drawn and strictly maintained in the field, and in this thesis. This is especially important given the research's focus on the private space of bedrooms and wardrobes, and on the private moments of dressing, and the level of trust required for the fieldwork to succeed that often gave the researcher insights into participants' personal, private affairs and struggles. Personal, sensitive information, which include but not limited to names of hospitals, age, occupation, addresses, participants' backgrounds, and participants' own comments and opinions of others, is never disclosed, neither in the field nor in the thesis.

Furthermore, protecting participants' privacy means rendering them anonymous in the thesis. Names are not real and bear no resemblance to participants' real names. As this thesis provides a detailed discussion of participants' individual styles, preferences and thus may provide a vivid description of their appearances even to those who are least acquainted, this thesis has purposefully omitted the names of organisation, group, events and places which are associated with participants. No exact dates or times are mentioned. The transgender and transsexual community in Amsterdam where this research was conducted was a close-knit network of people who tend to know each other and where regular, long-term members who became the key informants of this research were widely known. Revelation of names and places risks not only easy identification of participants but may also implicate other members of the community who did not wish to participate. The mention of The Lellebel, Transpride and 'Transmission' is an exception justified by the popularity of the place, and the large scale and media coverage of the events. This is nonetheless done in the most general way possible.

Access to places, events and particularly participants' private spaces were gained through clear communication and mutual agreement. Even in a public space such as the monthly group gathering, I communicated my role and intention as a researcher in a tactful manner and as clearly as possible. Only the data of those who have given their explicit agreement to participate are presented in this thesis. Furthermore, by request of one key informant and a member of the organisation, the use of audio-visual recording was minimised in public spaces and during meetings or gatherings so as not to upset guests or new members of such events. Any other recording made was done with participants' explicit permission and agreement. Audio-visual recordings, including but not limited to photographs, such as those taken during assembling processes, contain intimate, sensitive and specific information of participants, which will be harmful should it be made public, not only to participants but also

to other members of the community. In line with this research's commitment to protect participants' privacy no visual images are presented in the thesis. The researcher has made an agreement with participants that audio-visual recordings were used as a means to collect data and is limited to the process of analysis and no part of the recordings should ever be made public on any platform or media following the completion of this thesis.

Lastly, this thesis omits all information that may risk identification not only of participants but also other members of the community which did not participate, but who have nonetheless contributed greatly to the experience of fieldwork and understanding which this research sought. In the context of ethics, this research defines 'participants' as not only the informants who gave their agreement and support, but also those who made up the community where the research was conducted. In this thesis I strived to ascertain that the presentation of data and protection of participants' privacy were not done at the expense of neither the members of community at large nor the integrity of the research.

Chapter Three

The Creation of a Feminine Silhouette:

The Case of Male-to-Female Transgenders

Definition of Male-to-female Transgenders

In this thesis I define male-to-female transgender participants as males who want to assume an identity as a woman, be accepted and treated as a woman, and aim to do so in parts of their life at specific times and places. Contrary to male-to-female transsexuals, most male-to-female transgenders do not necessarily want to assume an identity as a woman permanently, although some of them may do so or have such desire. This also generally means that male-to-female transgender participants do not undergo any invasive—and permanent—gender reconfirmation procedure such as sex confirmation surgery or officially change their identity. Many participants in this research still purposefully maintain their identity as a man at various times and places, are often straight and may refer to themselves as cross-dressers, or 'deeltijdvrouw' (part-time woman).

The inextricable association between the sex of the body and gender identity in the binary convention of gender identifies a woman as one with a female body. The convention exerts an influence over male-to-female transgenders' perception of gender identity and underlies their perception of the importance of a female body and demands the creation of a woman's appearance in order to become one. Participants often speak of 'passing' as a woman. Within this frame, the body becomes a limitation and, very often, frustration to a male-to-female transgender. The male body becomes a problem in their attempt to pass as a woman. The genital and reproductive system aside, their male bodies lack the visible characteristics of

a female body, which are a powerful visual means of gender identification. Indeed, participants' focus, meticulous effort to reshape their figures to resemble those of females is a phenomenon observed throughout fieldwork. The identification of a female body as mandatory in establishing an identity as a woman gives rise to a need to create a figure that resembles or may be identified as that of a female's. As invasive methods of permanently changing the characteristics of the body are not an option for participants, they have to achieve this by creating the impression of having a female body. In other words, instead of creating a female body, they construct a feminine figure. This they do with clothing and accessories and the combination thereof in an assemblage[15]. Male-to-female transgender participants make use of various combinations of undergarments, clothing, accessories and temporary recontouring (such as make-up or shaving) to reconstruct their figure and create a convincing silhouette that would allow them to pass.

Moona

The Dresses and the Skirts

'I want to be a woman and what a woman likes to be. Should. Should be.'

A look into a woman's wardrobe, as Woodward (2007) showed, gives an insight beyond personal preferences and favourite brands: it is to look at the material of the self. A look into male-to-female transgenders' wardrobes gave no less, except that there seemed to be a trend preference toward dresses and skirts. There were almost no trousers or skinny jeans in sight. Very few male-to-female transgenders were seen wearing outfits made up of trousers or skinny

[15] 'Assemblage' is an analytical term used in this thesis to denote not only participants' outfit, which generally refers to a combination of clothes, but also everything else (body decorations) that are combined and worn purposefully to change or create a certain appearance. When the term 'assemblage' is used, it denotes a *combination.* It also means to include the results of certain practices which are done to modify one's appearance but may not necessarily be considered as 'decorating' the body, for instance, the practice of removing body hair.

jeans, and even if they were, dresses and skirts were still the favourites. This preference is a bold contrast to today's general trend of jeans and denims (as studied by Miller [2010]), trousers, as well as other styles of clothing derived from the classic menswear of trouser, suits, and blazers. On the streets of Amsterdam in 2016, the idea of a feminine appearance was no longer limited to dresses and skirts, much less defined by the materials and patterns that had been a characteristic of feminine wear. There were more women in jeans, stretchy leggings, all kind of trousers, shorts, structured suit-blazers, oversize shirts, leather, sneakers and boots in predominantly subdued, neutral, or darker shades, than in bright, gentle coloured dresses and skirts. Yet male-to-female transgenders wore flared skirts, long and short dresses of soft chiffon material, bright coloured blouses, floral patterns in pastel shades. They cinched their waists, sported long hair, and walked on Mary-Jane heels. None wore sneakers; most boots were high-heels, and in winter, thermal tights and warm trousers were replaced with knee-length straight skirts in heavier material and sheer stockings. Outerwear was cropped, tight jackets or an array of classic princess coats, A-line coats, trench coats, single or double breasted and in various materials, with one similarity: all of these styles defined the waist. Added to these was a repertoire of scarves, earrings and necklaces. Nails were coloured, faces were made-up, legs and arms were meticulously shaved, and long hair was carefully blow-dried and styled, short ones were curled, all with impeccable attention to details that would put many women (including the researcher) to shame.

Nonetheless, in a typical evening, it was not just the transgenders' strong preference for feminine wear and focus on their outfit that was remarkable, but also their mannerisms. The example of an evening in a bar will help. They spoke with soft voices, sitting comfortably on bar stools with legs crossed one on top of the other, or with their ankles locked in a quintessentially feminine manner. Some lit a cigar, some ordered a glass of wine and others a pint of beer. Someone walked daintily to the counter for more drink while others were

engrossed in a conversation. Just as they showed their hands to each other, one of them, translating into English, told me that they were discussing nail colours, adding that hers did not match her clothes that night. At this point they started to switch to English and conversation started to flow from nails, to shoes, to skirts, to wrong and right choices of clothing, and about 'coming out', someone who walks like a man, and anything that happened to be of interest. This is a scene of a typical interview with participants, prettily dressed in carefully selected skirts or dresses and skilfully accessorised, among whom I, the researcher, stood in stark contrast, stubbornly clad in jeans, an oversize sweater and a thick overcoat, if only to fight the cold Dutch weather.

During one evening, Moona was sitting for an interview, explaining her choices of outfit. She meant to attend a party afterwards and, for the occasion, she chose to wear a short, knee-length chiffon dress of salem colour that flared gently from the waist down. At a glance, the delicateness of the dress, owing much to its material and cut, seemed to be in contrast with her physical stature, which although not overly tall, was rather well built. Undoubtedly, the dress itself was a fine marker of gender and gave an unmistakable statement of Moona's intention with regard to her identity. On a closer look, however, the dress and her assemblage that night did much more than being an easily recognisable marker of gender. The elasticated waist and the flare of the dress subtly—yet sufficiently—curved her figure. The hips appeared fuller under the volume of the flare, and the waist was cinched and delineated by the elastics. The dress was embellished by a thin white lace around its wide neckline that exposed just enough skin to subdue the width of her shoulders, bringing them more in proportion with her hips. The flowy and light material defined and gave volume to her well-formed breasts, created by prostheses and enhanced by a bra, while a long pearl necklace drew the focus to her chest. Her choice of a medium-length, strawberry blond wig, styled in layers and a side bang, could not have fit her outfit better. The layered hair fell proportionately around her chin, softening

her jawline and forehead, complementing the subdued hues of her make-up palette with its blond colour. Moona's figure visibly showed the curve of the breasts, the waist and the hips. Yet, her outfit was not complete without a pair of high-heel pumps in matching colour. The pumps did more than just adding height and serving as a sign of femininity. They highlighted Moona's bare legs, exposed by the short length of the dress, sensualising them and elevating her figure. Her monochromatic choice of colour created an unbreakable silhouette with unmistakably feminine curves.

Moona's choice of assemblage manipulated her figure, creating an impression of a female body, all the while serving as an unambiguous means of gender identification. Yet an assemblage plays a role beyond creating an identifiable feminine figure. Even among participants, her choices of clothing and accessories stood out as feminine. Her choices reflect her ideal feminine self. She commented:

> [they could] ... wear all that kind of of a clothing but they don't. They don't do that anymore not at daytime not in the evening only when they going out and then when they going out to concert or somewhat when they are wearing jeans too it's ridiculous. Formerly when, em, the women got out they dress up and everything was very beautiful the make-up, the dresses, everything was very beautiful but nowadays nobody will do that anymore. […] I want to show that I want to be a woman so I'll show that to others that I'll do my best to to set up a nice […] look so…

Moona's appearance that evening did indeed reflect a careful attention in dressing, a committed effort to her ideal, visible from the combination of matching pastel colours from the salem dress to the pale pink pumps to details such as blonde hair and slightly pink nail colours, the choice of a classic A-line cut and gentle shades for make-up. To Moona, however, the light, soft chiffon that followed her movement and caressed her skin felt sexy and sensual, the pastel salem colours were 'the most feminine colour there are' [sic.]. The self was envisioned in the dedicated attention on dressing up for a party, to 'give it my best', and was strengthened by the image it created. Moona's appearance that evening was a culmination of a days-long process of assembling, of planning which dress and shoes to wear, of reimagining her ideal feminine

self. The feeling of chiffon on her skin, the visually pleasing pastel colours, the feeling of heels enclosing her feet, marked what she described as a 'switch' into her role as a woman. In this role, feeling sexy and feminine, she would party and flirt, an act that she would never do as a man with a wife and children.

Moona's assemblage was chosen not only for its quintessentially feminine attributes and their ability in creating the desired curves of her female body, but also for their tactile and sensorial experiences. Not relying on hip paddings or a shaper, the choice of dress became instrumental in creating the curves that were not there. A dress—as well as other items in her assemblage— is a marker of gender, but more than that, Moona's dress was a strong symbol of femininity through its materiality and its impacts, not only on her figure, but also on her experiences of her body. Perhaps not when worn on its own, but as a part of an assemblage, it created a feminine appearance, convincing enough to construct the ideal feminine self. Moona's favouritism toward dresses is shared by other participants, such as Jen, who aimed to avoid any clothes she could wear as a man, such as trousers.

Coral

A Long Skirt; it's 'my lady for you'

Coral is rather taller than most Dutch women and of a medium built. Her look was in contrast to Moona's detailed and dressy appearance. Her natural physique demands a consistent use of hip paddings in addition to breast prostheses and a tight shaper that keeps the genitals securely 'folded inside'. Coral's choices of assemblage mostly consisted of top-and-skirt items: skirts, blouses, and blazers with boots. In explaining her preference, she stated;

> I want to give an impression of a female body and make dress […] so to show a bit of female form I em you can accentuate by the shape shape of skirt.

he was indeed often seen in A-line or straight skirts that subtly cinched the waist and, widening toward the hem, gave an impression of fuller hips. Her choice of mid-weight, often dark materials perfectly hid any trace of hip paddings, creating a smooth line. In the evening of our conversation, she was wearing a black straight skirt patterned with white, curved lines and a fitted black blouse with a drape neck. The black ensemble was paired with a corduroy blazer in bold, deep red, and a large stone necklace and bracelet in a similar hue. Her legs were enclosed in light-weight winter stockings and a pair of boots with medium heels. Her face, framed by her own short, curly hair, was minimally made-up. Among others, her appearance was often described as 'natural'. There were neither unnecessary accents nor sensual exposure of skin in her assemblage. Her make-up was always minimal and she was one of the lucky few who could manage to forgo a wig, a piece often deemed to be very significant in male-to-female wardrobes. There was more to her assemblage though than its simple and modest appearance.

