A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS INTO THE TRANS AND NON-BINARY CONSTRUCTIONS OF EATING DISORDERS

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Writing this thesis has been the most challenging and transformative task I have undertaken to date. I remember on the day of the interview the course lead said to us hopeful and nervous interviewees, “this training comes with a health warning – you and your relationships will change, and some of them not how you would hope”. At 40 years old, I’d already seen life and thought I knew who I was! How much more growth be possible? Five years on, I have gained a doctorate and ended a marriage, and yet I feel more connected to myself and others than ever. There has been a lot of personal, painful growth, and a humbling experience of learning how to be part of a group, how to emotionally regulate, be sensitive and attune to others.

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Abstract

Background: Whilst there is a significant body of critical feminist research on how gender mobilises eating dis/orders it has tended to focus on the experiences of anorexia in (assumed) cisheterosexual, white, and middle-class young women (Jones & Malson 2011; Holmes, 2016; LaMarre, Levine, Holmes, & Malson, 2022). There is a lack of attention to the experiences of people of colour, cis men and trans and/or non-binary people (LaMarre, Rice, & Jankowski, 2017) and despite evidence that trans identified people have significantly higher rates of eating dis/orders than cis identified people of any sexual orientation (Diemer, Grant, Munn-Chernoff, Patterson, & Duncan, 2015).

Aims: This study explores how trans and/or non-binary people experience and make sense of eating dis/orders.

Method: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four trans identified people and four non-binary identified people living in the UK and US. Participants were asked about their experiences of gender and eating dis/orders. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim and then analysed qualitatively using a Foucauldian inspired, feminist discourse analysis (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2013; Smith, 2015).

Results: Trans and nonbinary people's e/d struggles are implicitly and explicitly intertwined with gender concerns. E/d thoughts, affects and behaviours act in multiple (and often harmful) ways to (re)negotiate painful gendered experiences by facilitating processes of disrupting gender norms to choreograph, signify or materialise novel subject positions. For the participants of the current study, these practices serve to find a more comfortable and safe experience of embodiment.

Discussion: This paper explores how gender and eating dis/orders are inextricably linked through interconnected socio-historically specific discourses that constitute and regulate individuals as gendered. The implications of the analysis for therapeutic interventions, further research and policy are discussed.

Keywords: trans, nonbinary, gender, eating disorder, feminism, intervention,

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Introduction

This research is about the discursive construction of eating dis/orders (e/ds) from a trans and non-binary perspective. I use the term eating dis/orders to disrupt the primacy of diagnosis (Malson & Burns, 2009) and avoid privileging the positive perspective (LaMarre, Levine, Holmes, & Malson, 2022). I use the abbreviated term e/ds throughout the thesis. The term gender is generally assumed to align with biological elements that make up a person's sex, but gender has multiple components - assigned gender, legal gender, gender identity, gender expression, and gender attributions (Devor & Haefele-Thomas, 2019). The terms trans and nonbinary are used without the word gender, to disrupt the association of gender with identity and because many trans and nonbinary people prefer to disavow gender. 'Trans' is used in this study to describe a range of people who share a feature of not feeling that their sex and gender assignments made for them at birth were syntonic (Devor & Haefele-Thomas, 2019) but this in no way suggests that our contemporary understandings of what this means are agreed upon or will remain the same in the future. Some trans identifying people will transition but some may not, and transition may involve medical intervention, such as hormones and/or surgery (Vincent 2020) but it may involve attitudes, style and or a personal disruption of the binary. The term nonbinary is sometimes used to describe individuals who might identify as or express: no gender, a partial gender, two genders, an extra gender, fluid gender, and/or political gender/s, and/or a personal gender/s that disrupts the binary (Richards & Barker, 2015). Richards and Barker (2015, p.166) suggest a multiplicity of terms may be used by individuals to label or describe their gender, including but not limited to:

- Having no gender: gender neutral, non-gender, agender, neuter, neutrois
- Having mixed qualities of man and woman; mixed gender, androgynous, pangender
- Having a partial identification with one gender: demi boy/girl, pangender
- Moving between genders: bigender, trigender, genderfluid, pangender
- Political and/or personal disruption of the gender binary: genderfuck, genderqueer

Not all trans people identify as nonbinary and vice versa (Titman, 2014) as the participants in this study demonstrated.

The current study is concerned with exploring the trans and nonbinary experiences of e/ds because whilst there is a significant body of critical feminist research that explores how gender ideology mobilises e/ds, it has tended to focus on the experiences of anorexia in (assumed) cisgender, white and middle-class young women (Jones & Malson 2011; Malson, 1998; Holmes, 2017; Duffy et al, 2016). There is a lack of attention to the experiences of non-white, cis men, and transgender people (LaMarre, Rice & Jankowski, 2017). There is a high prevalence of e/ds amongst trans, and nonbinary identified people (Diemer, White Hughto, Gordon, Guss, Austin, & Reisner, 2018). Worryingly, there is also literature suggesting that the lack of specialist training in gender causes significant harm to non-cis identifying people in e/d treatment settings (Duffy, Henkel, & Earnshaw, 2016). Consequently, it is crucial for critical feminist research in the field of e/ds to extend beyond a binary gender conceptualisation and be alert to the intertwining of gendered power, within cis, trans and nonbinary experiences (LaMarre, Levine, Holmes, & Malson, 2022).

Body dissatisfaction is often described as being core to the distress of e/ds in trans identifying people (Jones, Haycraft, Murjan, & Arcelus, 2016). The societal pressures to cultivate 'normal binary gender appearance and minority stressors for trans and nonbinary identified people are vastly more complex than for cis identified people (Velez, Breslow, Brewster, Cox & Foster, 2016). For trans men they may feel that their bodies fall short of the constructed masculine gender ideal perpetuated by a sexist, cisheteronormative culture (Velez et al, 2016). Restriction and compensatory behaviours are commonly reported as a means to control puberty development/delay developing secondary sex characteristics or attain characteristics of the preferred gender (Coelho, Suen, Clark, Marshall, Geller, & Lam, 2019). Disrupting appearance by restricting food may also be a route to construct an androgynous body ideal (Cusack, Morris, & Galupo, 2022). What the current study seeks to understand are some of wider social, historical, political, and cultural discourses that constitute and regulate individuals and how these discourses intertwine to produce the trans, nonbinary and e/ds selfhoods and subjectivities.

This research is critical realist, post-structuralist, and critical feminist - epistemologies that are appropriate to analyse, make visible and articulate the complex, subtle or obvious and sometimes contradictory ways that normative, dominant, taken-for-granted assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively re-produced, sustained, negotiated, resisted against, or conformed to (Lazar, 2007; Warner, 2008). This research is also described as being grounded in a trans epistemology, in that it is defined by taking an interdisciplinary approach or method and in Blas Radi's words, represents "a *corpus* of trans contributions"

(2019). I use the word trans here, to speak of a multiplicity of identities not limited to trans people, but all people who do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. That is not to say that this is a trans method because it is conducted by a trans researcher, or studies trans issues, but that it draws from multiple resources that have a kinship with critical feminism epistemologies, poststructuralist epistemology, postcolonial feminist and Black feminist theory and queer theory. For example, this study relies heavily on postcolonial theory and indigenous knowledge in the analysis to explain how colonialism, racism and Androcentrism operates to sustain power, and make visible its presence in the interviews. Academic work from different cultural and indigenous backgrounds have been drawn from, offering the reader different apertures for being curious about the material in question. Queer theory has contributed to the body of resources consulted in the analytic process, but even this does not provide the lens that cissexism offers as a "powerful epistemological instrument" to interpret the interviews. As the reader will notice, the analysis at times disrupts the primacy of gender as a central marker of definition and complicates the idea of identity to incorporate aspects of body size privilege, and its relationship to how racism, Capitalism, neoliberalism, and fascism operate to sustain power and produce certain ways to negotiate safety and agency in the world. The integration of indigenous knowledge, feminist theory, transfeminism, postcolonial studies, and critical race theory, therefore, makes this a trans methodology built upon a critical realist, poststructuralist framework.

To expand upon the critical realist framework; I am assuming the existence of a material, extra-discursive reality, whilst upholding that our knowledges of 'the real' are always socially contingent rather than absolute or objective; and that knowledge is always ideological, not because it is biased or distorted but because it only ever offers a partial perspective (Hall, 1982). In other words, this research aims to reframe the alleged possibility of universal empirical 'truths' around e/ds and gender, as socio-culturally and historically contingent. It rejects the idea that universal truths can be known, allowing for a multiplicity of truths, perhaps similar or contradictory in nature because for post-structuralist theory, e/ds, the body, and gender are constituted in and regulated by discursive practices. Discourse is about knowledge, and power and knowledge are indivisibly linked (Foucault, 1977). Therefore, discourse(s) on a subject, may produce ideas that gain the status of 'truth', that regulate and police our constructions of 'normal' or 'abnormal', conformity or resistance. Discourse therefore produces multiple subject positions that may resist or conform to dominant or normative ideas. Intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989) originating from the work of Black women scholars, offers a framework to explore how these different social

identities interact to form qualitatively different experiences and create meanings that are dependent upon the positions one holds within the 'matrix of domination' (Collins, 1990).

Epistemologically speaking, trans studies, as Susan Stryker says, should have the scope to "disrupt, denaturalise, rearticulate and make visible the normative linkages we generally assume to exist between the biological specificity of the sexually differentiated human body, the social roles and statuses that a particular form of body is expected to occupy, the subjectively experienced relationship between a gendered sense of self and social expectations of gender-role performance, and the cultural mechanisms that work to sustain or thwart specific configurations of gendered personhood" (Stryker, 2006). This study has achieved that, and whilst I do not intend to be explicitly emancipatory in my analysis, my naming of a trans methodology seeks to challenge the privileging of certain knowledge and modes of knowledge production.

This literature review begins by providing an overview of the dominant research on e/ds. Then I will summarise a post-structuralist theory of e/ds, and a theory of gender, moving on to the current qualitative critical feminist research on e/ds with a summary of the critical feminist research currently available on trans, nonbinary and e/ds. Lastly, I will suggest potential implications the analyses of this study may have for contemporary practice.

Overview on the dominant research in e/ds

There is a vast amount of clinical research on e/ds spanning the last century that is dominated by a positivist, quantitative epistemology that focuses on the stereotype of white, cis female, cisheterosexual experiences of anorexia nervosa (AN) (Bordo, 1993; Malson 1998; Nasser & Malson, 2009). Consequently, whilst acknowledging that e/ds do affect mostly girls and young women, there are decades of research that reveals e/ds can affect anyone (Bordo, 1993; Gremillion, 2003; Saukko, 2008; Malson, 1998; Thapliyal, Conti, Bandura, & Hay, 2019). Consequently, they have been historically constructed and understood as gendered problems or women's dis/orders (Malson, 1998; Holmes, 2016, 2018; Thapliyal et al, 2018; LaMarre, Levine, Holmes, & Malson, 2022). Also, of this existing research most studies tend to concentrate on the aetiology and treatment of e/ds (Saukko, 2008; Moulding, 2015; Holmes, 2017) and critical feminist argue (Bordo, 1993; Malson, 1998; Holmes, 2017) that empirical research and clinical interventions tend to locate the origins of e/ds within individual rather than sociocultural factors. Despite the consensus that e/ds are multifactorial or biopsychosocial in origin (Culbert et al, 2015) critical feminists argue that there remains a substantial and unjustified imbalance weighted towards the biological and psychological factors in models of risk and treatment approaches, whereas social factors are diminished as secondary or facilitating factors (Bordo, 1993; Holmes, 2018).