The straight cut of the skirt on her figure gave a modest curve, whatever the choice of material; a mid-weight black with contrasting white pattern drew the focus to her lower body and in combination with the hip paddings created the necessary volume that defined the hips. The thinner and stretchy material of the blouse in a similar black colour and its fit produced an impression of a smaller waist curve, complemented by the drape neck that enhanced her breasts and neck. The contrasting materials of black colour sufficiently created the curves however, it was the corduroy blazer that produced the impression of a well-built figure underneath through a visual play of volume and colour. The blazer's relaxed, straight cut and bold red colour was contrasted with a figure tightly clad in monochromatic black, making it appear slimmer, enhancing the modest curves formed by the blouse, the skirt and the hip paddings. Her red stone necklace and bracelet gave the whole assemblage a sense of coherence. Forgoing any additional body shaper, Coral's natural look relied on few necessary pieces of favoured cuts and shapes with a play of textures and colours. No frills, no laces; all understated and without

embellishment, her simple and plain pieces were chosen to express the ideal feminine image, the self that is at peace with both of its feminine and masculine tendencies, as she herself noted. Despite the intricacy of her assemblage, Coral's stylistic preference was notable as she never aimed to create beyond a modest feminine curve. This, nevertheless, also indicates a strong reliance on the symbolism of clothing and its function as a gender marker.

While a skirt is chosen to give an impression of a female figure, it is the act of wearing a skirt itself that expresses Coral's feminine self and her primary means of identification with the female gender. One of her early experiences illustrated this:

> Once I went to visit somebody […] car and went to the building and there was a small […] friend that stopped near me and they asked sir sir you want to buy […] from us? [laughing] And I had a long skirt and thing like that and I went to man and I said well you may say my lady for you …

And he did.

To Coral, the man's response was wrong. Although Coral was dressed as a woman in entirety, the skirt was the most obvious feminine marker. 'Being a woman' is an attribute of one who wears a skirt. The long skirt, seen as exclusively a feminine wear, was regarded as a powerful enough message to elicit a desired response. Disappointed and amused at the same time, Coral's response was a straightforward correction for an appropriate term of address. The skirt and the feeling of confidence and authenticity it produced facilitated Coral's confident remark and successful negotiation of her identity. To her, it was not necessarily about creating a sexy curve or a quintessentially feminine image as much as wearing an assemblage of feminine wear that signified a transition of a gender role from the masculine, *man*, to the feminine, *woman*.

The process of assembling, for Coral, is a gradual transition into a feminine role, marked most definitively with the donning of feminine wear and a feminine practice: polishing the nails, wearing feminine wear. In fact, when Coral started polishing her nails, his wife noted, she started to 'sit like a woman'. Her curve may be modest, her assemblage may not be sensual,

and her face may look natural, nevertheless, Coral still became a lady when she dressed in feminine wear and did what many women do. A feminine identity was not constructed solely by a feminine curve, but also by the symbolic power of clothing, body decorations, and the act of assembling.

Nina

Pushing the Limits, Taking the Risk

Despite the popularity of dresses and skirts and their overwhelming use among transgenders, symbolically and practically, in participants' construction of femininity, an assembling process has an agenda of creating a figure that resembles, and may be recognised, as that of a female out of a male body. While Moona's and Coral's assemblages were obviously different, their effects were to create the *impression* of feminine figures. This means that, first, the chosen dresses and skirts were of styles that would optimally delineate the feminine curve when worn. For example, an A-line shape constructs the waist and the hips better than an oversize shirt dress. Second, given the objective of assembling, dresses and skirts are a preference—albeit a strong and trending one—rather than a mandatory element of an assemblage. Skirts and dresses exude femininity like no other types of clothing, except perhaps a lingerie and a pantyhose. Their symbolic and indexical qualities facilitate participants' objective. However, other types of clothing were worn, and experimented with and, when assembled skilfully, created stunning results.

At the appointed time of her first interview, I saw Nina walking confidently through the door of the café where we were to meet. The high-heels of her black knee-length boots did not prevent her from moving gracefully, in light and confident steps, while her waist-length black hair swayed gently as she walked. What made the first impression so strong, however, was her outfit. It was neither a skirt nor a dress, nor a pair of classic-cut trousers in the usual

dark colour or even a 70's inspired 'narrow at the waist and flare' trousers. Nina was wearing a pair of tight skinny jeans, in light, washed grey colour. Skinny jeans, especially the light-coloured varieties, they say, are a 'tricky' item, perhaps because they are tight, or were made more to enhance rather than create a figure, or because they would easily show the less-than-ideal features many transgender women—and non-trans women alike—dread. They very rarely made their way into male-to-female transgenders' wardrobes. Yet, Nina was wearing a pair that was combined with a hip-length blouse of a tight, rather-thin, stretchy material in pure white. The length, tightness, and different colour of the blouse layered over the thicker jeans created fuller, well-rounded hips and completely masked any trace of hip paddings. The stretchy material of the blouse enhanced and defined the breasts, which appeared natural and full, skilfully constructed with self-adhesive prostheses and a nude colour bra. Her waist was accented by a wide black belt, which effectively broke the silhouette created by the pale shades of white and grey, creating in this case the appearance of a cinched waist. Nina was wearing a black, tight leather jacket, cropped at the upper hips, unbuttoned to keep her neck and collarbone exposed by the blouse's low neckline. The high-heel boots elevated her figure, flattened the lumbar spine and pushed the mid-back forward, emphasising her curve. Nina's figure looked feminine, but the strength of her assemblage was in pushing beyond what was necessary. She did not only hide masculine features and create an impression of a feminine curve, but also defined and sensualised it through strategic choices of tight and different weight materials and a visual play of length, volume, and colours.

Contributing to her successful assembling, as Nina herself noted, was her 'petite' (among Dutch women) and lean figure, as well as her youth, that allowed her to wear tight clothing without compromising the creation of her desired curve or image. In fact, the assemblage optimised her slender figure. On Nina's figure, the knee-length boots, the skinny

jeans, the tight blouse, statement belt and jacket, exuded confidence and created the bold, sexy image that she desired.

All the Details: The Essentials of Assembling

As the cases of Moona, Coral and Nina illustrate, creating a feminine figure is primarily done by creating the appearance of curves that characterise a female body and differentiate it from that of a male, namely, the delineation of the breasts, the inflection or the curvature of the waist and the hips, and to a lesser extent, the buttocks. Secondly, it is done by masking or hiding any obvious characteristics associated with a male body, for instance, hair and certain facial features. Thirdly, by emphasising, adding, or sensualising the physical features that support their aim to resemble a female figure, such as wearing high heels or revealing the legs or wearing a wig. These are all achieved by using the combination of carefully selected items and methods.

Moona's feminine and ladylike appearance, Coral's natural style and Nina's bold and sexy figure are the results of assembling processes that both construct feminine figures and feminine images. Assembling is a creative and dynamic process that nurtures participants' confidence and creation of the feminine self. Many of its elements are routine and detailed process that at times appear technical. To create a feminine figure, there are steps that must be done, and always done, and there are others that leave a little room for negotiation and limited choices.

The Curve

The creation of a feminine figure usually begins with the creation of breasts. Precision is a key word in this process. In contrast to the penis, which has to be 'folded in' and perfectly hidden and secured with a tight shaper, the breasts need to be created, perfectly visible and of

a good size and form, regardless of the clothes or occasion. Socks and other scraps maybe used to 'fill in' a bra to create the appearance of breasts, though, this practice is often abandoned by a more seasoned dresser. Participants, such as Sue and Nina noted that this method would often result in non-uniform, inconsistent breasts. Silicone fillings or pads produced better results, however, some types reportedly leak if pressed, which makes them unreliable and risky. For this reason, many participants use the more expensive breast prostheses, which, despite still being made of silicone, were specifically designed as replacements for the natural breasts and are self-adhesive. Still, as Jen commented, they risk going 'flat into the desk' under pressure, which explained her preference for foams. To reduce the risk, a bra is always worn to secure the prostheses and better delineate the breasts. To participants, a bra is more than underwear that covers and supports: it protects them from the embarrassment of having the breasts 'slipped off'. The risk may limit participants in their choices of dresses, as Sue noted; a strapless one, for example, is a challenge. Within these technical limitations, they have a reasonable freedom to adjust the breasts as they like with more or less paddings, thicker or thinner ones, bigger or smaller ones, depending on their figure, resources, and what they see fit. Assembling the breasts is not as straightforward as sticking a pair of prostheses. It requires both creativity and experience to know which material, shape, volume, and which kind of bra and method will work best with their figure and the rest of their assemblage. In the evening of her interview, Jen was wearing not one, but two pairs of foam breast filling underneath her corset dress to balance the width of her hips and shoulders, the tightly cinched waist and to complement her robust figure.

After the breasts have been created comes the issue of the waist and the hips. A male body, as participants perceive, lack the inflection of the waist and the round hips that characterise a female figure. Having no curve, males' waists and hips are perceived to be hopelessly straight. To add to their concern, the different fat distribution caused by hormones,

especially in older participants, often results in an undesirably round belly. That a female body may not always have the obvious curve of a small waist and round hips as it ages and sags, is affected by hormones and lifestyle, and children bearing, did not seem to be of a particular concern. Participants were focused on creating a waist-hips curve and a bust that is as distinguishable and easily recognisable as possible. Perhaps for this reason, the 'hourglass' figure was popular. Jill mentioned her lifelong ideal and inspiration to be the hourglass bombshell, Marilyn Monroe. To her, Monroe's sensuality and sexy body are the epitome of femininity that inspired many of her assemblages. Although not all participants were inspired by Monroe, many still strived to produce a smaller waist, rounder hips, fuller bust as much as their natural figure and resources allowed. Just as Hegland and Hodges (2007, p.167) noticed, in trying to be a woman, cross-dressers fall prey to the stereotypical image, the very kind of sexual objectification of the body that is the focus of feminist critiques.

Various shapers, including but not limited to contour stockings and tights, corsets or bodices, and hip-paddings, are used to give an optimal curve. The use of these shapers usually depended on participants' judgment of their own figure and ideal, and the clothes that they would be wearing. Nina, for instance, would wear a corset, or a tight shaper, as well as hip-paddings underneath a fitted dress, but would forgo shapers while wearing a looser-fitting maxi dress, which would render them pointless. Her lean and petit figure contributes to this flexibility as it produces a more delicate silhouette even under the volume of a maxi dress. Jen, with her robust body and a thicker waist, needs a tightly laced corset or a corset dress to create the desired cinched waist and figure. Sue, like Nina, often employed a combination of shapers, as well as a strategic choice of clothing style such as a corset dress or a tight-fitting little black dress, to create a feminine curve. Furthermore, participants not only decided which combination of shapers were to be worn with which style of clothing, but also the shapers to produce what kind of effects. Hip-paddings may be adjusted to create fuller or smaller hips,

contour stockings or a belly shaper maybe worn to subtly delineate the waist, or a bodice maybe chosen instead, in combination with hip-paddings, to create a bigger waist-hips ratio and more visual impact. The process, just like other steps in an assembling, is not as straightforward as it may seem, as will become clear in the next example. Participants needed to reimagine their figure as an ideal, yet realistic feminine silhouette. They had to take into account the limitation that the clothing they intended to wear imposed on their body, the silhouette they wanted to produce, the limitation of their natural figure, the resources at hands, materials, and time. A combination of shapers can be recombined or changed, or the clothes can be recombined or changed. Oftentimes, this is a process of trial and error that usually reflects participants' skill and experience and resources as well as ideals, which means it varies greatly from one participant to another. It further shows that participants not only intend to create a feminine figure, but also a figure that is feminine and quite often is sexy and attractive or elegant, in the case of Jen's corseted waist, or Coral's subtle delineation of rounder hips, according to their ideals.

If there is one step of assembling that is always done regardless of the type of clothing or occasion, it is the hiding of the genital. The most common and perhaps the only method is, as Coral explained, 'to fold it inside' or tuck it in. Tight shorts or shapers may be worn to smooth the outline of the groins so there is no visible bulge. Informants tended not to discuss this aspect of assembling in detail, but it is significant because it reveals participants' underlying ideas about gender. Coral's black skirt and Moona's dress would not reveal any bulge due to their material and cut, however, as Coral indicated, the regular steps of folding inside and wearing a shaper were done, regardless of how uncomfortable the process may be. The penis remains well-hidden under all circumstances. Moona's lamentation that she was not a 'complete woman' without sex confirmation surgery, despite 'passing' successfully might explain the importance of this step in an assembling process. With the exception of shaving,

male secondary sex characteristics are not removed but they are masked, hidden, and recontoured. Their visibility is altered in order to successfully create the impression of having feminine traits. Yet, compared to secondary traits, the penis remains largely unalterable and may only be barely hidden. If transitioning into a woman's role, as Coral described, is a gradual process that happens throughout an assembling, and the feminine self is thus being reconstructed step by step, the visibility of the penis threatens this process. Just as the breasts must be precisely created, the penis must be securely hidden regardless of circumstances. To a male-to-female transgender, the penis is not only an indication of a male body, but also of masculinity.

Smooth Skin and the 'Crown' of Assembling

Creating the impression of a feminine curve may be basic to assembling, but it does not complete an assembling. As Biljana maintained, 'the whole image must be correct'. Thus, an assembling includes many small details. Secondary sex characteristics, as Plemons (2010) explained, are visible in the minutiae of the body. While there is not much to be done with regards to the size of hands, as noted by Coral and Biljana, for instance, or feet, or the Adam's apple (which is often covered with a scarf or high-neck top), the facial features are contourable, the hair changeable and the skin may be enhanced. The skin is perceived to be smooth and feminine when it appears hairless. Hair removal as a part of transgender dressing is easily overlooked because it is so meticulously done. Sally's commitment to laser hair removal and keeping her skin permanently hairless is an attestation to its importance. In general, hair on the face, arms, armpits, and legs, where it is readily exposed, is always removed. Permanent methods, such as laser or electrolysis, or temporary methods such as waxing and epilating, may be chosen depending on preference and circumstances. Biljana, who only dressed as a woman a couple of times a year, chose a temporary method. In keeping the feminine hairless and

allowing the masculine to be hairy, hair removal is a faithful attempt to conform with the normative ideal of femininity and its standard practice, which includes the glorification of the hair on the head, a woman's 'crown'.

Synnott (1987) maintained that the hair is an important element of gendered appearance. Among transgenders, the practice of styling the hair is usually a matter of fitting of wigs, which is a significant part of assembling. Some participants, such as Nina and Coral, owing to their fortunate circumstances, grew their own hair, which is, as Nina said, an authenticating element of her femininity. Most, however, required wigs, which although not a real head of hair, carry the same significance. In some cases, such as Sally's, it is the centrepiece.

Sally's Glorious Curls

Sally, like many others, was seen sporting different hairstyles on various occasions. Usually it was layered, medium-length, and blond. The night of the Christmas party, however, Sally appeared from her bedroom with an unfinished assemblage. She had already fitted shapers, breasts, and put on her party dress, but her make-up was only partially done and her hair was short and balding. At that moment, her assemblage made a strong impression, if only because of the contrast between her femininely curved figure and the rest of her appearance. Sally's choice was a long, fitted evening gown fully lined with sparkling red paillettes, a hem grazing the floor and long sleeves. Only her collarbones and neck were revealed by the boatneck neckline. Her face was made-up in natural and gold palettes with a bright red lipstick that helped draw attention away from her square jaw line. Sally's figure and attire was that of a woman, yet the silhouette it produced was unsettling. Her receding hair emphasised her wide forehead and prominent ridge, the cropped, light ashy hair fully revealed her strong jaw line and exaggerated the broadness and width of her shoulders, which made the silhouette lacking the poise demanded by the extravagance and sensuality of the dress. The contrast between her

glamorous feminine attire and her hair and face made her appearance ambiguously neither masculine nor feminine. The completion of her make-up gradually helped with softening her facial features and smoothing her complexion but, nevertheless, failed to produce a poised silhouette. This all changed as Sally donned her wig.

The voluminous curls were in short bob and fell just above the shoulders. The volume of the curls countered the width of her shoulders, in effect, balancing them with the width of her hips, creating a more balanced figure. Hanging loosely to frame her face, the bob-cut curls softened her jaw line, effectively reduced the roughness of her facial features, and highlighted her blushed-on cheekbones. The side-swept bangs covered her forehead almost completely, masking the prominent ridge and enhancing her eyes. Sally did not just choose a wig to cover her receding hair, she chose a wig with the style that best construct her desired silhouette, something that her usual, medium-length wig would not have achieved. The blond curls were not only attractive but were also a strategic choice that gave much needed coherence and balance to Sally's silhouette, constructing a feminine, glamorous image. Carefully tucking her bangs away from her eyes, and with an elegance not seen in the beginning of assembling, Sally walked to fit a pair of heels, ending the dressing moment.

The wig's ability to create a feminine impression almost instantaneously mimics that of natural hair. Hairstyles are stereotypical cues of sex and gender identity that prompt a fast and accurate response (Manning, 2010). Furthermore, hair symbolism is public rather than private (Synnott, 1987). It was not only the look Sally's wig gave that affected her bearing, but also the tactile and visual experience of having a feminine hairstyle. Gender stereotypical hairstyles not only act to signify gender, but also symbolise a female body, femininity, and sexuality. Being both public and personal, one's hairstyle reflects one's intentionality, creates an impression, marks gender, and can be changed, manipulated, and styled to create an intended silhouette.

Among participants, long (mostly medium, just-over-the-shoulder length) hairstyles are popular, although short hair, curls, and other styles are common. The trend was not toward choosing long hair, which is a general attribution of femininity, but toward choosing a wig style that is the opposite of their own natural hair style as a man.

A Feminine Face

The last significant detail of assembling is make-up, the temporary and superficial recontouring of the skin to feminise the face through the use of various make-up tools, products and techniques. Nina referred to it, make-up is about 'softening all male details'. Make-up application as a part of transgender dressing is a complex process in which all the fundamentals of assembling –masking, creating/delineating and sensualising—are applied. Just as individual faces are different, and the fundamentals make-up processes are the same, they differ in their details from one to another. Colour palettes, products, tools and techniques used are variable, usually depending on participants' skills, experiences, resources and their own judgment on what they see as feminine. Nina's dark circles, for instance, are an important focus as they remind her of her male face, despite them being neither masculine nor feminine features. For others, this may be the jawline, the cheekbones, birthmarks, or for Sally, her rough post-shaved skin. Just as Biljana commented that 'it's very difficult to make a man look like a woman', make-up is perhaps the step that requires the most skill and experience, not only because its challenging objective is to change masculine details into feminine ones, but because it must create a result that is as naturally feminine as possible.

The central tenet of assembling is here most obvious: a male-to-female transgender does not want to look like a man with make-up, she wants to look like a woman. A part of the learning curve, Nina revealed, was to learn to

> wear the make-up instead of putting on as much make-up as possible […] for me it basically means ensuring everything as neutral and as that everything have the same type of feel to it.

Failure to achieve this balance of disguising, reducing, defining and sensualising results in an offensive, if attractive, appearance that participants dubbed as 'looking like a clown'.

Applying and wearing make-up is not only significant because it feminises a male face. It is a process in itself. It is in this process that faces gradually becoming feminine. Make-up is usually done last to avoid ruining the assemblage and for practical reasons, except for those with wigs, in which case, make-up is done just before fitting the wig. Jen stated that applying make-up is the process in which she feels that she has become a woman. Seeing her feminine face staring back in the mirror enforces the creation of the feminine self which had been gradually built during the assembling process. Furthermore, the act of applying make-up itself is significant, because it is perceived as exclusively a feminine practice. Applying make-up reinforces identification with the feminine gender.

In describing her daily make-up practice in the morning, Moona asserted that

> …the normal (women) are also very, em, in the morning. They do very quick, they use their stuffs and and but a quarter and they are finished and and *I will do it the same way*… (emphasis added).

Regarded as a standard feminine practice, the act of applying make-up is also an attempt of identification with the feminine gender, an attempt to belong to the category of *women*. Finally, make-up is the last stage of assembling that, for transgenders, also signifies the transition from the masculine to the feminine. It is useful to regard assembling as a gradual process and its every step and details not as isolated practices, but as parts of a whole. Just as the feminising effect of a wig would be greatly reduced without the feminine face created through make-up, a feminine silhouette is constructed by the dynamics of the combined effects of all the steps

and various materials of assembling on a wearer's body. A man does not appear as a woman just because he is wearing make-up or a long wig. When he is dressed in a dress, has a curvaceous figure, a feminine face and hairstyle, and wears make-up, however, he *may* be recognised as a woman.

Inside an Assembling

Nina's assembling is one of the most thoroughly detailed and documented events recorded in this research. I attended the process, from Nina's dress and identification as a man, through all the steps of assembling, to the moment she identified herself as a woman, both in her home and in public places. While this detailed account of Nina's assembling may differ from others, we can see many of the points that may be generally true of male-to-female transgender assemblings. Moreover, it illustrates how identity can be constructed during the process.

The new dress that Nina intended to try was a black sheath dress that was made of leather and fell above the knees. The dress was a tight fit on her figure and the cap sleeves emphasised her shoulder and arms. Her breasts appeared full and well-formed, created by a pair of prostheses that she had fitted beforehand, and were defined by the tightness of the dress and its medium-weight material which gave an extra volume and firmness. The top and skirt portions of the darted dress were highlighted, giving a minimum visual definition of the waist and hips. However, desiring a sharper outline for a sexier look, Nina took a structured, laced corset from the scattering piles of clothing on the floor of her bedroom. The laced corset would have given a more curvaceous figure had it been successfully fitted. The added layer from a structured corset, however, was too much for the tight dress and there was not enough space for its unforgiving, barely-stretchy leather material.

Unfazed by the failure of her first judgment, Nina stopped for a moment to inspect her figure in front of her full-body mirror. Because of her natural figure and how the dress was cut to follow closely a female curve, there was more space around the hips than the waist. Taking advantage of this and the stiffness of leather, Nina fitted a pair of hip-paddings, whose volume underneath the tight and stiff leather created a visual impression of fullness and roundedness that solidly defined the hips. The voluptuousness of the hips was a contrast to the now smaller waist, defined not by a corset but by the vacuum space around the waist that was now highlighted by the hips' fullness, generating an impression of a smaller figure. The high-waisted shaper worn to secure the paddings and the genitals smoothed the outline of the waist, hips and the groins, creating a clean silhouette. Nina was not successful in creating the bombshell curve she had envisioned, but her waist and hips were more than sufficiently delineated. With full breasts and slender legs partially exposed by the short length of the dress, Nina emerged from a casually dressed man into a buxom, sexy woman that fitted her desired image.

> I like to dress up like this 'cause I like the image and I think I have both feminine and a male part if you talk to actresses who dress like this for movie part, cool, I feel really powerful, if you ask a guy look at someone dress like this, they'll say it's hot, I can look at from both point of view. I'm not ashamed of admitting its both empowering and hot and sexy, the need crossdresser it has nothing to do with feeling excited and sexy but feminine as if sexy and excited about it is something bad. For me it can be all of those things, people asked me what do you feel wearing this, I'll genuinely say I love the look, woman in black leather look, I love it 'cause it's feminine but also sexy and hot.

Nina's skill and experience in dressing overcame the limitations of the dress and her male figure. It was not just the feminine curve that felt sexy. It was also the black colour, the feeling of leather on her skin, and the tight feeling of the dress which created and exposed her curve. As a material, the black leather created a strong impression: strong yet pliable, smooth yet texturised, understated but highly visible, the body clad in a tight, black leather dress was domineering and attractive. Symbolic of power and sexuality, it made a basic sheath dress into

a bold, sexy outfit, imparting a sense of empowerment and confidence to the wearer. This effect was subtly visible on Nina's bearing as she walked and stood in front of the mirror to apply her make-up.

A skilful application of primer, concealer and the right shade of foundation and powder instantly improved Nina's complexion, out lines and masking any roughness of the shaved skin. A blush on the apple of the cheeks and cheekbones, a brush of bronzer on the jawline, eyebrow and the cheeks contoured the face, emphasising Nina's cheekbones and deemphasising her strong jawline, softening the brow ridge, the bridge of the nose, and the chin. Lips were plumped with a primer, delineated and shaded in deep red. Eyebrows were plucked, drawn and emphasised, eyelashes were lengthened and curled, and the eyes were delineated. The dark circles under the eyes (apparently a reminder of her 'male face') were carefully covered and done with the skill and precision of a dedicated artist.

> […] I have to make sure the dark circle under my eyes, don't have to be gone, a lot of people have that but if I change it enough then let's say part of what reminding me of my male face is gone. For example I have birth marks here I just dab more of the concealer you see it's gone. Now I look at myself I don't have the idea the face has changed. Sort of mental psychological thing, I'm doing this and I still think that's my old face. In the beginning I used to struggle with that. I'm doing this work and make-up still this one of things I didn't know that make-up needs to warm up…'nd its about, this is all about trying to get to that base face where you can start making it more feminine. And now you look because of that shape not it actually pretty logical to do it *at least in my own eyes* present more convincing face. (emphasis added)

To Nina, applying make-up goes beyond masking and recontouring the masculine details to the creation of the feminine self. With every stroke of the brush and every layer of make-up, Nina, the ideal self, emerged. The superficial, that is, non-surgical feminisation of the face not only supports the construction of a feminine silhouette, a coherent appearance that intends to convince others, but is an act that intends to convince the self. As if building on wearing the

leather dress, the more authentic self and the stronger identity as a woman were becoming obvious in every step that Nina took.

Having completed her basic steps of assembling, Nina walked back and forth, turning around in front of the mirror and, being satisfied with how she looked, walked to another room to choose some accessories. Nina has always had a balanced and confident movement, which she attributes to her training in martial arts from an early age, but as she walked barefooted back and forth in front of the mirror, her movement became gentler and more fluid. Her firm and long strides noticeably became narrower and more delicate. While her back was straight, her shoulders were pulled back, shifting her weight backward, and were relaxed, allowing the arms and hands to be close to her sides, swinging gently and fluently moving. Her hips swayed a little, her legs moving gracefully, leading every step in a much slower pace and an elegance that was not seen when she was a man. Turning her back toward shelves lined with hundreds of shoes, her long black hair, which was now untied, fell loose over her shoulder to her waist, covering her back almost entirely. Sweeping her hair back with one hand, she bent her knees carefully—after all, the dress was tight—and pulled out of her shelves a pair of black over-the-knees boots followed by several pairs of pumps. Commenting on how she should have worn the stretchy boots first before the dress as it severely limited her movement, she finally managed to fit the pairs.

If her movement, barefooted, was light and gentle, with the boots, her stride became slightly firmer and longer but without losing its elegance and fluidity, it was confident instead of intimidating. Nina claimed that shoes made an outfit, but her boots also gave an attitude: ‘Obviously if you wear over-the-knees boot everything would be sexy and more daring’. The heels caused her lower and middle back to hyper-curve, emphasising her well-created feminine curve. Chin tilted down slightly, eyes focused forward, and hips gently swayed, her gait became more catwalk. Nina’s bare skin was dramatically exposed through a two-inch gap between the

boots and the hem of the dress, provoking attention. It was a skilful combination of the *right* length of dress and the *right* style and fit of boots that created such a seductive impression:

> if you wear these with shorter skirt it's slutty, jeans it's stylish, boots and no heels you can do a lot more, heels imply danger and sexiness, and you can dress it up with a cute skirt and it is not slutty'.