Scholars taking a critical and feminist lens to this empirical research argue that our understanding of e/ds has been broadly constructed, defined, and regulated by biomedical discourses that describe e/ds as pathological, categorised by observable diagnostic markers such as bingeing, purging, restriction and weight loss, are associated with various metabolic changes, and psychological hallmarks such as preoccupation with weight and shape (APA, 2013; WHO, 2020). However, the tendency to privilege diagnostic categories and a quasi-medical model over sociocultural conceptions of e/ds can be located in Eurocentric paradigms that dominate many academic domains (Bracken et al, 2021). Eurocentric paradigms originate from colonialisation and did not involve collaborative dialogue between cultures but a violent, sustained attack on the communities that did not advance the beliefs and norms of the White, male colonisers (Smith, 2021). The 'psy' professions are entangled with the emergence of the European Enlightenment (Bracken, et al, 2021) and the privileging of a particular form of reason alongside a particular focus on individual self (Porter, 1990).

Like Lugones (2008) I argue that the modern two-gender system is imbricated in colonial histories and intertwined with economic and political implications for individuals located along multiple axes of power and privilege.

Feminist scholars criticise empiricist e/d research for not taking a more critical sociocultural perspective (Rice, 2015; Holmes, 2017; LaMarre, Levine, Holmes, & Malson, 2022) arguing that it obscures or omits the social factors contributing to distress and that the diagnostic criteria utilised may be problematic for people who might not meet these criteria, for example people with higher BMI. There is also a pervasive assumption that people experiencing dietary restriction will be in a thin body, discriminating against people in larger bodies and men (Bacon & Aphramor, 2011; Bombak, 2014; LaMarre & Rice, 2015; Gotovac et al, 2018; Thapliyal, 2018).

In summary, the field of e/d research is dominated by positivist research that constructs and understands e/ds to be significant, complex physical, psychological problems that are formulated and treated individually. E/ds are documented statistically to have the highest rate of morbidity for all mental disorders (Schaumberg et al. 2017; Galmiche et al, 2019). Individuals with symptoms of e/ds who seek clinical support will usually have their symptoms mapped against the classifications of e/ds in either the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5 (APA, 2013) or the International Classification of Diseases (WHO, 2020). The current categories in use at the time of this writing are described as binge eating disorder (BED), avoidant/restrictive food intake (ARFID) and other specified feeding or eating disorder (OSFED) previously known as EDNOS, anorexia nervosa (AN) and bulimia nervosa (BN) (APA, 2013; WHO, 2020). In existing research, it is AN and BN that are prioritised.

As previously mentioned, e/ds are reported to occur more frequently in Western cisgender women (Holmes, 2016). It is difficult to determine accurate trends of prevalence though, because men might be frequently mis-diagnosed or under-diagnosed due to low reporting (Thapliyal, 2019). Trans and nonbinary identified people may either be reluctant to ask for support for fear of stigma or negative treatment experiences (Duffy, Henkel, Earnshaw, 2016; Thapliyal et al, 2018) and are potentially unlikely to be asked by clinicians because of a lack of professional training (Duffy et al, 2016). The last 20 years has seen an increase in the diagnosis of e/ds in the male population (Thapliyal & Hay, 2014; Jones et al, 2015) but female gender is still considered the biggest predictor of risk (Holmes, 2016). The UK National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) cite the risks of developing an e/d as being highest for young (cis) women and men between the ages of 13 - 17 years of age

(NICE, 2017) but what we see evident in many studies is that e/ds can and do traverse age, gender, colour, ethnicity, body weight, ability, sexual orientation and socio-economic status (Bordo, 1993; Nasser & Malson, 2009; Jones & Malson, 2011; Jones et al, 2015; Schaumberg et al. 2017; Thapliyal et al, 2018).

Because most of the research in the field of e/ds focuses on individuals who are cis gender, white, assumed heterosexual and assigned female at birth (AFAB), the measures used to assess eating disorder symptoms are validated primarily on cisgender women and girls (Coelho et al, 2019). Also, people who do not fit the stereotypical categories of risk, including queer people, non-white people and people with a disability are presumed to be at a lower risk or immune (Jones & Malson, 2011). Although the field of trans specific e/d research is sparse, recent studies suggest higher rates of e/d behaviours in transgender individuals than cisgender respondents of any sexual orientation (Coelho et al, 2019; Diemer et al, 2015).

To summarise, historically, most of the research into e/ds has been dominated by a quantitative focus on aetiology and treatment, and the stereotype of the white, cisgender female, heterosexual experience of anorexia (Bordo, 1993; Malson, 1998; Gremillion, 2003; Saukko, 2008). There is a growing body of qualitative and critical feminist research, but again this tends to focus on white, heterosexual cisgender women with anorexia nervosa (Malson, 1998; Jones & Malson, 2011). A smaller proportion of scholars explore the e/d experiences of people who identify as queer, homosexual, non-white and trans or nonbinary people (Coelho et al, 2019; Jones & Malson, 2011). Fewer still explicitly explore the trans or nonbinary experience of e/ds without placing trans participants into a generic lesbian, gay, bisexual category and there has been scant research exclusively addressing the trans/nonbinary/gender queer community and their e/d experiences (Duffy et al, 2016). This research seeks to add to that body of research by explicitly exploring the e/d experiences of trans and nonbinary individuals from a feminist, post-structuralist approach.

Feminist post-structuralist theory of eating disorders and gender

Critiques of positivism

The aim of this study is to explore the discursive constructions of trans and nonbinary experiences of e/ds. This research takes a critical feminist, critical realist, and post-structuralist approach. Given that the epistemological discourses of the European Enlightenment have dominated western science for centuries, and how this is fundamentally a White, male system founded upon the violence of colonisation (Bracken et al, 2021), it is hard to imagine how any discursive, or sociocultural research could avoid the topic of the domination and oppression of women and people of colour. In the wake of the public outcry against the brutal killings of George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor in the US, both the APA and the BPS acknowledged the colonial attitudes and structural racism that run deep in psychology and psychiatry (BPS, 2020; APA, 2021; Bracken, et al, 2021).

Colonisation involved violently imposing a monological ontology and means of knowledge production that was concerned with mobilising and privileging White, European values (Bracken et al, 2021) whilst eradicating cultural difference or diversity (Smith, 2021). Colonialist ontologies are grounded in hypothetico-deductive or 'positivist' methodologies that evolved as the dominant paradigm in psychology (and psychiatry) (Malson, 1998). The approach is characterised by the 'scientific method' of logical positivism - that is experimental observation, measurement, categorisation, quantification, and statistical analysis. It assumes a that an objective 'true' knowledge should be grounded in experience and observation (Harre & Secord, 197, in Malson, 1998). I am not discounting the value of these positivist scientific methods and their contributions to our lives, rather I seek to locate knowledge and knowledge production within the *historical present,* as Marx puts it, (Butler, 1990, p.7). By triangulating knowledge in the *historical present*, one can begin to construe multiple meanings, multiple histories, and more rich, complex interpretations of what 'truth' might come to signify. In taking a post-structuralist view, the stake that positivist science has in objectivity can be critically undermined, and the power that is inevitably imbricated with knowledge can be revealed (Henriques et al, 1984; Butler, 2003).

An example of power imbricated in knowledge is in the history of modern gynaecology. The heralded 'father' of gynaecology Dr James Marion Sims, operated on many enslaved African women between 1845 and 1849 to experiment on novel procedures for vesecovaginal fistulas (VVF) (Christmas, 2021). Many of these procedures were

conducted with no anaesthesia, whilst the women were on all fours, and observed by at least 12 other male physicians. It was only after his procedures were found to be successful that Sims expanded his intervention to include white women who were provided anaesthesia (Christmas, 2021). A common false belief that remains in circulation today, is that Black bodies are more tolerant to pain (Prather et al, 2018 in Christmas, 2021). Sims would claim that the women 'consented' and yet at this time the women would have been considered property and that lack of basic human agency eliminates any possibility of consent. In this, the 'knowledge' and violence behind modern gynaecology is imbricated in European, White, male power. It is worth noting that the statue of Sims was only recently removed from New York in 2018.

In attending to how power is imbricated in knowledge, post-structural approaches argue that the individual is socially and historically contingent. It problematises the concept of the individual and society as pre-existing objects of human sciences that are produced in a kind of social vacuum, and instead proposes that the individual is 'always-already' social. The individual or subject/subjectivity, is theorised as a socially constituted emergent product (Butler, 1990; Henriques et al, 1984; Burr, 2015). This is at odds with multiple implicit and explicit discourses of colonialism, Cartesian dualism, biological essentialism, neoliberal-individualism, healthism, mind-body, and social-biological-psychological, present in the dominant positivist approaches in the field of e/ds. Consequently, the critical point of departure for any post-structural analyses of gender and e/ds is to formulate within a frame of the historical present, and to critique the categories of identity that "contemporary juridical structures engender, naturalize and immobilize" (Butler, 1990, p.7).

Both critical feminist and post-structuralist perspectives to e/d research argue that empirical research conducted without due care and attention to reflexivity and critical methodology leads to claims weighted with Euro/androcentric bias and that to a certain extent, critical feminist and intersectional research is epistemologically excluded - that is when individuals or institutions devalue scholarship outside of the dominant discipline (Settles et al, 2020). A hallmark of critical feminist work on e/ds as previously explained, is an attention to contextual power issues, person politics and the social and historical context that provide the conditions for e/ds in the first instance (Malson & Burns, 2009, p278).

Notwithstanding the material and real-world experiences of participants, like physiological consequences of e/ds or anti-trans discrimination (Brewster et al, 2019) in taking a post-structuralist approach to e/ds, this thesis questions the validity of essentialist categories of e/ds as objective and static, and instead seeks to explore them considering

cultural prescriptions, norms, and values (Burr, 2015). To this end, a post-structuralist approach conceptualises e/ds not as a pathology originating from within, because this interiority or 'I' does not exist in the sense of a knowable, extra-discursive facet of being, but is seen as reflective/constitutive of the subject/object dichotomy of the Western epistemological tradition (Butler, 2003). Instead, post-structuralism conceptualises e/ds as a collection of culturally bound experiences that is always-already caught up in systems of meanings and power relations, that say something about what it means to be a particular gender in Western culture (Malson, 1998).

Foucault asserts that the sciences are discourses and discursive practices that help to construct the apparatus and technologies that constitute the social, and that the social and sciences are imbricated in the practices and relations between people (Henriques et al, 1984). This study assumes multiple possible interpretations of the interviews, for as Foucault says 'I believe the freedom of the reader must be absolutely respected. Discourse is a reality which can be transformed infinitely. Thus, he who writes does not have the right to give orders as to the use of his writings.' (Foucault, 1978, p.111).