She was now wearing a red, cropped leather jacket on top that wrapped her figure tightly and highlighted her waistline. Her muscular arms and shoulders were now covered. Worn partially unzipped, it created a strong v-shape line from the neck down, revealing her neck and décolletage, and the contrasting shade emphasised her breasts. She was clad in leather. The full coverage of the jacket of her body, combined with the over-the-knees boots, however, enhanced and sensualised her silhouette even more than before. Nina's outfit was an example of Rubinstein's (2001) mixture of exposure and coverage that made clothing seductive. Nina's choices were visually attractive items, a powerful symbol and a bold style, which when combined created a sexy and daring impression which could undermine the wearer's appeal. But it was not a problem for Nina as she walked confidently in an almost rhythmic, consistent pace, with attitude. The assemblage fluently expressed Nina's intention and ideal, enforcing the identity she wanted to construct. 'If you dress like this with boots like this everyone'll stare at them, if you are a woman or cross-dresser,' she said. Nina was not only creating a feminine silhouette, but also one that was sexy, provocative, daring and confident, an image skilfully expressed through the use of leather, tight-fitting clothes, and stilettos.

The boots were, undoubtedly, a centrepiece, as if proving Nina's claim that shoes made an outfit. They transformed sexy into seductive and gave a daring attitude. It was a different impression from the next stiletto pairs that Nina tried, a pair of leopard-printed pumps and a plain black one. Although still exuding confidence and sexiness, the stiletto pumps were much less provocative compared to the boots, creating a much gentler, less dramatic image. Now bare once again, her legs were exposed and elongated by the pumps with the leopard print

lending a sense of flirt and playfulness. Against the plain black dress and red leather, the pair became a centrepiece. Free from the tight leather that wrapped her legs, Nina's movement was lighter, and her bearing was more relaxed:

> …this is also a look that is still daring, leather and print, but you could wear this in a job that is more creative fashion marketing. I' d say so. I' ve seen other woman wear it. I've seen one lawyer wear something similar but the black one. so I'd definitely try this.

The next pair that she tried, the classic pointy black pumps, created yet a different impression. Plain and demure, the black pumps were understated enough to balance down the strong impression produced by the all-leather clothing but bold enough to exude confidence:

> the other one [the boots] was sexy dangerous, this is feminine, still powerful 'cause I think anything with leather on leather was a statement on how confident you feel. But with this it gives the classic pump look they are a bit more pointy toe, the boot has almond toe, still stiletto heels, I think also for me stiletto has also more show confidence if you know how to walk in stiletto heels which are different in all heels, show up at work, do your thing, maintaining balance and posture, it shows you are in control but a bit more feminine.

Shoes play a significant role in Nina's assembling. She is an avid shoe collector. The choice of shoes not only adds a point of interest to her outfit, but also affects her mood. A powerful symbol of femininity, a pair of stilettos goes beyond facilitating her catwalk gait to creating her desired feminine self. For each pair, a different image. Now sitting with one of her leg crossed on top of the other, Nina carefully smoothened her dress. Leaning back, she let her shoe dangle loosely, playing with it as she wiggled her foot and casually remarked:

> this is comfy as a guy [sits with her legs closed] but to do this when I'm wearing sneakers, I don't think so. I love heels, I like watching them, this is also for me; look at my shoe size […] This is the same like wiggling foot while it's more considered feminine, playing with your shoes and everything.

Nina was well aware of the change in her mannerism when dressed as a woman. Despite seemingly unintentional and occasionally instantaneous, her manner of walking, sitting, her bearing, and the small gestures such as playing with shoes and crossing her ankles, were learnt

mannerisms. She video-taped herself walking back and forth to aid her learning. She observed, mimicked, practiced, and then improvised:

> at certain points you just observe other women and look at them at what they are doing naturally. And for me I'll look at what comes naturally for me then I notice certain things do come naturally to me, other things not so much.

Her love of shoes, particularly stilettos and pumps, made playing with them and wiggling her foot a natural gesture. Her catwalk gait, though exaggerated, was nonetheless natural for her highly stylistic, dramatic silhouette of a sexy and daring woman. In this manner, her feminine self was enhanced not only through stylistic preferences but also by strategic choice and the adoption of stereotypically feminine gestures and mannerisms.

Being on stilettos, though, through the changes they imposed on the body and its movement, facilitates, and even initiates, the catwalk gait. Similarly, the tight leather dress and its short length limited the body, prompting a daintier stride, and forced Nina to bend from the knees instead of from the waist. Wearing a dress, as she revealed, prevented her from putting her legs up while sitting: '… it's more of a decency thing you know there is no need to flash that in public'. The materials and the styles of clothing and accessories (in this case shoes) limit and constrain, prompting the body to move differently. With the assemblage, she shed her male appearance. She identified herself, and could be identified by others, as a woman. Thus, the assembling process is also a transition from the masculine self to the feminine. As the feminine silhouette is constructed, the feminine self gradually emerges, bearing with it the feminine mannerisms that make the projected self-image a coherent whole, one that passes.

With Regards to Passing, 'the whole image must be correct'

The objective of assembling is to create a feminine silhouette, a coherent presentation of a feminine self that successfully sustains an identity as a woman. The word transgenders use is *pass*. To pass as a woman is to be fully acknowledged and accepted by others as one.

Assuming an identity as a woman is thus a public matter. One cannot be a woman, explained Coral, if one does not present oneself in public as one and assume the role of a woman. She has to present herself as 'Coral' in order to be a woman. For Biljana, assuming the role of a woman means to look, act and behave as one. Simply wearing a skirt does not produce a convincing feminine silhouette. Becoming a woman includes all the details of appearance. 'The whole image must be correct,' Biljana said, 'I know I observe also how woman looks and I see the difference how I *react* as a man and as [Biljana]' (emphasis added). Her word *react*, is much more nuanced than simply to walk, to sit, to stand in a stereotypically feminine way. It is about giving and managing a convincing impression that one is a woman. An encounter with Biljana during an interview will help to illustrate this.

The interview was set at a small café in Amsterdam-Centrum on a winter afternoon. I had seen Biljana several times before but had never conversed with her. She always looked neatly and stylishly dressed, never too much or too little. That day, she had just gone shopping and came wearing a knee-length, A-line skirt in dark, greenish brown leather and a tight, long-sleeve blouse of a lighter material. The deep green colour of the blouse enhanced her complexion and matched her short dark-brown hair. Already very tall, she opted for knees-boots with low heels in the dark shade that matched her oversize bead necklace. Her make-up was in warm earthy palettes, and she wore French style nail extensions. 'Classy' and 'chic' were the words that she used to refer to her style. *Sophisticated* was the word I used to describe her. Her outfit was simple. There were no embellishments, no frills, no laces, no statement of glamour, no over-exposure of the skin or sexy stilettos. Biljana's figure, though, was unmistakeably feminine. She had a presence but did not draw unwanted attention. Greatly helped by a professional stylist in her early days, Biljana successfully achieved her goal, shared by many other transgenders, to 'blend in'. She had big hands for a woman, she said, and a tall body, yet she still looked feminine. It was all in the details, Biljana explained, and not only that,

but to dress is to 'bring the persona out. Otherwise you are only dressing a body.' To dress, for Biljana, is not only to create the impression of a female figure, but to create and express the self. She commented:

> Ok, look at yourself, who do you want to be, who are you as a man, what kind of clothing you wear, where you go to buy clothing, go there as a woman.

Her expensive leather skirt and top, her preference for a classic style, and skill in combining them effectively to delineate a feminine figure created the image of a woman who was confident, educated, and successful.

Nevertheless, how Biljana looked and her skill in assembling was not the element of the interview that made a lasting impression. Establishing rapport was fast and straightforward. Biljana was used to giving interviews and talks. As we conversed, I realised that my usual reservation was gone, and we were sitting quiet closely and comfortably to each other. Having been brought up in a culture where physical contact and close proximity between opposite sexes (particularly with strangers) need to be avoided during such interaction, this was unusual for me. Like a typical casual conversation over a cup of coffee, in between questions we talked about common acquaintances, discussed values, family, relationships, and childrearing. At that moment, I was not talking to a cross-dresser, I was talking to a woman, born and nurtured as one, despite knowing otherwise. It was in her manner of gently leaning into me when she spoke and of talking, in the way she glanced and gazed, how she let her hand rest in her laps and checked her manicured nails, and in her soft and low voice. It was in her feminine bearing and gentle attitude. Biljana did not only look like a woman, she presented herself as one.

The way she used her voice, Biljana explained, and the gestures and movement she made during an interaction were crucial to establish and maintain her identity of a woman. She said:

> …all the little things make the difference. All the tiny parts together, small details. … the way I communicate, I speak, I look, non-verbal expression.

Like Nina, Biljana observed how other women react; their mannerisms, movements, gestures, how they use their voice and even eye contact. She mimicked, practiced and improvised them over the years. It is a continuous learning. Recollecting her experience, Biljana explained how a shift in behaviour and mannerism threatened her identity:

> One day my friend calls me, he is my best friend and though he'd not have problem with it, he doesn't know. If he phones me there's something wrong. I also had an interview with a student, we walk from residence to some other place to […] and would have to make phone call but don't want her to listen to it 'cause I don't know what it was about. So the moment, normal way of talking, acting, body language, because the person with cell phone on his head has other movement than woman have, the gestures are different. Well, if you look closely you can see there are difference. No one is phoning at the moment but if you look closely there is, because their movement are far more aggressive, voice is loud… So I was making this phone call and she was walking about twenty metres behind me. She said afterwards, I heard a man, I saw a man, I didn't know what was happening, I saw someone different, that's what happened.

What the student, a woman, walking behind saw was a feminine silhouette that gestured and sounded like a man. The student's confused and doubtful reaction illustrates the awkwardness and uneasiness that resulted from the incoherence between Biljana's feminine appearance and masculine behaviour. At that moment when she answered the phone, Biljana's silhouette was no longer feminine. It was liminal and ambiguous. Nevertheless, that Biljana's masculine behaviour was so unexpected that she was 'someone different', could also be seen as a testament of her success in constructing an appearance as a woman. To the student, it was at this moment that Biljana—ironically—transversed normative gender: she was expected to act, behave and carry herself in a feminine manner. Biljana's aggressive voice and normal way of behaving betrayed her feminine appearance and destabilised the feminine self she had been painstakingly constructed. In this manner,

constructing a feminine silhouette is not only creating the impression of a feminine figure, but also the impression of femininity. A feminine silhouette is not only a body that is dressed in a

woman's attire and resembles a female figure, but also a body that moves, acts, and gestures like a woman. A feminine silhouette produces an image of a woman, a projection of the feminine self.

The feminine self is dynamically constructed through the interplay of individual intention and other's responses, within the constraints and limits of social interactions. While the feminine self may be expressed and enhanced through an assembling process, which Biljana described as a 'trigger'—or a 'switch' for Moona—that deconstructed her masculine self and constructed her femininity, her identity as a woman is not yet validated. The feminine self needs, first, to be identified as a woman by others. Transgender participants do not pass as a woman in the privacy of their bedroom, they pass as a woman in public settings where their femininity is presented, appraised and validated. Passing as a woman demands more than abiding by a sartorial code or having a feminine figure; as Goffman (1977, 1990) would put it, it includes norms and rules of conduct. The construction of gender identity thus demands the correct 'display' of gender (Goffman, 1979), just as Biljana understands that 'the whole image must be correct'. In other words, the construction of gender identity is always ongoing and situated. In this manner, however, the construction of gender identity inevitably includes the perception and complicity of an audience. As Kessler and Mckenna ([1978] in Crawford 2000, p. 9) noticed, much of the work in passing is done by the *perceiver* and not the *presenter* (emphasis original). Indeed, an element of identity is always in the hands of others (Kuper and Kuper, 2004, pp. 479, 578).

What the case of transgenders furthermore shows is how unstable the self and identity can be, which then begs the question of how immutable any socially and culturally constituted system of classification is. The data presented in this chapter have shown that the normative classification system of gender as male/man and female/woman creates a problem. A transgender woman is not born female, yet when she passes as a woman, she looks like and

behaves as a woman, and she plays the role of a woman. She identifies herself and is identified as a woman. Biljana was in fact so successful in passing as a woman that her masculine voice and gestures startled her interviewer. This proves that one can be a woman without having to be female at the same time. Furthermore, that the attribution of gender is not natural.

Studying participants' wardrobes and mode of assembling does show that sex, more precisely, secondary sex characteristics influence, shape and limit transgenders' experience of being a woman. The limitation, however, comes more from the normative classification of the sex/gender distinction—male=man/female=woman—[16], rather than from being of the male sex. In other words, the problem arises from having been attributed masculinity as their natural gender based on their possession of a male genitalia. Transgenders' practices challenge this normative idea. Their close adherence to standard—in some cases stereotypical—feminine practices, in following the norms of feminine conduct, and in constructing the silhouette of their body reveals a desire to be accepted and regarded as a woman rather than as a transgender woman. From this comes the irony that by demasculanising their male body and feminising it they conform to and enforce the conventional gender norms that they have been accused by some of subverting. The study presented in this chapter proposes that if transgender women subvert anything, it is not the conventional gender norms or even the binary system itself, but the deterministic idea that sex determines gender and is thus natural and inevitable. The construction of the feminine self through an assemblage of body decorations and through feminine mannerisms and behaviour presents a possibility that one's gender does not need to be dictated or confined by the classification of sex. Gender transcends sex.

This does not mean however that the biological body does not matter. In fact, this study shows that the biological body does matter in the construction of the feminine self and its

[16] Kessler and Mckenna (1978) defined the natural attitude to gender as there are two and only two genders and this is natural; everyone must be classified based on this binary schema; membership in a gender category is natural and changes are only ceremonial; gender cannot vary and all deviation from the binary system is pathological; genitals are the essential sign of gender (pp. 113–114).

presentation. The body has been shown to enable, influence, limit, constraint, and direct the expression and manifestation of the gendered self, which will be more apparent in the next chapter that presents the cases of transsexuals. What the transgender cases show is that the construction of the gendered self, thus also gender identity, is a situated practice. It is situated not only in the sense that gender identity is constructed in the dynamics of social interactions, but also because it is experienced and manifested with one's body. One's body is, as Merleau-Ponty ([1962] in Moi, 2010) and de Beauvoir explain, both historical and biological. Sex and the biological body, thus, need not be reduced to a mere discourse, but at the same time, they need not be allowed to make a transgender woman less of a woman. 'It is by seeing possibilities as realities and realities as possibilities that we often relearn to see in an altogether different manner' (Allen, 1980, p. 108). Just as de Beauvoir ([1999] cited in Moi 2010, p. 118) would put it that there are many kinds of women, 'There are women in the world. And I am one of them'.

Chapter Four

Assembling the Masculine Self:

The Case of Female-to-Male Transsexuals

Definition of Transsexuals

Transsexuals in this research are defined as those whose behaviour, mannerisms, appearance, and self-identification, do not match their sex characteristics. Their gender expressions are thus not their gender identity ascribed at birth. However, unlike the transgenders treated in the last chapter, who may consciously choose to play both gender roles and shift their gender identities at will, transsexual people seek continuity and consistency in belonging to one gender category. A common sentiment among transsexual participants is, 'I was born in the wrong body.' They note a discomfort and a feeling of always being at odds with their own body. The transsexuals encountered in this research are fundamentally different from transgenders in that they seek to change their sex characteristics permanently with the aims of changing their gender identity indefinitely. This is most commonly done by an alteration of the physical body through procedures that usually culminate in surgery and has the ultimate purpose of permanently changing their morphological sex.

All transsexual participants in this research had either completed the procedure or were undergoing the process, which is usually referred to as 'in transition', during the time of fieldwork.

Transmen: The Problem About the Skirt

Hans's recollection of his experience wearing a skirt to school illustrates transsexuals' general sentiment toward the sartorial code of gender. In speaking to him, he described an early experience:

> Hans: It's the most weirdest twilight type experience, in a world im not supposed to be in and just woke up in the wrong side of someone's world. I felt naked. Super naked. Doesn't matter how many clothing pieces I would wear. I felt naked. I closed my door behind me and already regretted. Didn't go back….worst day ever! Felt like people staring at me, thinking why is this person wearing a skirt? Felt like that whole day.
>
> Interviewer: So it did show your figure?
>
> Hans: Yeah but just the fact that I was wearing skirt. Traumatising.
> I prefer not to walk and just stand still since that's not possible in your mind you think I have to do this just for five minutes to make it home. Traumatic and horrible that was … skirt or grenade.

A girl wears a skirt, and Hans had a female body, and was at least supposed to be, a girl. The skirt, itself represents the feminine gender, created a feminine silhouette, a readily recognisable image of a girl. To him, a skirt was 'a foreign object; my mind cannot turn it into something logical'. The image that the skirt created, the understanding of what it represents, and the feeling of wearing the skirt created discomfort and a feeling of alienation from his own body. At that point, the masculine self was not only unexpressed but was also negated by the skirt. The skirt presented what he was trying to hide, his female body, his feminine characteristics. Identifying himself as a man in a female body, wearing a skirt became a problematic act which reflected the complexity of transsexuals' dilemma in dressing and their situation within the binary system. To Hans, the act of wearing a skirt was an act of transgression.

Jerry was not wearing a skirt but a green dress, 'I look at myself and felt I was a drag. One of the first moments I felt something is wrong'. Seeing himself in the mirror, he shared Hans's sentiment. Despite having a female body, wearing a dress felt like being a drag. The

image in the mirror was not the one that expressed his desired self, it was the opposite of it. The feminine silhouette that Jerry saw in the mirror reflected a conflict between the masculine self and the feminine body, vastly exaggerated and complicated by the green dress. The dress feminised the female body, creating not only an image of femininity but also indexing the gender identity of a woman. If in the male-to-female transgenders' cases, a skirt and a dress produced an image and the authentic expression of the self, here the feminine self created an image that was inauthentic, in a manner that was almost theatrical, that of a drag. The green dress was deceptive, it created the wrong silhouette which was at odds with Jerry's intention and gender identification.

Jerry's and Hans's experiences with a skirt and a dress illustrate the problem that transsexuals, in particular transmen, face in their dressing practices, as well as the tension and anxiety that surrounds their relationship to and perception of their own bodies.

The biological body, in the transmen's case is more than a limitation, it is perceived almost like a trap that prevents the authentic expression of the self. For as long as they have their female body, their gender remains immutable. In dressing the body conventionally in dresses and skirts and conforming with the norms, Jerry and Hans risk an inauthentic expression of the self, thus threatening the integrity of the masculine self and destabilising their own gender identity. On the other hand, dressing unconventionally as a man with a female body may equally feel and look inauthentically like a man's ensemble used to dress a female body. In this manner, neither a skirt nor menswear could authentically express the gendered self. Furthermore, to dress an apparently female body in a male attire challenges the convention of gender by undermining its sartorial code and conduct. The result confounds the convention of gender itself and undermines attempts to construct a masculine identity. From this perspective, transsexuals find themselves in a liminal and ambiguous state in the dichotomous

gender system and the politics of identity based on sex characteristics and appearance. The problem of transsexuals, as Plemons (2010, p. 320) rightly put, is a body problem.

Transsexuals' dressing practice reflects this incongruity and tension between the body and the established gender norms. When they wear an ensemble that authentically expresses the self, they transgress the very convention to which they seek to adhere. Wearing inappropriate clothing devalues their self-identity. The conflict between the body, gender and self-identity is reflected in transsexuals' mode of dressing, which process is often imbued with feelings of dissatisfaction, confusion and frustration, especially for those who are in pre-transition and transition stages. Transsexuals' dressing practice in general, can be seen as an attempt to mitigate this problem through the skilful use of body decorations. It is an attempt to negotiate a place within the binary system and to mediate the state of ambivalence and tension, at least until surgery that minimises the incongruity between sex and gender is done. In the case of transsexuals, unlike transgenders, an assemblage is not a solution to their problem but it lessens the anxiety that arises from being 'in the wrong body'. While an assemblage may not confirm their identity under the gaze of others, it supports their construction of gender identity. If wearing menswear, in the case of transmen, does not automatically insure them the identity of a man, it separates them from the category of the feminine gender. This is an important element in the dynamics of transmen's dressing.

In examining the case of transsexuals and their dressing practice, three stages can be recognised: pre-transition, in-transition, and completion. The functions, roles and the styles of assemblage differ from one stage to another. A transition is a gradual change or transformation from one gender identity and role to another. Transition is a period when a trans-person undergoes significant changes in the body. It is in this period that a transsexual starts publicly and more intentionally to assume a different gender role. This period is commonly, although

not always, linked to an act of 'coming out'[17], that is, presenting his- or herself in a chosen gender role. The process may begin by approaching a gender therapist and beginning the procedure to change a gender identity. The actual start and end of the process and how the process manifests, is a matter of individual preference and circumstances. In every case in this research it involved hormone therapy, surgeries, and other methods used to change the body. A pre-transition stage is that before a trans-person comes out and formally starts the procedure of a gender identity change, while the completion is the period when a transition is deemed to be complete, that is when a participant feels comfortable and confident enough with his or her body in relation to the self's gender identity. In this research, the completion stage refers to the period after a person has successfully undergone and recuperated from a gender reconfirmation procedure.

Just as individuals are free to choose the type and extent of surgeries that they desire and feel comfortable with, the stage of completion is best understood as a successful transition from one gender role to another. It is a condition in which they have successfully created and expressed their desired gendered self. A decision for another type of surgery may be made later. Indeed, although strongly marked by completion of surgeries and therapies, transitioning from one gender role to another is an ongoing, continuous process that varies from one person to another.

If a pre-transition stage, as illustrated by Jerry's and Hans's problems with skirts and dresses, is marked by incongruity and conflict, the transition stage is characterised by instability and uncertainty. The body in transition is not yet congruent with the desired masculine or

[17] The phrase 'coming out' or to 'come out' is often used in the field by both transgender and transsexual participants but with a slightly different meaning. 'Coming out' in the context of transition specifically refers to a participant starting to live his or her desired gender role indefinitely, that is, they do not shift from one gender role to another as is the case with transgenders. In other words, to come out, for transsexuals, is to become a transman or a transwoman.

feminine image, but it may no longer be as alienating as it used to be as secondary sex characteristics start to change and become closer to ideal. Because of hormone therapy, training and other pre-surgical procedures, the body is in a constant flux of changes as male sex characteristics, such as hair or a different distribution of fat, begin to show, yet feminine traits such as breasts remain. As Jon described in-transition, it is a 'mindfucking experience', and accurately represents transsexuals' general sentiment toward the process. While participants may experience relief as they change their biological body, this is often referred to as a disturbing time full of turbulent changes and instability. Some likened this phase to 'being a teenage boy', an experience they never had, as shots of testosterone impacted their body for the first time. The identity as a transman often begins in this phase. The extent to which participants change their body, the high risks of hormone therapy and surgery, the long and painstaking procedure and effort to manipulate their sex characteristics in the frustrating process of transition shows that transsexuals' ideas of gender identity, the masculine or the feminine self, is deeply rooted in the facticity of the physical body. The feeling of authenticity is evoked through an actual change of physical characteristics instead of through visual manipulation of their outlines. As Jon explained:

> 'I think breast surgery is the more important to transman cause to the outside world, it's more important what making you a man'.

Despite being made invisible to others with the help of a binder during transition, the existence of the breasts and the fear that they will be recognisable prevent transmen from experiencing and expressing their masculinity authentically. Quite unlike male-to-female transgenders who use body decorations to construct a desired feminine silhouette, transmen's ideas of being authentically men involves an actual removal of the breasts. In the case of a transwoman, this may mean a removal of the penis and the surgical creation of the breasts. In other words, while male-to-female transgenders attempt to construct a feminine figure,

transwomen aim to construct a female body. The significance of the biological body in transsexuals' experience of gender as well as the physical, mental and emotional changes that they experience throughout all stages of transition is reflected in their dressing practice.

Transsexuals' accounts on their assembling practices differed depending on the stage they were at at the time of interview. Participants recalled that during the pre-transition and in-transition phases, dressing as a man, or for transwomen, as a woman, was often marked with anxiety and a deep fear of exposing their bodies. Transsexuals' experience of dressing stands in contrast to transgenders' accounts of assembling.

While a transwoman's manner of assembling prior to surgery may bear resemblances to male-to-female transgenders, the practice is often imbued with very different emotions. If Nina and Biljana described dressing as a woman as something that helped them to relax, for Ellen, a transwoman, dressing before and during transition was burdensome and complicated despite her success in passing. Similarly, transmen's dressing moments were marked with tension and discomfort while struggling to hide, cover, and mask their feminine curvatures. Although the elements of masking, hiding and covering are similar in transgenders' and transwomen's mode of assembling, transmen's dressing practice prior to surgery is slightly different in that their assemblage focuses more on compromise rather than on producing an ideal image of masculinity or expressing the ideal masculine image of the self. Transgenders' and transwomen's (in-transition) assemblages, due to their need to create a feminine curvature and figure, are somewhat confluent[18] in nature, clothes are tight and figure shaping. For transgenders, the feminine silhouette creates an impression of having a feminine body and recreates the self through the reconstruction of the figure. A transman's in-transition assemblage, in contrast, is an outfit that neither conflicts with the self's gender self nor offends

[18] Rubinstein (2001) remarks on a manner of dressing that 'expands the proper self'. The body and the dress are confluent, creating an illusion of one and the same thing, such as seen in transgenders' use of clothing to create a feminine silhouette, thus expressing and 'expanding' their feminine self.

the sartorial code of the binary convention of gender. Their assemblage, the baggy ensemble, reflects the instability and fluctuating changes of the transition process, often characterised by deconstruction, desexualisation, and contrast[19] instead of confluence.

The 'Baggy' Ensemble; Dressing the Body in Transition

Relaxed cut, cargo trousers, a T-shirt beneath a shirt, an outer jacket, all in dark shades, a pair of sneakers or a pair of Oxfords, and a hat of choice made the usual ensemble of a transman in transition. The clothes were of a loose or relaxed fit. Clothes were layered. Dark shades of blue, black, brown or neutral colours were dominant. With the exception of small accessories, bright coloured clothes were uncommon, and no shades of pink were in sight except in prints or items that symbolised the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) flag. Many sported streetwear or youth fashion items such as jeans, baseball jackets or caps, beanie hast, loose shirts, sneakers. The ensemble looked baggy. The curvature of the changing body was fully covered and hidden. The previously curved waist and hips, the fullness of the thighs, the soft outlines of the shoulders and the décolletage disappeared under layers of clothing, layers that the season did not demand. The outfit was exaggerated, the body was downplayed. The female curvature was desexualised. There were no traces of breasts, the most readily observable female characteristics, their chests appeared flat and broad. Accessories were kept to minimum, usually a watch, a ring or a simple chain necklace. Hair was short or shaved, and none wore make-up. They dressed to hide any traces of female characteristics that their bodies may still have possessed, to desensualise their feminine body, eliminating anything associated with a female body. Yet they did not necessarily project any of the stereotypical

[19] Rubinstein's (2001) remark on a manner of dressing where a person wears clothes that are too big, making him or herself appears smaller, imbuing them with a sense of insignificance.

masculine image. Despite their age, they dressed more like young boys, struggling to define their masculine identity and find their place within the tightly binary structure of gender.