The popular notions and diagnostic criteria of e/d, although ostensibly afforded the currency and status of observable truths, are a product of discursive practices that Foucault calls 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1978), that are discussed here as mobilised in part by discursive constructions of eating experiences that fall along a spectrum of experiences and axes of power/oppression. In taking a post-structuralist approach to theorising e/ds, the notion of empirical truths becomes untenable because societies produce their own specific, normalising truths (Foucault, 1984). These normalising truths, each constituting different meanings to behaviours and bodies, reproduce the power imbalances manifest in wider society that work in, though, between and around bodies (Foucault, 1977) ostensibly defining what constitutes normative or pathological experiences with the body, food, appearance, and gender.

However, when e/d experiences and classifications are mapped against broader bio-pedagogies for the wider population (LaMarre et al, 2017) (especially around obesity prevention and 'healthy eating') the limits and contradictions of paradoxical instructions (such as, diet if you're fat, don't diet if you're thin) (Gotovac, LaMarre & Lafreniere, 2018) become visible. Biopedagogies are subtle and diffuse messages, define which bodies have status and value, using binary and biomedical criteria like healthy/unhealthy, fit/unfit (Rice, 2015; LaMarre, Rice & Jankowski, 2017). Considering this, much of what is categorised as supposed 'pathological' eating behaviour, is instead behaviour that is contradictory and

constructed as pathological, depending upon many factors, like subject position, culturally available discourses and current discursive constructions of body, health and morality, that hold multiple and paradoxical meanings for the individual relating to how subjectivities are constructed, normalised, (re)produced and resisted in the context of wider society.

Turning to gender, feminist, queer, and critical race approaches make clear that the concept of gender, and with-it womanhood, is a colonial one (Tudor, 2019). [Cis]heterosexism then, is understood as a key component of how gender fuses with race in the operations of colonial power and the mobilising of this ideology to the Global South (Lugones 2007). Slavery 'ungenders' enslaved men and women and undoes whatever presentation of gender has been relevant to those African and Indigenous societies the enslaved were taken from (Tudor, 2019). The modern colonial two-gender system, divides people into two classes - men and women, based on those existing hierarchies of domination and submission. Consequently, trans and nonbinary gender identities have a racial history, and a history of racism should also be one that interrogates gender (Tudor, 2019).

In interrogating this history, I turn to Foucault, although some feminist scholars say he failed to theorise gender sufficiently (Butler, 2007; Connell, 2021). Butler (1990) who is arguably one of the most influential gender theorists of contemporary feminism, argues that Foucault assumes the existence of a pre-inscriptive body, extra-discursive and rejects that idea, writing 'there is no recourse to a body that has not always-already been interpreted by cultural meanings' (Butler, 1990: 8).

Discursive constructions of sex as natural or 'real' is reproduced in research about gender dysphoria where a biomedical construction of the 'wrong body' marginalises the identities of trans people who are satisfied with their bodies, and the anti-binary paradigm that presents all trans people as sharing a subject position (Radi, 2019). For Butler, and other theorists, the bodily constitution rests in its inscription, and gender operates as an act of cultural inscription that is performed (Butler, 1990; Radi, 2019). Fundamentally for the purpose of this study, gender is conceptualised as an illimitable process of identity signification that is always-already signified and continues to signify as it reproduces and repeats within multiple intersecting discourses (Butler, 1990).

The Cartesian subject/object dichotomy grounded in the western epistemological tradition, conditions the very problems of identity that it purports to solve, (Butler, 1990) much in the same way the dominant paradigm of psychology presumes the priority of the doer to the deed, thus creating the 'Other'. In taking a critical realist, post-structural, critical feminist approach to e/ds and gender, identity, and e/d categories are instead complicated,

contextualised, deconstructed, unstable, and are open to splitting (Butler, 1990) parody, contradiction, inconsistencies, and multiple meanings.

Critical feminist research on eating disorders

The interviews I conducted were broadly organised into three sections: talking about gender and e/ds, talking about bodyweight, gendered body ideals and eating, and then talking about experiences of treatment or recovery. I have organised the literature around these themes to explore the topics discussed in the interviews.

Gender and e/ds

During the mid-eighties, there was growing theoretical focus on gender in the field of e/ds, but etiological models emphasised developmental issues, family problems or perceptual/cognitive dysfunctions, with scant regard for gender or social factors (Bordo, 1993). As reported incidences of AN rose in parallel to the second wave of feminism, some of the early feminist writers on anorexia interpreted it as articulating and resisting the impossible dilemmas of the contradictory demands placed upon women (Orbach, 1986). The liberal feminist ethos of this time was associated with a fit, androgynous body shape that also shadowed the old ideal of a frail and coy femininity, and a more traditional domestic femininity associated with an 'hourglass' figure (Bordo, 1993).

Today, as numerous critical feminist scholars have illustrated (Orbach,1986; Bordo, 1993; Malson, 1998; Woolf, 2002; Gremillion, 2003; Saukko, 2008) the corporeal hyper-real ideal of thinness inscribed upon female bodies can be comprehended as one of the central conditions of possibility (Foucault, 1972) constituting subjectivities and practices of bodily management that may be constructed as dis/ordered (Riley, 2008, p27). These gendered hierarchies and cultural ideals of female thinness and beauty among others, have been extensively critiqued and deconstructed by critical feminist scholars (Orbach, 1994; Bordo, 1993; Malson, 1998; Wolf, 2002) along with how dominant gender body image 'ideals' are imbricated in mobilising e/d subjectivities and practices (Orbach, 1993; Malson, 1998; Holmes, 2016).

E/ds may emerge in multiple ways, often considering various representations of gender in contemporary western culture (Moulding, 2006; Saukko, 2008). Bordo (1993) wrote that the body may operate as a cultural metaphor, a text of culture and a practical, direct locus of control where dominant constructions of beauty and gender may be reproduced (or resisted). Malson (1998) explores multiple discursive constructions of anorexia as resistance and expression of selfhood and gender identity where thinness signifies

a multiplicity of femininities and a rejection of them. She writes that within discourses of the anorexic body, are discourses of Cartesian dualism in where human existence is essentially dichotomised, and romantic discourses where the body is constructed from within a heterosexual matrix, and of course the constructions of the fat versus thin body (Malson & Ussher, 1996). Bordo, (1993) says that anorexia symbolises a resistance to the maternal body and association with powerlessness, and the desire for the binary opposite in rejecting a 'reproductive destiny'. Other research finds that discursive constructions of female self-starvation are complex representations of girlhood that twist and turn on a slippery continuum of containment and resistance (Holmes, 2017). (Rice, 2009) argues that certain bodies are problematised according to their social acceptability relating to constructs of 'unfitness' and culturally bound fat hatred (Rinaldi, Rice, Kotow, & Lind, 2020). It is interesting to consider the significance of these (sometimes) binary constructions of body ideals and gender identity juxtaposed against the matrix of a trans identity, that may attempt to blur or subvert the binary (Connell, 2019).

These analyses of gender discourses reveal a multiplicity of contradictory femininities (Malson, 1998; Riley, 2008) that present as distressing experiences around eating and the body as a logical consequence of social oppression and not, as the dominant paradigm would suggest, as an individual pathology (Malson & Ussher, 1996; Malson, 1998). It should be mentioned that feminist research on e/ds has privileged AN (anorexia Nervosa) over BN, (Bulimia Nervosa) even though BN is four times more common than AN in the UK (Priory Group, 2021) and a large proportion of trans youth were reported to engage in binge eating compared to cisgender populations (Coelho et al, 2019). Malson & Burns (2009) suggest that AN and BN should both be considered complex expressions of femininity, but a hierarchy between AN and BN persists in research (Holmes, 2016).

Weight, gender, and e/ds

The significance of body weight and shape is one of the most pervasive ways the female body is discursively constructed and regulated in contemporary western culture (Orbach, 1993; Woolf, 2002). Discursive constructions of fatness and the moral rhetoric of the 'obesity epidemic' are well known to be problematic, stigmatising, over-simplified and neoliberalist in their individualism (Bacon and Aphramor 2011; Rice, 2015). Prescriptions of what constitutes a beautiful body also fluctuate across history (Orbach, 1993; Malson, 1998). A concern is that binary and moral constructions of fat as ugly and thin as beautiful are normalised and reproduced through a pervasive culture of dieting (Malson & Ussher, 1996;

Malson, 1998). Even with e/d prevention messages, referred to here as biopedagogies, there is a contradictory intersection with anti-obesity biopedagogies that perpetuate stereotypes about who is at 'risk' for body and food distress (LaMarre, Rice & Janowski, 2017). These contradictory messages serve to create a fit and self-sufficient bio-citizenry that also constructs the other through surveillance; others being the people who fail to conform to normative standards of health, including queer and trans people, women, dis/abled and non-white people (LaMarre et al, 2017).

As mentioned previously, trans identified individuals reported higher rates of e/ds than in any other population, but they too remain unrepresented in e/d research (Diemer et al, 2015; Duffy et al, 2016). Body dissatisfaction is described as core to the distress of trans people, which might be a risk factor for e/ds (Jones et al, 2016) and a qualitative study of e/ds and gender incongruence found that the most participants explained their e/d as a striving to suppress or accentuate certain bodily features that they experienced as a particular gender (Ålgars et al, 2012). Although e/ds are constructed as pathological, in many case reports, trans youth engage in restrictive eating to both express and support gender expression, but these may be misinterpreted as behaviours that solely indicate an e/d (Coelho et al, 2019).

Even so, the external pressures to conform to a gender appearance norm are vastly more complex for trans individuals (Velez et al, 2016). For trans men they may feel that their bodies fall short of the constructed masculine gender ideal perpetuated by a sexist, cisheteronormative culture (Velez et al, 2016). It is suggested that compulsive exercise (e.g., weightlifting, body building) might be one way that trans men seek to express their gender identity and conform to cultural ideals of masculine muscularity in a similar way that trans women may restrict food to meet the construct of the feminine thin ideal (Jones et al, 2016). However, in contrast to cis identified women, trans and nonbinary identified women face additional barriers to achieving idealised gender presentations (facial hair, voice, height, body shape etc). Failures to be read as cisgender might also lead to transphobic harassment and violence with material consequences from structural and political inequality (Brewster et al, 2019; Devor & Haefele-Thomas, 2019).

These experiences are both reflective of, and are echoed in research on the racial, moral, and medical constructions of anti-obesity rhetoric and the coloniality of gender - the light and the dark sides of the gender system (Lugones, 2008 - see chapter three). Lugones deconstructs the modern colonial gender system because of the cognitive needs of colonial capitalism, including measurement, quantification, objectification, of what is knowable with respect to the knower, to control the relations among people with respect to it (Lugones,

2008). She writes that the conception of humanity was consolidated according to these historical constructs, into binary categories: superior/inferior, rational/irrational, primitive/civilised etc. Gender is described a *tool* of domination that defines women in relation to men, the 'master category', (Warner, Settles, & Shields, 2016) that I expand upon in the analyses.

In thinking about the binary, heteronormative matrices of gender ideology, I turn to Jones & Malson (2011) who explored the lesbian perspectives of e/ds and found that there were references to the significance of e/ds as a response to the stress of not fulfilling heteronormative expectations. In men, gendered body image ideals favour muscularity, and a 'gym ready body' (Velez et al, 2016, Thapliyal et al, 2019) and homosexuality is sometimes viewed as a 'risk' perhaps because of a culture of increased objectification and body image concerns (Räisänen & Hunt, 2014; Velez et al, 2016). Other studied allude to feminine versus masculine traits that seem to indicate risk and protective factors respectively (Thapliyal & Hay, 2014) and what feels salient is not measuring risk per se but interpreting the ways gendered bodies are discursively problematised and constructed as 'risky' or not.

Treatment experiences and recovery

Whilst there is a lot written about e/ds from a sociocultural and critical feminist perspective and a significant empirical foundation to suggest that sociocultural factors play a role in the aetiology and maintenance of e/ds (Malson, 1998; Culbert et al, 2015), less has been written about how much these are addressed in treatment practices from a critical feminist perspective (Gremillion, 2003; Homes, 2016; 2018; Moulding, 2016). A lack of a feminist approach in e/d treatment omits the multiple ways that gender identity may be articulated and mobilised through e/ds (Holmes, 2016). Bordo (1993, p53) concludes, that "the medical model has a deep professional, economic, and philosophical stake in preserving the integrity of what it has demarcated as its domain and the result has been a frequent blindness to the obvious". Likewise, contradictory, and paradoxical constructions of health in research on e/ds often convey in subtle or overt ways that recovery is possible, but only if you look a certain (contradictory) way (LaMarre & Rice, 2015). What I mean to say is, some health biopedagogies are 'anorexified' (Malson, 2008) in that they promote restriction and the thin ideal under the guise of 'health'.

In study of health professionals, over half the participants suggested that patients would have to explicitly flag issues of gender themselves for it to be addressed, that professional training omitted these issues and that dominant formulations limited

opportunities to address wider issues (Holmes, 2018). This is despite feminist research that says women construct experiences of recovery as personal quests around themes of self-discovery, self-care, and agency (Moulding, 2016) and that individualistic formations that discursively construct an essentially anorexic/bulimic self, act as a barrier to imagining recovery (Malson et al, 2011).

In a metasynthesis of the role of gender in treatment experiences, gender issues were overwhelmingly experienced as being marginalised or addressed only by absorbing them into the dominant formulation, rather than in ways that might be transformative (Thapliyal et al, 2018). For women this was experienced as their voice being filtered and constrained, where they were permitted to speak about issues of gender but only within the current formulation (Thapliyal et al, 2018). For men, this was experienced as isolation because treatment was specifically tailored for women (Coelho et al, 2019), or ignored what e/ds meant for men, particularly around the conflicted assumptions about social norms of masculinity that are often associated with self-control and physical strength.

Feminist analyses of these issues find that one of the main restraints to help seeking is the gendered construction of e/ds as a woman's problem (which they are) and a discourse of masculinity as 'strong', emotionally constrained (hooks, 2004) help seeking behaviour as weak (Thapliyal et al, 2018; 2019). Men are reported as often not recognising that they are experiencing issues, don't report, are under or mis-diagnosed and experience stigma as part of the treatment process (Thapliyal et al, 2018; 2019) and whilst there is non-feminist research on e/ds and gay men, there is less prevalent feminist research on men with e/ds (Thapliyal et al, 2019).

In a qualitative study exploring trans and nonbinary experiences of e/d treatment, of 84 respondents, none of them reported having positive experiences, with some expressing a wish that they had never had treatment at all, despite acknowledging that it probably saved their lives (Duffy et al, 2016). Approximately 40% of participants went through treatment without disclosing their trans identity and those who did reported facing stereotypes, dismissal, assumptions, and bewilderment from clinicians that was experienced as invalidating their identity (Duffy et al, 2016). These analyses are echoed in subsequent research identifying a lack of health literacy in professionals (Thapliyal et al, 2018; Coelho et al, 2019). Critical feminist research on recovery unearths the complexity of attempting to define normal eating in a culture of dieting and anti-obesity rhetoric (LaMarre et al, 2017) and illustrates some of the cultural obstacles to people with e/ds and what might be an un/imaginable recovery (Malson et al, 2011).

The current study

The thesis explores the discursive constructions of e/ds from a trans and nonbinary perspective by analysing eight semi-structured interviews of trans and nonbinary identified people living in the UK and US. The interviews asked participants about their experiences of gender and e/ds, how gender and e/ds were related, their experience of identifying as trans or nonbinary and what role body weight and appearance plays in the e/d or gender identity (for full interview schedule see appendix f). Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data was analysed using a Foucauldian, feminist critical discourse analytic method (Lazar, 2007; Arribas-Allyon & Walkerdine, 2013) drawing from trans resources to locate discursive problematisations, technologies, subject positions, and subjectification in the wider literature. The analysis will contribute to the knowledge base on nonbinary and trans experiences of e/ds and has implications for counselling psychology research into e/ds, practice, and policy.

Reflexivity statement and positionality

Embodied critical reflexivity is central to feminist research (Lazar, 2007; Rice, 2009). It is of particular importance in research involving trans and nonbinary people because of the epistemic marginalisation of trans scholars and the subsequent discrediting of the products of trans scholarship (Radi, 2019). By explicitly locating my position in this research, I question the claim to knowledge from 'God's perspective' and any associations to modern rhetoric on scientific objectivity. In other words, situated knowledge challenges any essentialist claim to sex, gender or identity that "mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, that makes the unmarked category claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation" (Haraway, 1991; 188). More simply put, I seek to make myself and my epistemic position visible so that others might contextualise what lies within this thesis.

Later in this analysis I explicitly discuss the markers implicated in the perspectives on culture, race, class, ability, sex, sexuality, gender, and social class, and I aim to be critically reflexive of my own position and the practices I have deployed, and to be alert of how these may have influenced the analysis. The following reflexivity statement reflects a level of embodied critical reflexivity that I have read in other researchers' statements (Rice, 2009) and I have aimed to have matched the level of disclosure and courage that the participants shared and disclose what I felt personally comfortable with. All the participants shared their childhood stories with me, and trauma that often related directly to being misgendered as female and/or being non-cisgendered. Whilst I am not suggesting for myself, the participants

of this study, or anyone else, that the experience of gender-based trauma is an inevitable pipeline to maladaptive coping strategies and/or gender fluidity, only that it is part of *my* story and part of how I came to research this topic and work in this field.

Researcher positionality (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) influences the way I have engaged with the research process, both through my identity, how I have shown up, how I have interpreted the data, the focus of the study itself, or through my relationship with the material that came up during the interviews. In the interviews with participants, along with obtaining relevant information, my main concern was to establish rapport and facilitate a safe, relaxed space where they felt they could share their experiences and perspectives. To prepare, I researched trans and nonbinary language (Devor, & Haefele-Thomas, 2019; Vincent, 2020) and asked all participants of their pronoun preferences. I invited participants to ask me anything about the study or myself, and I shared my own pronouns and motivations for the study. I paid attention to the potential power imbalances possible with a researcher/participant dynamic and made it clear that they did not have to disclose anything they felt uncomfortable with and could terminate the interview at any time. I also checked in with participants periodically 'how does it feel to share this'. All the participants were university educated and some said they had prior insight to the interview process from their own studies, but I did not assume any prior understanding or knowledge. I made my position on gender and my personal history of e/ds available to all participants. I shared this information to build trust and rapport, and my status as insider/outsider in the research and community (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Fundamentally I approached this research with humility and not from the position of believing myself to be an expert on trans or nonbinary experiences, but with curiosity and sensitivity. I would implore other researchers and trainee counselling psychologists to similarly delve into their own subject positions before embarking on research or clinical work involving gender, race, and, or body size concerns or eds.

Embodied critical reflexivity statement

My interest in the topic was prompted from my own experiences with gender and e/ds that began before I can remember. My mother tells me I refused to eat when I was aged three, and how she anxiously took me to the doctor, concerned that I was starving. My mother was 16 years old when I was born, and my dad was 17 and nearly illiterate with undiagnosed dyslexia. My parents are white British, working/sub-working class. At age nine, I experienced my first molestation at the hands of my father who would have been 26. We had

been talking about a playdate I had arranged to a boy's house, when my father, without warning, pinned me down on the floor, in front of my mother, and pushed his tongue into my mouth. I remember the smell, the roughness of his tongue, squeezing my eyes shut, the terror, my body fighting to move but feeling utterly powerless, like the mass of a star had descended onto me. In that moment I disconnected from my body. It felt disgusting and I became at once different, broken, sullied, sexualised, female, and alert to the reality that my father or any man, could overpower me and might want to do that again. That threat lodged itself into me like a sickliness and I lost any sense of safety I felt I had at home. Dad said he did it to teach me about what boys do to girls, and to be fair to him, bitter experience told me he hadn't been wrong.

Just as bell hooks (2004) wrote about her mother's silence and complicity to patriarchy, when I was released by dad, I ran away, angry, crying, and shocked, and my mother explicitly told me to quieten down, accusing me of being dramatic and overly sensitive. She responded similarly when I told her I'd been assaulted by a 29-year-old man when I was 16, only this time she explicitly said, "don't tell your father – he'll hurt him and end up in prison". So, between my father's every-day and often sexualised low-level violence and my mother's shame and silence, I learned that I should expect to be disrespected by men, and I was unlikely to be protected or defended, even by other women.

I learned to cope by moving through the world with a combative energy. I struggled to connect to subtleness, and vulnerability was not safe for me. I loved books though and found solace in study, learning, and having goals that kept me mobilised. Knowing 'things' and being 'right' became my sanctuary. By my late twenties, all that stress manifested itself in anorexia.

Anorexia for me represented a lifeline. It contained the deep existential anxiety brought about by the feeling of being unsafe and it allowed me to feel a sense of pseudo-control. It allowed me to reject my parents and all they signified, protect my inner child, gain some ownership of my body, and cultivate what felt like bodily power though compulsive exercise. It anaesthetised my feelings. Similar to the Neil Gaiman story 'Coraline', about a fantasy set of parents, anorexia represented my desire for the 'other mother' I fantasised about, who promised structure where there had been chaos, surveillance where there had been neglect, and rules for life to keep me safe where there had been despair.

Recovery meant letting the 'other mother' go and required me to grieve the phantasy mother I so desperately wished for and accept that she had never existed, except in a part of me that was so desperate for love I was able to imagine her into existence. I learned to re-

parent myself and soften to the darkest, angriest, messiest parts of myself again and again, but with compassion. Part of the grieving process involved me looking back not only on my childhood, but on my gender and how so many aspects of my gender have been imposed, that do not fit or function as a signifier of my own felt sense of selfhood. I feel genderless sometimes, and I connect to myself as 'woman' only when I feel safe – a state that I increasingly am able to access at will, with my breath, with my yoga practice and with connection to creativity and play. This is how I have come to conceptualise my gender - as a response to a state of feeling safe or threatened and a vehicle for negotiating my selfhood through those experiences. I feel most connected to the idea of becoming, that is evolving beyond what is scripted for me by others, beyond my past and beyond my defenses.