'I'm not fittable.'

Dressing the body in transition is a challenge for most transmen. Matt's honest comment on his body revealed the sentiment most transmen feel during transition. The transitioning body is perceived as 'not in shape'. Transmen in transition experience change in the fat distribution in the body and the effects of testosterone. They start to lose the roundedness of the hips, their love handle starts to disappear, muscles and body hair grow, the shoulders start to look wider and more muscular, their voices becomes lower, some start to grow beards. Many wear menswear but, invisible as they may, these men have breasts. It was, as Jon exclaimed, a 'mindfucking' experience. The body still bears feminine characteristics that need to be concealed lest their masculine identity is destroyed. The changes of the secondary sex characteristics, furthermore, fluctuated for a period of time, which destabilises the figure. The body is neither feminine nor masculine. A transman's transitioning figure challenges both his self-perception and others' perceptions of him. Transition is a liminal phase in which the body, in the context of gender at least, becomes what Turner ([1967] in St John, 2008, p. 5) described as a temporary 'realm of pure possibilities.' Their bodies become a site of ambiguity that create tension in their construction of gender identity.

The foremost role of the baggy ensemble is to lessen this ambiguity, to mediate the confusion and tension that arise from the changing, liminal body by deemphasizing the body through clothing's symbolic and indexical qualities in creating a gendered appearance. Transmen aim to conceal, hide and mask their existing feminine characteristics through choices of relaxed, loosely fitted menswear, often oversize, or gender neutral T-shirts, in dark colours. Blue and black are supposed to hide everything, including breasts.

Just as the masculine self is perceived to be incomplete, imperfect, and unfittable with in the binary, the baggy ensemble, in dressing a transitioning body, is liminal in nature. The image that is constructed is temporary. In contrast to many of male-to-female transgenders' remarks about a feminine assemblage being a reflection of their true selves, the baggy ensemble is not yet perceived to be a reflection of the true self, but a useful device during the transformation from fake to real. 'Yeas, I'm wearing a mask to get off the previous mask I'm wearing. Like onion. Peeling it. I'm peeling the second one now', said Hans in the early stage of transition. Through producing an exaggerated silhouette that downplays the body, bagginess desensualises the body, downplaying its imbued femininity. The transitional ensemble carries a sense of neutrality, it deconstructs the feminine figure but without creating masculinity. It hides instead of expressing the self. As Jerry remarked, 'I don't know if mask is only for your face, it was kinda safe to go out.' As a mask, the transitional ensemble deceives rather than speaks truly.

The inauthenticity of the baggy ensemble is connected to transmen's perception of the body and gender identity. As has been mentioned, their concept of authenticity is largely influenced by the facticity of the physical body. The baggy ensemble may appear masculine and menswear may be worn, yet the body is female. It thus projects an inauthentic image of the self regardless of the silhouette it creates. This does not mean that an ensemble during transition is always experienced in this way. As its foremost function is to conceal feminine characteristics, it affords transmen degree of freedom by allowing them to disidentify from their feminine identity and identify themselves as a transman. As Matt stated, it is 'liberating'. The construction of the masculine self and identity is incomplete at this stage. Nevertheless, the ensemble produces a straight, exaggerated silhouette that is more coherent with the transmen's self-identity and desires. They no longer look feminine.

Out of items that make the ensemble, the binder, worn by most transmen in transition, is the most important. 'You can wear men clothes all you want but without a binder, not gonna happen', as Jon said. The most readily recognisable female characteristic that male-to-female transgenders strive to create is effectively concealed by a binder. The breasts are perceived as a signifier of a female body. Thus, a binder holds an immense importance in transmen's appearance. The feeling of having breasts negates the masculine self, particularly during the period of transition, when sex characteristics begins to change:

> … never hated it [my body] so much. When you get it, it's ok … hair is growing but you still get breasts it's mind fucking. … people now complaining to me bout their binder is ay! Hahaha. For me binder was something coming from heaven.

Matt expressed the same sentiment; ' ….I hate it, I hate it [taking the binder off].' Thus, a binder is significant not only in creating an appearance that convinces others of their masculine identity, but also one that convinces the self and fortifies transmen's feeling of authenticity and confidence:

> … for yourself when you at home … you put out your binder and you can still see. without your binder still, those I hate them … It was an important moment to wear a binder but before I wear also men's clothes but when I wear the binder part of my identity for transman. Just before I feeling and now I can say I am a transman and it's part of my identity. So it's very important for me. (Matt)

Indeed, regardless of the pain and constriction that it creates on the wearer's body, a binder is the first thing that Joel had reached for during a fire emergency. It is an item which Hans would never open the front door of his house without wearing. A binder is what made Jon's passing as a man in Egypt possible and allowed Matt to change from a woman who 'walked like a lesbian' into a transman. It marked Jerry's coming out as a man. More than a means to constrict, a binder symbolises the transition itself, an item that disidentifies a transman from his feminine body and is a part of transmen's identity.

While binders are important in transmen's assembling, layering loosely fitted pieces over tighter ones, is an effective—perhaps the only— method of concealing the feminine curvature, most importantly the breasts, prior to surgery. Jerry's comment on his manner of dressing before completing his surgery is very telling:

> for the first time I feel I can actually wear something I like. Not something that I think make my hips look ok you know, that's how I saw clothes before. I can only wear this kinda things because it conceals my hips or my chest … it has very specific purpose before. I was very protected.

During transition, an ensemble is not only a means to cover the body and protects the physical being, it is also a means to protect the self. Through the exaggerated silhouette it produced, the bagginess and the volume of the ensemble create an effect of contrast that hides the self from others' gaze. By deconstructing the feminine body, yet not overtly sexualising it in a stereotypical masculine image, the ensemble mediates the tension and ambiguity that comes from the appearance of the changing body and transmen's own concept of gender identity.

Matt was a transman midway into his transition. He was often seen in baggy cargo trousers or a pair of jeans, a sporty polo shirt, a shirt, a baggy jacket, sneakers and a beanie hat. Everything was in shades of dark blue. Perceiving himself as 'not passing yet', he purposefully stayed away from wearing his ideal low-rise jeans and a more stylish, bright coloured jacket, carefully opted out of tight shirts and swimwear, and bought two binders; 'I wear full one 'cause I'm a little bit bigger', to ensure he could always wear one going outside. His layers of clothing and his full binder protected him from being wrongly recognised as a woman. Commenting on his choices of clothes, he said:

> I'm in transition so it's in between, I'm not in shape. So what I wear is a mix of little bit oversize 'cause I'm not fittable. But when you see me after a year I hope I have different clothes.

Matt's transition was challenging. He struggled for months with hormone therapy and could not start training his body due to having low energy. He selected clothes to protect and cover instead of to enhance his figure, to divert attention away from his 'unfittable' body. Matt's baggy, dull ensemble enabled him to identify himself as a transman. Much like Jerry's assemblage, it was a source of comfort and safety in this period. While he is not yet seen as a man, the ensemble facilitates his identification with being a transman, signifying his detachment and disidentification with both the female body and feminine identity. The dullness of the outfit, in turns, allowed his masculinity to emerge slowly and thus reduce his stress , amidst the ambiguity and incoherence of his transition. He said:

> I never experience my feminine side. I dunno my feminine side. For when I'm (not) passing I will search my feminine. But I don't recognise my feminine side. I dunno really what is to be a man than what it is to be a transman.

Matt's revelation is remarkable as it summarised the complexity of passing and being a man from a transman's perspective, a process laden with emotions and frustrations.

In contrast to Matt's experience, Jon's body reacted differently to transition. With the success of his therapy and his naturally lean and small body, he could choose from a wide variety of clothing and order a special swimsuit that would accommodate his binder. Jon was still wearing dark colours which, he noted, marked the difference between his transition and post-transition outfits. 'My transition went quiet quickly, my hips fat […] disappeared in about two months time. My world opening up. So jeans I wanted to so….' The relatively unstressfull transition allowed him to experience his masculinity differently from Matt at this stage.

> I'm smiling now in our first year I went to Egypt for a week to the beach for holiday. Really went in my man male body still didn't have any surgery was in my transitionwas wearing a binder, but already had a shirt Quicksilver, seventy euros. Walked up street out there and felt very confident and I'm gay, I'm attracted to men and also my first holiday was really intense, I was now a man I went to souk and they said "hey mister, you walk like a lady", that felt sooo great!! Making me grow cos they said mister to me. Gay man. The reason for that was I was wearing whatever. …

Losing his hip fat, binding his breasts, wearing a men's shirt that was 'tight and fit like gay' was what made Jon feel that he was a man. '[I]…really went in my man male body', he said. His carefully constructed masculine figure and the confidence that came from it contributed to his passing as a man. At this stage, Jon's mode of dressing resembled that of a transman's post-surgery, it was no longer that of contrast but was confluent: the assemblage acted as an extension of the self through the creation of a desired body. As in transgenders' assembling, items work in combination to create a desired impression of a figure. Working in tandem, the binder diminished his feminine characteristics while the tight Quicksilver shirt sexualised Jon's body such that he was rightly perceived as a gay man. The comment at the souk that he walked like a lady was probably not meant as a compliment. Nevertheless, it reveals that Jon had passsed as a gay man, a joyous occasion for a transman in transition. At that moment Jon's masculine identity was established and the gendered self was confirmed.

Jon's case is an exception, but it reveals the dynamics between the transitioning body and the clothes that dress it, illustrating their inextricable relationship. The role of the baggy ensemble in constructing a gendered appearance and in the establishment of gender identity is clear. It was his body dressed as a man that allowed him to present himself as a man, and to experience being a man. But it was also the disappearance of his hip fat, the success of his hormone therapy, that enabled him to wear menswear confidently. It was the training that he had done and his naturally lean body that facilitated the function of his binder to successfully create the impression of a masculine chest. It was the favourable changes of his sex characteristics that allowed Jon to set aside his many XL size shirts and don a tight one. Yet it was the success of his assembling that created an image of a man. In other words, the success of an assemblage in constructing the desired self and identity is contingent upon the state of the biological body.

Yet, while Jon noted that he '…passed seventy percent of the time' during transition, his reliance on black colours because they 'hide everything' indicates the need to protect and conceal. In other words, even when Jon appeared masculine enough for others to confirm his identity, the state of his transitioning, still feminine body, prevented him from articulating his masculine self authentically.

As with Matt's hope to wear different clothes after his transition was over, Jon's remark about wearing an expensive Quicksilver shirt is notable. It indicates the confidence among transmen that they can wear what they like after transition. On the other hand, it reveals the importance of wearing menswear and further, implies the role of brand image, in addition to the menswear tag itself, during transition. Hans, in fact noted that being in the men's section of a store and wearing menswear was a transformative experience. Because the masculine self is in the process of being constructed and is yet incomplete, the transitional menswear ensemble is temporary and may not fully reflect the ideal self-image. As Jon, Jerry and Matt revealed, their choices were limited to items that would make the hips 'look okay' rather than ones they would prefer to wear.

Identification with certain brand images is a means of expression and compromise. Jerry was attracted to 'urban hip hop' which drew him to brands that place their stamp on hip hop subculture. This usually means a preference for sweatpants, sneakers, and T-shirts. Matt was browsing clothes from America Today, a company that stocks classic American brands of heritage streetwear, such as Levi's, marketed as a reminiscent of a college lifestyle. Jon, a lover of water sports and island living, found his style in the premium youth fashion label, Quicksilver. Individual tastes may be further shown through choices of materials, colours, prints, the use of accessories such as a watch or a ring and, in some cases, underpants or intimate wears. Hans expressed his taste for playful designs through his choices of boxers in different colours and prints; 'red with all all kinds of crazy things on it. With cupcakes…'. So

constraining was the transitioning body and so limiting was its demand for an ensemble that conceals rather than expresses the ideal image of the self that items worn in private or intimate wear became an important instrument of self-articulation.

Jon's and Matt's cases are examples of how transition is experienced and managed differently using an assemblage of body decorations. Jon's 'I was in my man male body' and Matts' 'I am not fittable' are two ends of a spectrum in transmen's manner of assembling. Masculinity, for Matt, Jon and Jerry, was experienced through the facticity of the biological body, and masculine identity is established through a dressed body. The role of the 'baggy' ensemble is seen as not only crafting a figure that is more masculine, thus easing the tension and anxiety of transition as well as assisting the construction of a more accurate image of the self, but also, in doing so, allowing the masculine self to emerge and be established.

The 'Suit'

'My body is working with me now … also, people addressing "sir'"all the time', said Hans, beaming with satisfaction as he walked into the café to greet some people on one Transpride evening. He had recently completed sex reconfirmation surgery in which his breasts, uterus and ovaries were removed during a nine-month long transition. He was no longer clad in baggy T-shirt, trousers, and his usual black biker jacket. The moment that he had been waiting for had finally arrived: Hans was wearing a suit, a casual suit that now defined a lean, masculine figure. The fitted, navy-blue jacket was paired with well-fitted trousers made of textured, mid-weight material in what looked like subdued hues of grey and olive green. Underneath, Hans wore a bright white shirt with small, multicoloured alphabets pattern, creating an attractive, yet unceremonious combination. The contrasting colour of his shirt and dark suit was balanced with a pair of white 'statement' sneakers. The ensemble was eye-catching without being pretentious or overwhelming. Hans's suit was a stark contrast to his

baggy, dark coloured jacket and trousers a year earlier. Hans's figure was sensual. His shoulder and chest were emphasised, and his muscular upper arms, a result of his training, were superbly defined, a visual contrast to the straight silhouette of his now slim waist and hips. He commented, 'It's the shoulders that make the silhouette'.