My position has undoubtably shaped my research and practice interests. In considering my position during the analyses I aimed to hold a somewhat analytic-somatic-psychodynamic-Foucauldian-postcolonial perspective, whilst attuning to the responses I had to the words of my participants. During interviewing, I noticed myself nodding enthusiastically when participants described something I related to. I was keen to avoid leading the conversation too much, but this inevitably may have occurred. What was said though, whilst it may have been influenced by my demonstrable affirmations, remains valid in the sense that this was the participants account and not mine, and all the questions that were asked were the same for all participants.

The resulting analysis offers a situated, embodied, and partial perspective that neither guarantees or suggests pre-eminence, nor does it suggest that it represents all the views of all the trans and nonbinary people everywhere. That said, I did identify with many of the stories shared with me during the interviews, but I aimed to decentre myself in multiple ways, not least by acknowledging my privilege as a conventionally attractive, cis-presenting, averagely sized person, and by not relating their stories back to my own as much as I was consciously able. By de-centring myself, I focused on the analysis of each interview, whilst drawing from my own points of difference and correspondence (Rice, 2009). By practicing this ongoing critical embodied reflexivity, I aim to have analysed the interviews with curiosity, and awareness of how my own position might have influence my interpretations. This was not to avoid being influenced, as it is impossible to claim such sterility in this type of research, but instead to be alive to, make visible and be accountable for such influences.

METHODOLOGY

Theoretical framework

This chapter presents the case for the post-structuralist, qualitative and trans methodology adopted in this research to answer the question 'how are trans/nonbinary experiences of eating disorders discursively constructed?'. In any research, the position of the researcher primarily informs both the questions asked and the appropriate theoretical framework within which to address the question.

The research question dictates a methodology capable of expressing the complexity in the participants experiences and requires a theoretical framework with the capacity to reveal multiple and potentially contradictory meanings and context in language. A positivist framework is not appropriate for the research question because this study does not look to infer or condense complex experiences into simpler explanations, nor does it intend to describe a causal relationship between gender and e/ds. Instead, the current study looks to explore how trans/nonbinary experiences of gender and eating problems are products of social processes situated in a historical and social context (Burr, 2015). To achieve this aim, the research design took a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews with 8 participants who were prompted to talk about their experiences in ways that felt salient to them, and with the intention to analyse the data using a pluralist Foucauldian, Feminist Post-structural Discourse Analysis (FPDA) (Baxter, 2008).

Consequently, this research takes a pluralist 'critical realist' post-structuralist, trans, epistemology. This methodology asks we interrogate our taken-for-granted assumptions about the world and ourselves (Baxter, 2008; Burr, 2015; Lazar, 2007). It is trans and pluralist because beyond the scope of Foucault and feminist analysis, it draws from a multiplicity of trans resources capable of disrupting, denaturalising, reconfiguring and making visible the traditional positivist associations that are often assumed to exist between an essentialist biology and gendered social roles, statuses and the subjectively experienced gendered sense of self with relation to gender-role performance, and cultural/historical mechanisms that sustain or undermine specific configurations of gendered selfhood (Stryker, 2006). Post-structuralist theory aligns with feminism and trans studies in criticising the natural sciences stake in objectivity as the research 'gold standard' as androcentric bias resulting in epistemic exclusion of non-dominant methodologies (Settles et al, 2020; Warner et al, 2016). Feminist critical discourse analysis (CDA) integrated with intersectionality

theory (Crenshaw, 1989) offers a critically useful view of discourse as a location of struggle along multiple axes of power and privilege where tensions of social (re)production, dispute, resistance, and conformity are enacted (Lazar, 2007). In drawing from indigenous scholar's work, feminist theory, postcolonial studies, Queer theory, and transfeminism, this methodology is a trans epistemology, and not because the researcher is trans, or the topic concerns trans issues, but because the process of knowledge production and knowledge produced is defined by a trans approach – trans because it bridges theory associated with other epistemologies such a feminist theory, and is fruitful in delimiting the field of trans epistemology (Radi, 2019). Trans methodology offers exciting theoretical insights and makes space for expansive knowledge production processes, creativity and diverse products of research that might otherwise be limited by a methodology grounded in a cis framework, serving cisgendered concerns and marginalising trans issues.

Jacob Hale wrote, in his 'Suggested rules for non-transexuals writing about transexuals', 'interrogate your subject positions' and 'don't totalise us' (1997). To this end, this research takes a feminist post-structuralist trans approach, drawing from, but not limited to, Judith Butlers gender theory (Butler, 2003), intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989), postcolonial studies, Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) (1926-1984) and a multiplicity of trans resources that challenges the epistemic exclusion historic to trans scholarship, and contribute to the already growing field of radical trans epistemology (Radi, 2019).

Research design

A concern with the quality and texture of experience and in the meanings of discourse led to a qualitative design to be adopted in this research (Willig, 2015). A qualitative approach was the most appropriate method to invite a rich, detailed exploration of the participants experiences of both eating disorders and identifying as trans or nonbinary. Semi-structured interviews, considered to be the most widely used method of qualitative research, were chosen to gather data (Willig, 2015). Due to the COVID restrictions in place at the time, interviews were conducted online, and attention was given to the justification, applicability, and benefits of doing online interviews, and the specific sensitivities created by the virtual arena (James, 2009). Foucauldian inspired, feminist post-structural discourse analysis (Lazar, 2007; Baxter, 2008; Arribas-Allyon & Walkerdine, 2013) was used to analyse the data. This qualitative, language-oriented approach facilitated a focus on the text itself and an attention to the specific and often, contradictory ways that an identity, experience, or event was variously constituted in an interview (Willig, 2013; Malson, 1998). I turned to Foucault to illustrate on

matters of discourse, power, and knowledge. There is no monolithic formalised manual to this type of analysis and my intention was to draw from multidisciplinary approaches and disciplines (Arribas-Allyon & Walkerdine, 2013). The analysis chapters were presented in such a way as to articulate the binary setting (chapters one and two, productions of femininity and masculinity) and then the metaphorical routes out of the binary, so to speak via e/ds and gender/binary disruption. That is not to say that this reflects what all participants suggested within their interview, but my interpretation of the overarching theme of the analysis.

Recruitment and participants

Recruitment began once ethical approval was granted by the Faculty Research Ethics Sub Committee (FREC) on 21 August 2020, ref: UWE REC REF No: HAS .20.08.003. Participation in this study was invited from people who met the inclusion criteria of being over the age of 18 years, identifying as trans or nonbinary and self-identified as experiencing an e/d. Purposive strategy's consistent with qualitative research were used (Rawson, 2017). One participant was recruited by word of mouth and the remaining participants were recruited though Twitter after seeing the advert (appendix 3). Hashtags such as #trans #transgender and #nonbinary were used to raise awareness of the advert and appeal to the participant group.

Eight participants were recruited. A sample size of around eight is appropriate to provide a sufficiently rich, detailed account to analyse with FDA (Willig, 2015) but likewise, the success of a discourse analysis is not dependent upon sample size, but what is available and decent interviewing (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Demographic information was collected from all participants. Four participants identify as trans, four as nonbinary. All participants identify as white with one participant also mentioning Indigenous ancestry but stated their identify as white. Ages are between 23 and 35. Three participants are from the U.K. and five are from the U.S. Eating issues identified were binge eating, severely restricting eating and associated body checking, fear of food, bulimia, anorexia, and yoyo dieting. Although not asked on the demographic form, one participant identified as having a disability in the interview.

Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were chosen for this study and despite being criticised for their overuse (Bannister, 2011) they are the most routinely actioned method of data collection in qualitative research. They were also chosen as they are compatible with discourse analysis

(Willig, 2015). In this study online or telephone interviews were offered for practical reasons due to COVID restrictions and because they were an excellent way of expanding the range of research contacts for a very specific sample (James, 2009; Janghorban et al, 2014). All participants consented for online interviews. Online interviews mean an inevitable decrease in non-verbal communication and body communication, but if online researchers' practice is reflexive and rigorous, online spaces can provide meaningful insightful data (James, 2009; Willig, 2008). In taking a feminist stance to the interviews, ongoing reflexivity and mindfulness to ethical issues that might arise during the interview process was practiced, as was an awareness of the positionality of the interviewer (Bannister, 2011).

All research involving human participants has inherent risks particularly if it involves sensitive topics such as gender and e/ds and the benefits to conducting this research were considered to outweigh any possible to harm to participants (BPS, 2014). A risk assessment was carried out prior to conducting any interviews to obviate, minimise and manage risks to all stakeholders and this research adheres to the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (2014) and the Code of Ethics and Conduct (2018).

Prior to interview, participants were sent an information sheet (appendix e) detailing the interview schedule, aims for the research, potential risks, right to withdraw (and constraints of retrospective withdrawal) and type of data to be collected. Written consent was obtained via email and documented and stored separately to other documents. In accordance with the UK Data Protection Act (2018) anonymity and confidentiality were ensured using pseudonyms in data storage and transcription that will be also used throughout analysis and write up. Participant's demographics were also collected. Immediately prior to interview participants were asked if they felt safe to continue, renew consent verbally, check equipment, internet connectivity, ensure familiarity with technology and invite any questions (Rawson, 2017).

An interview schedule (appendix f) was developed to ensure that each participant was asked similar questions and to keep the interview broadly on track. The aims of the interview were to elicit a narrative, biographical account of participants experiences of identifying as trans/nonbinary and having an ed. The interview questions included:

- Could you tell me about your experience of identifying as trans/nonbinary/?
- Can you tell me about your experience of an eating disorder?

- Can you tell me a bit about how identifying as trans/nonbinary has influenced your experience of an eating disorder?
- If you had to offer words of wisdom to anyone else going through something similar, what would you say?

Questions were purposefully open and used as prompts for participants to speak about what they felt were the most salient points. Questions were developed by thinking about how to cover gender, eating and intersections of those, along with a kind of narrative timeline of events. I was hoping to elicit a rich conversational account to reflect upon in analysis. I used prompts like 'can you expand upon that?' and 'how did this Affect you?' and this felt like it happened quite naturally because all the interviews were fascinating, and I genuinely wanted to know more. All except one where the participant needed no prompting and if anything, I needed to keep things more concise.

Each interview lasted between 60 - 70 minutes. The right to withdraw and contact details of support organisations relevant to the issues of gender, eating disorders and mental health were offered following the interview.

Anonymised audio recordings and transcripts were stored on a password protected computer in an encrypted folder in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018) and once transcription has taken place, audio files will be permanently deleted from all drives and digital devices. The researcher (and supervisors) are the sole people who have access to the data. All documents containing ID codes have been destroyed as the last withdrawal period for the last participant has expired, and hard copy material will be destroyed after the final award is confirmed. Once the research is complete access to a final copy will be offered to all participants.

Interviews were recorded using a digital recorder provided by UWE. The audio files were then transferred to the researcher's computer and uploaded to Office 365 Word transcription software. Inaccuracies in the automated transcription were then manually corrected and identifiers removed by the researcher. Transcriptions were time stamped and tacit signifiers were included along with pauses and emphasis. Hard copies of the transcriptions are stored in the researchers' home office in a locked metal cabinet.

Analysis

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, and the resulting transcripts were analysed using a discourse analytic methodology (Willig, 2015). More specifically, I deployed Foucauldian (1980) inspired, feminist post-structural discourse analysis (Lazar, 2007; Baxter, 2008; Arribas-Allyon & Walkerdine, 2013). This qualitative, language-oriented approach facilitated a focus on the text itself and an attention to the specific and often, contradictory ways that an identity, experience, or event was variously constituted in an interview (Willig, 2013; Malson, 1998). I turned to Foucault to illustrate on matters of discourse, power, and knowledge, which could also be said to share much with feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Lazar, 2007). There is no monolithic step-by-step manual to this type of analysis and my intention was to draw from multidisciplinary approaches and disciplines.

Post-structural discourse analysis methods share a key principle, in an agreement on the discursive construction of subjectivity, and aligned well with Butler's gender performativity theory (1990) in that they are concerned with discourse as social practices, the diversity and multiplicity of speakers' identities and in deconstruction (Baxter, 2008). Differences seem to lie in the intention of two methods though: CDA has an explicitly emancipatory agenda that has been said to polarise subjects against a backdrop power/oppression, whilst FPDA intends to critique the ways modernist thinking trends to the binary over complexity and can analyse exact moments when speakers shift between states of relative powerlessness to powerfulness (Baxter, 2008). By incorporating the transformative agenda of FPDA this analysis avoided privileging one experience against another, insomuch as discuss how they strayed from or conformed with dominant discourses. My intention then, was to illuminate how wider discourses of gender, health, discrimination, and political agenda are incorporated into individual discourses at the various intersections of race, gender, ethnicity and ability, and sexuality (Moradi, 2016).

This analysis drew from Foucaudian analysis (FDA) because it focuses upon and identifies the culturally available linguistic resources rather than specific linguistic manoeuvres made in an interaction (Burr, 2015; Willig, 2015). FDA is concerned with explicating the roles of discourse in broader social processes of legitimation and power (Smith, 2015) with attention to the relationship between institutions and discourse, and how these organise and regulate social lives and the body. Considering the gendered and racial hierarchies of power and control exerted upon the body (Strings, 2019) this research took an intersectionality theory approach to analysis to consider the material, experiential, economic

and structural factors influencing the operation of power/knowledge and the material experiences in the lives of trans or nonbinary people. Intersectionality theory best practices were consulted that suggest researchers should explicitly state why they choose certain intersections to foreground (see statement of embodied reflexivity), to conceptualise that identity formation is an emergent social process, and to take an interdisciplinary approach to situated identity within multiple contexts (Shields, 2008; Warner, 2008).

Foucault did not offer a set of rules for analysis (O'Farrell, 2005) and there are several ways to produce a Foucauldian analysis (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2013; Smith, 2015). This analysis was guided by Willig's six step FDA process (2015) as follows:

1. Discursive constructions
2. Discourses
3. Action orientation
4. Positioning's
5. Practice
6. Subjectivity

The transcripts were read and re-read multiple times before identifying both consistencies *and* variations in discursive representations (or constructions) of either, 'eating disorders', 'gender(s)', and/or 'identity', and on, producing a culturally contextualised analysis of these constructions by locating their relationships within cultural values, norms, and concerns (Foucault, 1972; Malson et al, 2010). Once key topics and themes were identified, these were physically cut out, and constructed to produce a mind map of interconnected construction and their cultural relatability. I became interested in Deleuze & Guattari's (1988) rhizomatic model of the ontology of change and becoming, in the sense that the map had no beginning and end but evolved into a 'messy' dynamical mass of interconnected topics and themes. From this map, a series of coding categories then developed, that were further refined as more detailed analysis took place.

These steps were considered appropriate because they allowed for identification of discursive resources, the subject positions they constitute and an investigation of the implications for subjectivity and practice (Willig, 2015). Other resources such as Potter & Wetherell's (1987) ten stage guide to discourse analysis was also consulted regarding the more practical aspects of analysis, but as Burr (2003) emphasises, such guidelines should

produce “what is in the end a subjective, interpretative analysis rather than providing recipe-type instructions”.

ANALYSIS

Chapter one

Discursive productions of femininity

WHATEVER I AM, I AM NOT WHOLLY THIS

Discursive productions of the female body as pathological, eruptive and out-of-control

This chapter presents analyses of excerpts where participants spoke about femininity and begins with descriptions of puberty or adolescence. When it comes to self-development and selfhood, modern, colonialist conceptualisations of the self as singular have influenced our understandings of gender as a binary and stable identity (Lugones, 2008; Namaste, 2009), that develops in a linear way from childhood (where one is becoming) to adulthood (where one is being) (Linstead & Pullen, 2006). In conceptualising selfhood as unitary and boundaried, the dominant post-colonial framework uncouples childhood and adulthood, reproducing discourses of Cartesian dualism around identity development (Tisdall & Punch, 2012). Hence, the lack of space to explore gender identity and the limited conceptualisations of selfhood (see chapter two – trans analysis for further explanation) can be restrictive and oppressive (Horton, 2023). The position of this research, therefore, is that there is not one unitary category of selfhood or femininity, but multiply constituted and often contradictory constructions of what it means to experience, embody, and perform femininities. The female body and puberty are always already located in complex sociocultural contexts within which sustains multiple and often contradictory meanings (Malson & Ussher, 1996; Malson, 1998). This analysis of femininity is grounded in the sociocultural context of patriarchal everyday sexism (Bates, 2018). For example, Bill and Danni (both from the U.S.) said:

> *SH*: What did that mean to you to start to develop this womanly figure?
>
> *Danni*: I did not like it at all. It actually initially started with my chest, because I think I was about nine when I started wearing like training, bras [...] and it hurt a lot, which now I realise is probably because of all my neurologic issues. But, so I kind of just from the very start had this resentment towards it of like, oh, well, I didn't ask for this. And now it's painful [...] when my period started, I have endometriosis, it was incredibly painful. And so, I, just along

with not liking the physical aspect of it, I was also just resenting any amount of like, puberty and femininity, while also kind of identity wise, struggling to win (inaudible) that I was really trying to fit in.

Bill: I was actually always very tiny, even underweight, growing up [...] this kid eats like a horse […] I was just so active […] I had such a high metabolism as a little kid [...] when I hit puberty, I do have PCOS (polycystic ovary syndrome) which does affect metabolism quite a bit. [...] I started quickly gaining weight and getting heavier from then on pretty much…I never cared to moderate my, my eating. Because, like, once I was hitting puberty, because it was a well, I'm not going to be doesn't matter how much I watch what I eat or workout. I'm not going to get, I'm not going to look like what my ideal is

In the above extracts, puberty, menstruation, and breast changes are described as painful, inconvenient, and resented. Historically in traditional society and multiple religious scripture, menstruation has been signified as taboo (Ussher, 2006) and even in now it is still associated with shame and embarrassment (Thomas, 2007). In these excerpts, the pairing of puberty and weight gain with medical diagnoses such as PCOS and endometriosis, along with the description of pain and metabolic issues, serves to categorise Danni and Bill's puberty as distinct from a 'normal' or healthy puberty. Problematising puberty may signify a rejection of impending womanhood that involves being at the mercy of an adversarial, painful, and pathological female body, represented in the wider social and medical discourse as debilitated, unstable, inferior, and Other (Malson, 1998; Ussher, 2006).

These accounts can be read as part of a wider discourse that constitutes and regulates female bodies in puberty as a source of anger or despair and as a signifier of an unwanted or pathological femininity, read in Danni's description of resentment toward the changing body "I didn't ask for this' and Bill's despair "I never cared [...] it doesn't matter [...] I'm not going to get [...] it's not possible". Bill's description positions puberty negatively and associates it with pain, pathology, and biomedical discourse, 'I do have PCOS which does affect metabolism'. There is a discursive construction of puberty that is always already, biologically inevitable, unwanted, or of failing to embody a 'healthy' or ideal femininity. Foucault's theory about governmentality and the regulation of the body (1967, 1970, 1972, 1973, 1979) explains the gradual objectification and medicalisation of bodies since the seventeenth century and offers a framework for understanding how bodily self-surveillance practices are

normalised in contemporary society as biopower. Normalised because as Aihwa Ong (1995) also explains, the state, through the institution of contemporary medicine, regulates individuals and social bodies, because it is the primary authority on the definition and promotion of guidelines around what to eat and how much, hygiene, sexuality, exercise, and death. Foucault's (1978) concept of biopower articulates the subtle and prevalent power that compels us to take individual responsibility and management of our own health and risk. Biopower acts as a normalising standard based on the dominant ideals of the male, White, cis, able body, that constructs the experiences of the Other, marked by gender, race, disability, or size, as unfit, abnormal, and unproductive (Rail & Jette, 2015). Biopower therefore is not just about the gathering of information, statistics, and guidelines but it transforms how we understand, produce and experiences ourselves, bringing us under control through surveillance practices (Foucault, 1988) that operate and regulate at the intersections of gender, health, weight, and appearance.

Discursive productions of 'real' womanhood as fragmented body parts

In the extracts below, Luke and Bill describe periods and breast changes as unwanted in the context of identifying as male:

> *Bill*: I didn't even hit puberty till I was like 15,16 years old [...] by the time, you know, I was getting into like a b to c cup, you know, I was I was still talking about how like, I, I wish that I could just chop them {breasts} off and have like, no, and I'd be like, yeah, no more than like, you know, a slight cup hands worth, which now I'm like, well duh!. That's a manboob size that I was holding up.

> *Luke*: I started having periods really late and I was really flat chested for a long time as well. So it was when that sort of stuff started happening like real female stuff, stuff that I just couldn't even identify with as relating to me.

Luke describes periods and 'growing boobs' as 'real female stuff' locating female identity in the body and in the biological descriptions of bodily changes related to puberty. Womanhood is constituted as 'bodily', signified by menstruation and breasts, that are construed as alien and uncontrollable (Malson & Ussher, 1996). This construction of a 'real' femininity locates womanhood not just in the body, but in the processes of puberty and

meanings around puberty and essentialising biological sex. The everyday sexism inflicted upon young women begins well before they are old enough to question it and is amplified during puberty when bodily changes are happening in a patriarchal culture that produces a thousand pressures on women to be 'beautiful' (Bates, 2018). This pressure is a hallmark of patriarchal late-stage capitalism that commodifies and objectifies the body through the male gaze, and through biopedagogies that dictate which bodies are productive, have status and value (Evans & Rich, 2011).

Further to this, I wonder what can be construed from Luke's use of the phrase 'real female stuff'? Real versus fake in the sense of cosmetic surgery, or real versus fantasy? Cis versus trans? What might Luke be attempting to reify, evade or resist in the rejection of feminine 'realness'? It was not until post Enlightenment that the dichotomy between male and female was distinguished through the construct of sex as biologically essential, and through body, soul, physicality, and moral aspect (Connell, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2018a). It was at this time that heterosexuality as an identity marker was intertwined with sex categories. This constructed the notion that a heterosexual man was regarded as 'real' and a heterosexual woman considered a 'real' woman (Javaid, 2020). It is worth noting too, that gay men have been accused of not being 'real' men because of their departure from heterosexually driven masculinities (Javaid, 2020). In popular culture, female 'realness' is discursively constructed as an idealised, eroticised type of femininity, one that signifies the qualities of femininity, such as compliance and sexual readiness, constructed and reproduced by a cisheteronormative framework. The sexualisation of the 'real' woman has been a common theme in pop songs:

> What you need is a real
> Real woman tonight
>
> A real woman tonight
> Someone that does you right
> Keeps you awake at night now honey
> A real woman tonight
> (Gloria Estefan, 1998)

Like Luke, Bill describes his breasts as unwanted and problematic 'I wish that I could just chop them off'. Later, he says on reflection that his boobs were not women's boobs but 'man

boobs'. He protects the body from being scripted with a feminine identity by articulating an epiphany 'well duh!', emphasising their misgendered status. What might drive a person to want to amputate a healthy body part? To understand this, I turn to Foucault's technologies of the self (1984) that suggests there are practices individuals can use to transform themselves within power relations. Foucault says that for this to occur, a particular set of cultural conditions must facilitate an individual to problematise aspects of their identity and the codes that govern them. Once the 'problem' is established, the individual is able then to negotiate the often liberatory practices required for transformation – meaningful practices that are central to people's subjective experiences through which selves/bodies are (re)constituted.