It was not just his outfit that made an impression, but also his demeanour. Although it had been noticeable over the year, changes in his bearing was most apparent that evening. Hans was no longer the shy boy who hunched his shoulder slightly, treading carefully among the crowd of Transpride as he did a year ago. He stood tall with head held high, his steps were confident strides in momentum with the movement of his shoulders and upper body. Hans had not only created a male figure, but also a sensual, masculine silhouette. He had established his identity as a man, one that appeared confident, yet friendly and approachable, precisely as desired.

In the completion stage of transition, transmen feel authentic, an authenticity established by the changes of the biological body that enables them to wear the clothes they actually like. They are free to wear ensembles that create a desired impression. In the early days of Hans's transition, he said:

> people make judgment from the outfit first, they scan the whole body. … Let me get my body works. I'll look good in a suit. I will look like a million dollar.

His remark echoes Matt's sentiment of not being fittable. Although the effects of hormone therapy on Hans's body were favourable and he started training early, he felt his body was not yet ready for the suit and the image it conveys of a successful man. To Hans, he would not look good in a men's suit while his body was still female. In contrast to male-to-female transgenders' mode of dressing, in which clothes that strongly sign the feminine gender are generally preferred, dressing a still female body in a man's suit, a powerful index of the masculine gender

would project an inauthentic image. This is not to imply however that the feminine silhouette that transgenders produce and the image that they convey are fake, but to state that transgenders and transsexuals differ in their ideas of authenticity. To many transmen and transwomen being an authentic man means having a male body. Hans's body, post-surgery, was, in his words, 'working with me now.' Thus the masculine self that he projected when he donned a suit felt authentic while his baggy ensemble was a mask. It was not an authentic expression of the masculine self. For Biljana, her correct image of a woman that was produced through an assembling that gave an impression of an educated, well-to-do woman, and her correct enactment of stereotypically feminine behaviour and mannerism, was felt as an authentic expression of her femininity. To return to Woodward's (2005) framework of dressing as a distribution of personhood, this simply means that as long as sexual characteristics of the body do not change, the self's intentionality and desires, the distribution of personhood, is incomplete and inauthentic.

The feeling of being authentic influences transmen's behaviour and mannerisms. However, the changes were subtle and typically happened over a period of time, through and beyond transition. While it is true that the biological body is strongly emphasised in transsexuals' ideas of gender identity, this does not reduce the importance of gender appropriate behaviour and mannerisms. Similar to the case of male-to-female transgenders, observing the proprieties of stereotypically gendered behaviours was the norm among transsexuals. Transsexuals' narrations of self-identity understand that their behaviour and mannerisms have always matched or been identified with the opposite gender. In other words, transmen's behaviour and mannerisms have always been more masculine than feminine regardless of the biological sex of their bodies or the assemblage that they wear. The same can be said of transwomen. The tendency to behave in a more masculine or feminine manner, that is, in the way that is more appropriate for the opposite gender, rather than the gender assigned

to them at birth, usually manifests during childhood or adolescence. Hans's discomfort when wearing a skirt at school illustrates of his preference toward masculine clothing and appearance. Erin, a transwoman, recalled that her early identification with the feminine gender was manifested through her interest in playing with dolls, knitting and various home-makings instead of playing sports and riding horses as most boys did in her childhood. Jerry described his 'unfeminine' behaviour as always having 'this guy swag that people always see as a misfit'. Perhaps, the term coined by Norway's prominent trans figure Esben Esther P Benestad (2009, 2016) 'gender talent', illustrates this tendency the best.

While having a gender talent is arguably not exclusive to transsexuals,[20] this tendency is consistently and persistently manifested in their behaviour through a long period of time: 'I have always been behaving this way', one said. Contrary to the switch moment that transgenders described, which was revealed in the process of assembling and assemblage, transsexuals credit assemblage and assembling as supporting their confidence but never as a trigger for changes in gender specific mannerisms.

In comparison, observation of transgenders' assembling process and behaviour showed that the changes in appearance and behaviour were often mutually interdependently and, through practice, became smooth and coherent. Nina's changes in her mannerism of walking and sitting while in a feminine or a masculine assemblage, for example, were obvious and comfortable. The same was observed with Biljana, Sally and Coral. During assembling, a gradual transition of gender specific mannerism was observed with the unfolding of every steps in the process. The awareness of having a feminine silhouette establishes their identity as a woman, both necessitating and allowing them to behave and act as a woman. While Jen simply became a cheerful, easy-going character instead of her introverted, quiet self, Moona exclaimed:

[20] Some transgender participants revealed that they had exhibited this tendency as early as in childhood

> I can flirt with boys. I can flirt with with man, ya, and I can go rather, rather far. In normal life life..no way. But when I'm dressed like that so what can your mind do ridiculous. All in you mind […]

Yet, when the feminine outfit is discarded and changed for a masculine one, they resumed their man roles, often comfortably and effortlessly. Nina's changes in her walking mannerism upon removing her dress and make-up and changing back to trousers and shirt were observably smooth and as fast as the actions themselves. In this regards an assembling process and an assemblage that constructs a feminine silhouette mediate the necessary changes in participants' presentation of self that allows them to establish their gender identity. An assembling and a disassembling is a mode of transition.

The cases of transmen and transwomen are subtly different. Their predisposition for gender specific behaviour has always been consistent and apparent. Prior to transition and for a long time, Jerry had always had a 'guy swag'. Matt, despite his previously feminine appearance, walked in a masculine manner which invited a comment that he 'walked like a lesbian'. Indeed, transsexuals' accounts that they 'have always been behaving this way' accords with their perception of being 'born in the wrong body'. They speak of this tendency as an inherent trait, a natural predisposition. The early age in which they start to behave in such a way indicates that gender identification through stereotypically correct behaviour and mannerisms precedes identification through dress and appearance. In other words, masculine or feminine behaviour in transsexuals is less dependent on and is influenced to a lesser extends by their constructed appearance, that is, assemblage. They are consistently and predominantly masculine (in the case of transmen) or feminine (in the case of transwomen) regardless of the outfit and even regardless of transition.

This is not to say that the influence of assembling and an assemblage that fits self-descriptions of gender mannerism is negligible. Participants noted that wearing a binder

especially increased their confidence, facilitating their attempt at presenting the correct image of the self in public. Jon's experience of being in a male body before surgery and the confidence that he felt presenting himself as a man, that he was 'walking so proud', for example, is a testimony to how a binder may impact mannerism. This shows how clothing and an assemblage influence and facilitate changes in behaviour and mannerism by increasing confidence, although this effect may be conditional upon the physical changes of the body. Although participants often term these behaviours as 'natural', observation for a year, during transition and through completion, revealed these subtle behaviour and mannerism shifts. While it may be the case that it is physical changes and alterations that mainly elicit changes in behaviour and mannerism, in dressing the changed body assemblages are essential in presenting the self in an appropriate and self-correct manner. In other words, an assemblage may facilitate, nurture and even prompt changes in the gender specific behaviour and mannerisms of transsexuals in conjunction with the physical changes of the body.

Furthermore, being predisposed to behave in a predominantly masculine or feminine way does not mean that gender specific behaviour and mannerism are automatic. Transmen, in commenting on their own behaviour, remarked that the imperfections of their mannerisms was due to the biological differences between male and female bodies. In this sense, Jerry's 'guy's swag' is seen as a misfit, not only because it was performed by a female but through a female body. Jon, who had completed his full surgery years back, referred to the genital as the real reason of a masculine manner of sitting (with legs apart); 'cos there is something between my legs. It needs space. It needs air'. According to their observations, these biological differences were also the reason why men tend to walk with wider and longer stride, as well as in using the upper body to lead and the arms to gain momentum as there is no 'swaying hips' in the way. This perspective implies that a male body greatly facilitates, even enables, masculine mannerisms and illustrates transsexuals' ideas of gender related behaviour and mannerism as

deeply rooted in the physical body. This does not mean, however, that masculine mannerisms can only be performed through a male body or an automatic result of having a male body. In fact, a transman observes and learns these mannerisms even prior to surgery when he is predisposed to behave in a masculine way. Indeed, performing these mannerisms may be important in their self-identification as a man prior to surgery.

As the body significantly changes during transition, its movements are adjusted, thus these techniques of the body need to be simultaneously trained and perfected. Given transmen's tendency to behave in a masculine way before the long process of transition begins, the process of mastering these techniques may often be subtle, gradual, unintentional. Nevertheless, several participants have confirmed that 'behaving like a man' is an aspect of their identity that is nurtured, intentionally facilitated by the body and assemblage and mastered.

Observing, mimicking and practicing a masculine walk, for example, always plays a part in a transman's establishing an identity as a man, which in turns indicates that behaviour and mannerisms are a learned part of gender identity. In their good-humoured, most generous and insightful demonstration of how to walk, sit and use eye contact 'like a man', Matt and Jon revealed the process of relearning and retraining the movements of their body to be more 'masculine'. This included walking with legs further apart, arms on the side, chest more forward, and letting the arms lead the movement with the upper body. More subtly, this manner of walking carries with it a sense of pride and confidence. The masculine manner contrasts to a feminine way of walking that is lither, gentler and less intimidating, which Matt calls 'feather like' upon inspecting my manner of walking back and forth. Furthermore, while walking, men, as Jon confidently pointed out, are free to look—and they do—at whatever or whoever happens to be in their direct view, or on their way for that matter. They may gaze. Women, on the other hand, are conditioned to look demurely, that is, to avert their gaze upon direct eye contact. Indeed, as a male-to-female transgender put it, 'women "look around" but they see everything'.

Transsexuals' strong gender talent no doubt plays a significant part in their attempt to construct their desired gender identity. However, it also exacerbates the incongruity and tension between transsexuals' own notion of the gendered self, the body and the proprieties of the gender binary. A 'guy swag' was a misfit, sitting with their legs open was inappropriate, but walking like a lesbian was incorrect: '… rather than walked like a lesbian… I walked like a man', Matt said. Jerry's green dress created an impact so strong that he stopped, frozen, and felt like a drag, his clothes become like a 'harness or shield'. Later, the baggy ensemble, inhibited the budding masculine self, making sure it was out of the limelight:

> I was kinda hiding. … They'd say "sir" until they hear my voice and "ow, I'm sorry mam…no, you've got it right the first time.

Imbued in clothing as a shield is the need to rigidly protect and limit the self. In choosing his clothes and by behaving in certain ways, Jerry's identification with the masculine gender was at odds with others' appraisal of the self, or, to be more exact, with others' appraisal of his figure and characteristics which were in transition and still —though during transition, arguably— feminine. Jerry's guy swag and Matt's manner of walking illustrate the ambiguity and incoherence between appearance and behaviour that destabilise the integrity of the gendered self. The outfit that validates the normatively predetermined gender identity is at odd not only with individual's notion of the self, but also with its behaviour and mannerisms. In another case, Hans's dress caused him to withdraw, feeling embarrassed and alienated from his body:

> I felt naked. Super naked. Doesn't matter how many clothing pieces I would wear. I felt naked. I closed my door behind me and already regretted. Didn't go back. Went to school….worst day ever! Felt like people staring at me, thinking why is this person wearing a skirt?...felt like that the whole day…

Hans's skirt, the very item that contradicted, even negated his notion of self, accorded with his ascribed identity as a girl. Consequently, his predominantly masculine behaviour while

wearing a skirt produced an incoherent image, both to himself and others. His trusted layers of clothing, later on, a binder, tank-top, and a T-shirt, limited the construction of the self-image as a well-to-do young man, restricting his confidence. The feelings of alienation, shame, exposure, confusion and incoherence impact gendered behaviour and mannerism, potentially inhibiting them. Through this perspective, the dressed body inhibits transsexuals' tendency to behave in the manner that express the self and projects their notion of gender identity. Thus, an assemblage in this respect may suppress gendered specific behaviour and mannerisms. What these cases show is that an assemblage may construct an authentic self only when it is in accord with the norms of gender conventions and with the individual idea of the gendered self. An individual's bearing and conduct are influenced to some extent, despite natural predisposition, by how the body is dressed.

The transsexuals' dilemma is that an appropriate assemblage by gender convention is always at odds with their notion of the gendered self, that is, gender proprieties are a force opposing their attempt of self-definition and articulation. To transsexuals, somewhat contrary to male-to-female transgenders or cross-dressers in this research, so long as their sex does not change, gender is immutable. With this perception, changing the body and taking the risk of transition remain the only solution to their dilemma. If transsexuals' attempts at re-establishing their gender is seen as opposing the convention of the binary, an act of transgression, then inherent in this opposition is an intentional act of yielding to the demands of the binary, an act of conformation, which highlights a genuine need to belong and a longing for validation.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

The study of male-to-female transgender and transsexual people in Amsterdam revealed how an assemblage of body decorations may be used in, and become an element of, the construction of the gendered self and the establishment of gender identity. In other words, how the gendered self may be produced through a strategic combination of clothing and accessories (body decorations). Furthermore, the study illuminated how transgender and transsexual people experience and manifest gender through an assemblage of body decorations, and how it relates to the body.

In the case of male-to-female transgender people, the feminine self is presented through a creation of a feminine silhouette. Gender identity to them is linked to and influenced by appearance. In order to become a woman, they must look like a woman. Presenting the self as feminine requires a strategic selection of clothing and accessories, a skill of combining them, and learning how to wear them, lest the feminine figure may not be well constructed. For this purpose, items like wigs, necklaces, skirts and dresses, and other gender appropriate and specific articles are carefully chosen. The purpose of their assemblage is not to deconstruct the body, but the visibility of the body. In other words, a construction of a feminine silhouette is done not by changing sex characteristics, but by manipulating the appearance of the sex characteristics. The feminine silhouette itself serves as a sign, indexing and cuing people for a desired response in a gender appropriate manner; when one sees a feminine silhouette, one may assume that it is a silhouette of a woman. In short, they create an impression that impacts other people's perception, directing their assumption—or rather, convincing them—to respond in a desired, gender appropriate manner. In this way, the feminine self is affirmed and her identity as a woman is successfully established.

The kind of feminine self that is presented is further created through a combination of personal preferences, tastes, desires, intentionality that is reflected through differing choices of materials, colours, the shape and styles of clothing, shoes, shades of make-up and hairstyles and colours. These various elements are then combined differently, creating different styles that reflect different images of the self, or in Woodward's (2005, 2007) framework, different combinations of clothing distribute different aspects of personhood. To illustrate in other words, articles in an assemblage are imbued with individual tastes and intentions, which when worn, become an aspect of the self, enriching the feminine image of the self. As Miller (2005a) has noticed, these aspects of the self, expressed through an assemblage, are often regarded or assumed to be true. Indeed, 'the clothing did not stand for the person: there was an integral phenomenon of clothing/person' (Miller, 2005a, p. 32). This means that the aspect of the self that is refracted through an assemblage of body decorations is assumed to be the entirety of the self for, in Stone's (1979) framework, it is the self that is appraised, not an element of the self. Biljana's classy and feminine assemblage gave an impression of a financially secure, well-educated woman with a good taste. The self may appear sexy, daring and sensual through Nina's clever combination of what would have been otherwise risqué items, establishing her identity as a young, confident and stylish woman. Or Biljana is simply classy and Nina is indeed sexy. It is in this way that the feminine self, indeed also their femininity, may be appraised, and transgenders' desires to be a woman that they want to be are expressed, convincingly and articulately. In this manner, the self, like identity, is not static, as it—or at least aspects of it—may be reinvented through a different combination of clothing.

The feminine silhouette, however, is not only produced by how the physical body looks, that is the figure, but also how it moves. Do they move with dainty steps, elegant steps, or a long, confident stride? In the context of Goffman's (1979) gender display, is their gesture demure and receptive? Or is it outward leading, certain and authoritative? Do the hips sway

when they walk? Do they sit with their legs closely together and ankles crossed? Or do they lean back and open their legs? How do they speak? How do they gaze? These all contribute to the impression that transgender women create, and how it may or may not convince people to treat and address them as women. The feminine self is enacted at this moment. Appearance in this context is not just how someone looks, but how one 'appears', as Stone (1979) explained, in the presence of others. Constructing a gendered appearance means following the proprieties of gender, including its rules of conducts. In short, Nina is a sexy and confident young woman, and Biljana is a well-educated, elegant woman, only if each behaves and moves, first of all, like a woman.

While identity may be indexed by clothing and is established within the dynamics of social interactions, the construction of the feminine self in transgender women is marked by the assembling process. As they don their women's wear, they see their figures become curvaceous, their faces softer and their whole appearance becomes more feminine. The feminine self is emerging. Role is shifting and their behaviour and mannerisms start to adjust to the reflected image of the self. The shift may be observable, or just subtly apparent during the process. To them, it may feel swift, like a turning on a switch or gradual and slow. A tight skirt may restrain the movement of the legs, forcing their steps to become smaller. A pair of high heels may make the hips sway, making them move in a more sensual way. As they feel a smooth satin dress caressing their skin, the tightness of a bra and the lipstick on their lips they began to act and behave like a woman. It is not that the heels or the lipstick that made them behave in a feminine manner, but the experience of wearing them as a part of an assemblage and the image that it reflects allows them to identify the self as a woman. In other words, femininity is experienced through the symbolic properties of body decorations. In this manner, the feminine self is reinvented in an assembling process, not only through the feminine figure that an assemblage creates, but also through the sensual and tactile experiences of assembling

and the symbolic experiences of wearing such feminine items. Indeed, body decorations, when worn, evoke emotions, which affect subjective experiences that influence behaviour and mannerism. While the relationship between an assemblage and gendered appropriate conducts is not linear, the function of an assemblage, in a male-to-female transgenders' construction of the feminine self, is to facilitate its enactment so that the self that has been created through a strategic combination of body decorations may be appraised correctly.

As much as the feminine self may be constructed through an assembling process, the self, as Mauss (1997) asserted, is always socially constructed. The construction of the self is incomplete until it is appraised in public space. In turn, the construction of the self is always informed by the perceptions of others and in this context, by the norms of gender. In other words, an element of the self is always in the hands of others. In this manner, if the feminine self is seen as emerging through an assembling process, it is validated in public space, thus gender identity is established. A transgender becomes a woman when she passes as a woman.

While a male-to-female transgender aims to look and behave like a woman, to become a woman, a transsexual, particularly a transman, faces a different challenge for he is already a man, who was 'born in the wrong body'. When one looks like a woman but behaves and presents oneself as a man, he is perceived as transgressing the binary convention of gender. The self that is reflected through his appearance is incoherent, leading to an incorrect appraisal of the self. Subsequently the masculine self is barely, at best, inconsistently, acknowledged, which results in a failure to establish the desired identity as a man. When a transman wears a skirt, as seen in Hans's case, his masculine self is unexpressed and unseen by others while Matt's masculine behaviour led him to be inaccurately perceived as a lesbian. Jerry's 'baggy' ensemble that dressed his lean, petite body during transition confused people instead of convincing them to treat him as a man. In Jon's case, his body had changed favourably in response to hormone therapy before he successfully 'passed' as a man. Transmen's

construction of the masculine self may only be successful when the body has successfully resembled a male body. In fact, unlike transgenders' concept of gender, to transmen, masculinity may only be authentically experienced through a masculine, male body. In other words, masculinity is experienced through the facticity of the body. In this sense, gender is immutable until the sex is changed.

This does not mean, however, that a skilfully combined assemblage is an insignificant element in the construction of transmen's identity: masculinity during transition is experienced through the constricting effects of a binder and wearing menswear. In fact, strategically dressed, as Jon stated, transmen may pass seventy percent of the time before surgery. However, they are not yet men. The state of the physical body prior to surgery prevents them from feeling comfortable wearing their preferred clothes, thus limiting and restraining the authentic expression of the masculine self, to be the men they want to be. This means that while constructing a masculine appearance out of a female body through an assemblage is a meaningful and sometimes successful practice, it is insufficient as their concept of a masculine appearance is based on their experience of having or not having male characteristics. An assemblage of body decorations may evoke confidence, which enforces gendered behaviour, but not authenticity. Masculinity may only be fully and authentically experienced through the experience of having male characteristics, only then could the masculine self be enacted, and a coherent, convincing image of the self may be produced. This is not to say that sex is the basis of gender but rather to assert that, among transmen, gender is understood and experienced differently.

The gendered self as explored in this thesis is understood as not merely a product of a successful negotiation, a correct appraisal and an authentic and strategic expression of one's intentions and desires, but also a cumulation of an individual's experiences and desires that is limited and mediated by the body. In other words, a cumulation of subjective experiences.

Furthermore, gender is experienced differently by transgender and transsexual people. The body, following de Beauvoir's (2010) conceptualisation, is seen as a situation, and subjective experiences both influence and are influenced by its facticity. The body is also understood as an active agent in the reconstruction of the self, as well as a cultural and symbolic text whose meanings may be changed when embellished and decorated. The body limits or more precisely, contains subjectivity, thus limiting and directing the experience of gender. In the case of transgenders, where gender is seen as more mutable, and sex does not equal gender, the body still limits and dictates the type of figure and image of the self that they may construct. In a sense, the body embodies the self, contains subjectivity, and thus from this perspective, it becomes the material through which gender is experienced, manifested and reproduced.

The research has also provided insight into the perspectives and experiences of the transgender and transsexual people of Amsterdam themselves. The transgenders' manipulation of the signs of gender and the transsexuals' long and painful process of reinventing the self and of conforming to the convention of gender are courageous acts worthy of admiration and respect. We are led to the question: is it not the society's concept of gender itself and its conventions that need reinvention?

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Appendix 1

An Outline of Procedure for Changing a Gender Marker

The sex change procedure consists of a minimum of six months of therapy by a psychologist or gender therapist at a clinic such as that at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, hormone therapy (a minimum of one year but may be nine to ten months for some individuals), and desired surgeries. A recommendation from a gender specialist or therapist was a prerequisite for all of the steps following psychological counselling. A request for a change of a gender marker in an ID card or a passport, for instance, or surgeries would require this recommendation. All of the participants in this study opted for some form of surgery to change primary and or secondary sex characteristics through invasive and surgical methods. At the time of this research, though, participants understood that by the Dutch law, gender reconfirmation surgeries were not a prerequisite to request a change of gender marker in official documents. In some cases, an individual may change his or her gender identity with only a recommendation from a therapist without first having gone through any invasive procedure or hormone therapy. Individuals may also attempt to change their gender identities without the medical procedure by means of a court decree, although this was rare. The extent of surgery was entirely up to the individual and the medical team involved and could be adjusted to an individual's wishes and circumstances. For example, one may opt to change his or her sex by genital reconstruction and have facial reconstruction surgery, while others may only opt for a sex change without facial reconstruction surgery. Yet others may opt for a sex change, a facial reconstruction surgery, and breasts augmentation. Due to the high cost and specialisation of these surgeries, some participants and transsexual women chose to complete the procedure overseas in countries such as Thailand or in Belgium.

Appendix 2

A Note on Transwomen's Assembling

Although transmen are the main focus of Chapter Four, a brief illustration of how a transwoman dress during and after transition may be worth worth comparison. While sharing transmen's sentiments with regards to their bodies and perceptions of gender identity, as well as in their need for transition, the role of an assemblage during transition is subtly different than that of transmen's.

Among transwomen, Ellen, who eventually underwent a full surgery including facial reconstruction, recalled that going out in public and dressing in this period was difficult despite the favourable effects of hormone therapy on her body. The same tension and problems that underlie transmen's dressing practice is similarly to transwomen, but transwomen employ very different methods which, pre-transition, resemble those of male-to-female transgenders. In transition, transwomen strive to create a feminine silhouette out of a male body. During transition, the result of hormone therapy may minimise the need for prostheses, waist shaper or paddings, in fact, if the body responds well, some of the difficulties in creating a feminine curve are lessened. However, for most, the body is in an unsatisfactory state in which they start to grow secondary sex characteristics like breasts. The growing breasts do not appear as well-formed, mature breasts and need to be enhanced. Indeed, for some, the growth of the breasts often fluctuates, giving inconsistent form and size. The focus of transwomen in this period is not necessarily to conceal but more to enhance these changes in addition to their attempt in solidly defining the feminine curve. The liminality of this phase and the body is managed through choices of clothing and accessories that help situate the body unambiguously in one gender category, hence dresses or skirts instead of trousers. This may mean that there are seemingly no significant changes in assembling other than adjusting to the needs of the changing body during transition, which depending on the person, maybe minimal. It is noted

however, that transwomen experience similar scrutiny and exert vigilance in dressing as they experience no fewer fluctuations and constant changes in their body transmen. Their bodies are thus as ambiguous with respect to the gender dichotomy as transmen'.

Given the state of the body during transition, an assemblage still plays the primary role of creating feminine curve, as well as hiding any imperfections that persist or are incidentally enhanced by the fluctuations of hormones. Indeed, the changes in a transwoman's dressing practice and assemblage only become clearly apparent after the completion, when they are observably different from those of a male-to-female transgender and the previous phases. After completing and recovering from surgery, Ellen's combination of dresses, skirts, bold make-up and hair is replaced much more relaxed cuts of maxi-dresses, natural skin and hair, and most visibly, trousers. In fact, a pair of semi-casual trousers became her signature daily wear, combined with a casual, semi-fitted blouse of plain or diverse patterns. Jewellery, like make-up, is greatly minimised, leaving only long and dangling earrings, usually in silver tone, to add a note of interest.

Ellen's most notable remark describing this change was that she 'finally threw everything away. It was super. So happy. released'. She was referring to all the prostheses, the paddings, figure shapers and other tools that she relied on prior to surgery. Her feeling of being released at this stage reflects the tension between clothing or an assemblage and the self and the body before surgery. While an assemblage enabled her to construct a feminine appearance and play the role of the feminine gender, it was also felt as a binder that conceals: 'you had to cover so many things', she said. By its nature, an assemblage severely limited the choice of clothing and restrained full expression of the self although it was necessary in reshaping the figure into a feminine one. While the feminine assemblage may situate the body in an opposite gender category by virtue of appearance, the body's characteristics and its supposed 'maleness' prevent the self from fully identifying with the desired gender. Seen in this way, the feminine

image created by the assemblage, although desirable, produces incoherence that can evoke feelings of inauthenticity. This perspective provides an insight into transsexuals' dilemmas and anxieties that underlies their dressing practice throughout their journey to define their gender identity.

Indeed, Ellen's daily wear of trousers and relaxed fitting blouse reflects her post-surgical freedom. As her body changed to resemble that of a female's, it no longer needed to be reshaped by clothing and specifically designed adornments, nor did it need to be presented in a strictly unambiguous, symbolically feminine attire. The full surgery also enabled her to wear low cut blouses that show the breasts, a feat that would not have been possible previously and for transgenders. Like many transmen, Ellen describe her post-surgical style and goal in dressing to be simple and comfortable. Yet, when desired, the body is fully delineated and sexualised, and it no longer needs to be concealed. At this stage, especially in Ellen's case in which both the genital and the face were reconstructed, there is coherence between the body, the image it creates through clothing, and the gendered self.