There is a fragmentation present in Luke and Bill's excerpts, in the way they speak of their body parts as disintegrated from the whole. I turn to wider cultural discourses that represent images of the female body to understand this. Started by Marcia Belsky, The Headless Women Project' (https://headlesswomenofhollywood.com/) collects and collates images of women seen in film, tv, on book covers and advertisement. What can be seen are thousands of images of women who are decapitated, used to sell products. As Marcia says:

> 'By decapitating the woman, or fragmenting her body into decontextualized sexual parts, she becomes an unquestionably passive object to the male gaze. The question of her consent is removed completely alongside her head, and her purpose becomes solely that of being looked at by men obediently. Her value is that only of her sexual appeal to men, and not of her personhood.'

Fat people are also specifically the target of the 'thin gaze' (Fuller, 2018) of the media, in which fat people's bodies are portrayed in film and video without their heads, (and their humanity) cropped out of images (Sturgess & Stinson, 2022). Bill's distancing from femininity might therefore be construed as protection, evasion and resistance against fat stigma, and the sexual objectification that girls and women experience. The sexualisation and objectification of girls and women is known to be a violent global problem, and it undergirds and reproduces harmful controlling gender roles that normalises such violence against girls (APA, 2008). Feminist theorists also argue that "heterosexuality is imbued with a dominance-submission dynamic and that power is enacted through sexual relations as well as in other arenas of gender "(Gavey, 2019, p.43). For Bill, then, if his breasts are scripted as male, they might have the power to reconfigure, evade, disrupt, or subvert the predatory male gaze.

I spoke with eight participants, but it was the quotes of Bill and Danni, and Luke that mentioned puberty, really stood out for me. Bill and Danni describe puberty as a traumatic experience where they became aware of the predatory practices of men:

> *Danni*: It actually even started at like, age 13, I would have people, I mean, of course, old guys hitting on me on the street, or I would have people asking me to sign petitions when you have to be 18. And so people were really thinking that me as like a child barely even a teenager was many years older. So I really didn't like that. But I knew that I couldn't just dress younger and have people think I was younger. And I also was really into doing my makeup and like things that also made me like older. So it was a lot of just struggle.. of kind of feeling like I was being pushed into being a teenager way before I was ready […] it was also around that same time that I started questioning my sexuality and so there was just a lot kind of stacking up at that point.

> *Bill*: I have basically been dealing with constant like, almost daily…well, not even almost daily, but at least weekly sexual harassment since like kindergarten… I started developing late, so it was like, went from nothing to a lot very quickly um and so, you know, I would get, I would get, like sexual harassment [inaudible] and stuff about my body, about like, having large, about my boobs, particularly because, you know, teenage boys and boobs. Yeah. But, um, you know, and so, there was also like, that was going on, in addition to, like, internal um sense of things I also started going through, like, I also during that same time period, it started like an eight year long cycle of various levels of sexual assault. And so like, all at the same time, it's a big clusterfuck of a time. […] So I would get like, harassed with comments about like, what was her name? Pamela? What was her name? You know? Pamela Anderson? Haley Anderson? Yes. Yeah, comments, like, you know, evoking her from Baywatch.

Danni's comment 'I would have people, I mean, of course, old guys hitting on me on the street' constitutes sexual harassment towards women as inexorable. Statistics suggest that 97% of women between the ages of 18-24 years and 70% of women of all ages have experienced sexual harassment in public spaces (APA, 2008; APPG-UN, 2021). Danni's phrase 'of course' serves to construct the experience as ordinary, reflecting the pervasiveness

of everyday, wearisome violence towards women and children. Whilst Danni constructs this as a stock event, the trauma inflicted on young girls and the explicit ways this shapes selfhood cannot and should not be minimised (APPG-UN, 2021). Danni's describes how it was the sexualising gaze that resulted in her feeling she was 'pushed into being a teenager' before she felt ready. Danni's selfhood and subjectivities were contingent on her location within social and cultural contexts. As Riley says, 'the body is not, for all its corporeality, an originating point nor yet a terminus; it is a result or an effect' (p.102, 1988).

There are many ways that the social embodiments in the domain of gender show up - in the catcalling, wolf-whistles, and unwanted comments from men to young women for example. The discursive devices in these excerpts describe how sexual harassment assembles the ways the participants negotiate the relationships they have with their bodies and subjectivities. For example, Danni describes their experience as a young adolescent as one of feeling pushed prematurely into teen-hood before feeling ready, and a 'struggle' with how they were being perceived as sexually available whilst navigating their own sexual preferences: 'there was just a lot kind of stacking up at that point'. Danni is clear on how they 'really didn't like that' and describes navigating the tensions of being sexualised whilst attempting to explore practices related to growing up, using make-up and clothes. There is a sense of in betweenness or liminality of Danni – becoming (see chapter one for more on *becoming*) - a process of cultivating safety, agency, and authenticity within a cultural context of sexual predation, objectification, and cisheteronormativity. There are countless examples of the discourses around adolescent sexual maturity in pop songs, that eroticises and romanticises female sexuality whilst constituting men as sexually predatory:

> Girl, you'll be a woman soon
> Please, come take my hand
> Girl, you'll be a woman soon
> Soon, you'll need a man
> (Neil Diamond, 1967)

> School girl sweetie, with a classy kind of sassy
> Little skirt climbing way up her knee…
> …I met a cheerleader, was a real young bleeder
> (Jo Perry/Steven Tyler, 1986)

Sexy girl, sexy young girl
You rock my world
And I was thinking boo, maybe me and you could get together baby
Sexy girl
Sexy young girl
Sexy young girl
Tonight me and you gonna chill
(Marques Houston, 2009)

Bill's excerpts describe a similar experience of harassment earlier than puberty in kindergarten (from age 5 in the USA). Like Danni's, Bill's resigned tone signifies the pervasiveness of sexual harassment but is also located in a discourse of 'natural' gendered behaviour 'because, you know, teenage boys and boobs'. It implicitly serves to construct teen boys' appetite for boobs as uncontrollable, that conversely places the responsibility upon women to protect themselves. As many as 1 in 5 female children will experience some form of sexual abuse before age 18 whereas, it is 1 in 20 for boys (2023, child rescue coalition) and sexual harassment of girls is only getting worse (Ringrose, 2021; Topping, 2021). A UK report on sexual harassment and violence in schools found that the problem is pervasive and normalised, and whilst girls and women are statistically still more likely to receive sexual harassment and abuse, young boys and men also represent a proportion of victims (of primarily other men) (Gov.UK, 2016). A global review found that rates of sexual harassment of women on public transport in most countries were vastly underestimated, and were above 40% (Gekowski et al, 2017). The report found that the nature of attacks ranged from groping, public rape, unwanted touching, leering looks, gesture making, intimidation, masturbation and being ejaculated on (Gekowski et al, 2017) to name a few. The fear instilled in women, precludes them a basic human right to safe access to public spaces and the prevalence of such violence is implicated in a lack of reporting, not least because it is discursively produced as "boys will be boys" (Gekowski et al, 2017). (In the next part of this analysis, we hear from Luke, Nathan, Charlie, and Sam who all construct living as or performing a more masculine presentation as a safer way to 'take up space' expanding on this analysis of femininity as uncomfortable, pathological, traumatic, and best to distance oneself from.)

Dominant cultural narratives of female adolescence are situated within cisheteronormativity, adding an extra dimension of trauma and confusion for people with identities and experiences diverse of this category. Bill says 'that was going on, in addition

to, like, internal um sense of things' referring to sexuality. Both Bill and Danni construct their experience of puberty around the awareness of an always already existing set of cisheteronormative constructs about the female body, relating to the sexualisation of puberty, and what it means to have breasts. The awareness of what it means to have breasts and be viewed as sexualised and sexually available to men seems to result in a disconnection from the body as a familiar sanctuary, and instead invites the sense of embodied threat from the violence of the male gaze.

Discursive productions of beauty in colonial-binary constructs

Arlo, who mentioned having Native American heritage in their family, grew up in a North American neighbourhood of mostly non-white families. They describe what it was like to deviate from Eurocentric and/or feminine beauty standards at both elementary school and high school (U.S.):

> *Arlo*: I was 100% accused of being a lesbian when I was like seven…just based on the fact that I was constantly trying to buy suits at thrift stores and…wanting to get my hair cut short…I was considered odd because I didn't do a lot of spray tanning, I didn't bleach my hair, like platinum blonde, and I didn't wear blue contacts…I knew like, two and I was in high school with over 4000 kids, and I knew two people that had long, dark brown hair that were white that didn't, that didn't bleach their hair…everyone else was expected to bleach their hair and and, you know, very strict sense of beauty standards. And so it's like any sort of small deviation from that was like it - you were just very odd. I very firmly believe it is based in colourism…it was just like this like really heavy obsession with yeah, with the blue eyed blonde haired, et cetera. And the thing is, is that this is a predominantly Black, Puerto Rican, Italian neighbourhood

Arlo's heritage is salient because of the explicit Eurocentric beauty standards they describe at school. Beauty standards that privilege White racial framing (Feagin, 2020) are rooted in violence - roots that continue to invisiblise or denigrate Black bodies and position White (female) bodies under disciplinary surveillance (Lugones, 2008; Strings, 2019). Lugones (2008) writes about the coloniality of the gender system, based on the invention of 'race' to naturalise and replace the power relations of superiority and inferiority previously founded through domination. The 'light and the dark side' of the binary gender system is

constructed around compulsory heterosexuality that permeates racialised patriarchal control over production, including knowledge production and over collective authority (Lugones, 2008; Radi, 2019). This system constitutes the lives of White bourgeois women as passive and 'sexually pure', inducted by bonded sexual access, whilst Black women are eroticised and reduced to animality (Bordo, 1993; Lugones, 2008). Thus, the fear of the Black body was integral to the creation of the slender aesthetic that is fashionable among White Americans/Europeans (Strings, 2019). Because of this, feminine beauty standards are doubly impossible for women of colour to meet, and those women are judged at both the intersections of gender and race (Crenshaw, 1989).

Arlo wanted to cut their hair short and chose to wear 'suits from thrift stores', practices that are construed as resisting the gender binary by disrupting the narrow standards of femininity. Finn Mackay (2021) writes about the butch identity and discusses the many ways that dressing in a traditionally masculine presentation signals multiple departures from cisheteronormative femininities, such as being queer, trans, or lesbian, and not necessarily a desire to be associated with normative masculinity, men, or maleness. What is revealed in this and the subsequent chapters of analysis is that gender performance is not a simple act of resistance to the binary, not only subversion or resistance to masculine power, but a complex multiplicity of performances to negotiate comfort or safety.

Either way, the excerpts here can be construed as liberatory, read in the self-determination of cutting hair or preferring to wear suits, the self-expression of Arlo's authenticity and individuality opposed to fawning to the external cultural values being inscribed upon their being. The short hair and typically masculine clothes are construed as symbolising a desire to complicate the unrelenting standards of the patriarchal lens. Arlo's preference for 'thrifted clothes' can also be construed as a rejection of Capitalist consumer values where to be an acceptable woman/girl, one must invest, spend, continually improve upon, and optimise appearance through the consumption of products and services aimed at women who feel insecure about their appearance (Bordo, 1993).

Arlo, like Bill and Danni, describes being sexualised as a child - 'I was 100% accused of being a lesbian when I was like seven' - a statement that speaks to the implicit dominance, disciplinary power and punitiveness of the cisheteronormative framework. Arlo was rejected by their peers 'I was considered odd' in a way that articulates Foucault's principle of panopticism (1977), in that despite Arlo attempting to evade the dominant, idealised performance of femininity, they were still subject to a disciplinary and normalising gaze that produces and disciplines assemblages of appearance and gender, categorising them as

'normal' or 'abnormal', queer or straight. It is through the possibility of surveillance and the normalising gaze that one might be constituted as a (disciplined) individual (Malson, 1998). Arlo describes restrictive cultural precepts that conditioned young people about not just how to be beautiful but also how to be what the dominant culture admires, values and rewards (Bordo, 2009). Arlo's excerpt, along with Bill's and Danni's, demonstrates how gender ideology maintains the status quo by creating a mobius strip of identity, perpetually looping back to a in/visibility conundrum, whether conforming to feminine ideals or resisting them, the cultural gaze seeks to categorize by approval (that leads to unwanted attention) or disapproval (that leads to exile). Because women are typically reduced to their bodies (Orbach, 1986; Bordo, 1993; Malson, 1998; Strings, 2019) it presents a hero's challenge for people assigned female at birth to cultivate a safe bodily home, in the context of social embodiment (Connell, 2021).

Foucault (1977) described an 'economy of visibility' that places individuals in a field of surveillance, both producing and regulating the individual. The importance of visibility in in the production of the individual is also present in psychoanalytic theory; it plays a part of 'the mirror stage as formative of the function of the I' (Lacan, 1949) and the entry of the subject into the symbolic order (Lacan, 1977). Within psychoanalytic theory, femininity is constituted within this economy of visibility, where for the girl, feminine sexuality develops when she recognises that by comparison to with a boy's genitals she has been short-changed and perceives this as a slight against her and as grounds for inferiority (Freud, 1924). In psychoanalytic theory then, femininity is a result of a perceived lack, occurring only due to an already existing patriarchal (Symbolic) order of values. Like post-structuralist theory, psychoanalytic theory affirms the significance of visibility in constituting subjectivity and the gendered arena within which the gendered subject is both constituted and revealed (Malson & Ussher, 1997). Arlo and Sam are disrupting the microphysics of power and knowledge (Foucault, 1977) by reproducing a kind of identity that can be constructed as 'odd', confusing and beyond categorisation.

Sam (from the UK) describes a similar experience of being singled out for being different at school, the significance of clothing in performing acceptable femininity and the growing sense of the prevailing gender ideology as she hit puberty:

> *Sam*:…when I got to junior school, it felt very, like, suddenly little boys were on one side, the kind of girls on the other side…it was very just like, girls do this, please do that…that kind of experience just felt a bit abrupt…feeling confusion as

> to why everything had to be boys and girls - like sports… the products in the supermarket…I kind of became really aware of this kind of divide…then onwards, you know, like puberty and things, it becomes kind of much more exaggerated…the older you get the kind of more kind of gender nonconforming you are…that difference is seen and…pointed out...within school, the things that kids get picked on is, is different. If you look different, you know, you're going to be singled out. And so wearing trousers…even things that seem like so insignificant…it was like, oh, you're wearing trousers so that means that you're less of a girl… people kind of picked me out as different, I didn't necessarily like that, because it was uncomfortable. Whereas now, I kind of almost like being seen as different.

Sam's excerpt describes their growing awareness of the divisiveness of gender ideology 'it was very just like, girls do this, please do that' and of feeling 'a bit abrupt…feeling confusion' 'I didn't necessarily like that, because it was uncomfortable'. There is a sense of Sam feeling increasingly distressed and disempowered by the expectations and restrictions placed on them as a female presenting child growing into adolescence and like Arlo, how surveillance both disciplined and revealed them to be an individual 'If you look different, you know, you're going to be singled out.' As Foucault (1977) argues 'discipline "makes" individuals'. Sam described an abrupt divisiveness in puberty between boys and girls, in gendered products, clothing and sports. They describe how by presenting as non-conforming they were exiled ('get picked on…singled out') and how uncomfortable it felt. It speaks to the cost of liberating oneself from a system of values that oppress and restricts only to find that you are viewed suspiciously or derided for your dissent. It also speaks to the possibilities of resistance or lack thereof, that are mad available for femininity, by the dominant values of the patriarchy.

Sam echoes the distress of the other participants in becoming aware of their gender in adolescence, and their awareness of the field of surveillance under which their bodies are disciplined, made intelligible, docile, and useful (Foucault, 1977; Malson, 1998). As I have mentioned, these experiences are reflected in the wider literature around bio-power and bio-pedagogies (Foucault, 1980; LaMarre et al, 2017) founded on binary criteria like healthy/unhealthy, fit/unfit, normal/abnormal to define bodies - criteria that are measured against normative (White, Western, able-bodied, and masculine) standards (Rail & Jett, 2015). For example, moralising messages about health and what constitutes healthy bodies

circulate classrooms, clinics, the church, media, and the family, sculpting understandings of how we should examine and curate our bodies. Working class, Indigenous, and racialised people, trans and queer people, women, disabled people, and non-Europeans continue to be the target of sexist, homophobic, classist, ableist, racist and colonialist biopedagogies that oppress marginalised bodies (Rice, 2007; Rice, 2015; Rail & Jett, 2015; LaMarre & Rice, 2016).

Discursive productions of the 'ideal' woman as consumers

One of the main ways that the female body is discursively constructed and regulated in contemporary Western culture is through the biopolitics of weight and shape (see Foucault, 1980). These serve to operate as a diffuse disciplinary power imbricated in the healthism of late-stage capitalism (LaMarre, Rice, & Jankowski, 2017). Although weight and shape are increasingly important characteristics for men's embodied identities, it is inescapable for women (Riley et al., 2019) and 'masculinity can be more easily defined independently of physical appearance than can femininity' (Malson, p.106, 1998). For women, weight and shape are constituted as a major marker of hierarchy, class, place, and power (Woolf, 1990; Rice, 2007; Tischner, p.127, 2013; Strings, 2019) and are determining factors in how young women come to understand themselves. In turn they constitute how others relate to and treat them as young women (Rice, 2007; Kyröla, 2014). Cisheteronormativity is a foundation upon which the biopolitics of weight and shape both regulate and discipline femininity through standards of physical perfection, and through the economy of thinness (Woolf, 1990; Malson, 1998) and a through a performance of an active, lived interest in fashion and beauty:

> *Danni*: I'm mostly trying to fight all the kind of internalised ideas…we would watch America's Next Top Model, and we would be laughing at it the whole time, and like, wow, this is so ridiculous, all these rules that they have and stuff, but then it was still getting in there.

> *Sam*: I just thought like I was doing kind of 'girl' badly. And I kind of thought like, well if I'm thinner, then I'll be happier…if I have like better hair, better make-up, I'm thinner, if I look like that person, if I do this, then then I'll be happy because I was like, well, there's no choice, like, I didn't know there was anything else. So I was like, well, I am a girl, like that's what people keep telling me so…I must just be unhappy because I don't like the way I look. So I just need to try harder and then

> just make myself thinner…I just pinned my hopes on getting smaller…eventually I'll look like that person in the magazine and then and then 'girl' will feel like the right category.

Sam's comment of 'doing kind of 'girl badly'' and 'the right category' and speaks to their sense of gender as a performance and classification - a curation of image that requires a particular kind of inscription upon the body, hair, and face to be considered acceptable and one they felt they struggled to achieve well. Danni too, speaks about how the 'ideas' of femininity are 'still getting in there' despite a conscious rejection of the rules that construct a kind of high value femininity. Judith Butler (1990) argues that 'gender proves to be performative – that is constituting the identity it is purported to be' (p.34) and it is widely accepted that gender identity is asserted through a process of signification. The construction of 'body-as-image' and the ways that our felt-sense or embodied subjectivities are discursively produced and regulated is a pervasive and noteworthy aspect of postmodernity and late-stage capitalism (Kroker, 1987; Bordo, 1992; Malson, 1999). In wider research it is suggested that the postmodern body is reconfigured not as natural or lived in, but as a consumer object or a 'sign-commodity' (Kroker, 1987) to be worked on as a project - plastic images demanding constant maintenance and augmentation to produce a look that is inscribed on the surface (Malson, 1999). The focus on body as image renders bodies static, meaning that the body is uncoupled from the multiple social forces that shape how bodies feel and with what consequences (Probyn, 2009).

Sam and Danni articulate the complex socio-material intersubjectivities that serve to construct acceptable, productive performances of femininity ('I am a girl, like that's what people keep telling me') and how they (re)orient their sense of self … 'if I'm thinner, then I'll be happier…if I look like that person, if I do this'. We get a sense of how performing 'girl' appropriately is constructed as the road to happiness - one that requires surveillance, ongoing effort ('I just need to try harder') and a set of body practices (to work on the project of 'doing girl' in 'just make myself thinner'). This seems emblematic of postmodernity and late-stage capitalism in producing the body as a consumer subject to be improved, scrutinised, and modified (Bordo, 1992; Malson, 1999). Because femininity is defined and constructed in terms of how the female body is perceived and represented, value and status are frequently judged by appearance (Craik, 2003) that Danni and Sam's comments can be construed as both an active attempt at resistance to those ideals that sneakily get in, and as despair at 'doing girl badly'.

This construction of the thin ‘beautiful’ female body is complex and multiply constituted. For example, it is embedded within a cisheteronormative romantic cultural narrative in which the ‘beautiful’ woman gets the ‘perfect’ life and lives ‘happily ever after’ (Malson, p.107, 1998). Romantic discourse idealises the thin female body, equating thinness with health and beauty. It also defines female beauty standards in terms of White racial framing (Feagin, 2020), cisheterosexual attractiveness, and in where (in part due to the legacy of second wave feminism) if a woman works on herself sufficiently, she can ‘have it all’ (Nicolson, 2003). The ‘beautiful thin woman’ is embedded in the philosophical oppositions of subject/object, male/female. Thus, women or the category of woman, are constrained by codes that position them as passive vehicles of display and the object of the gaze (Craik, 2003). The look is regulated and disciplined by the heteronormative male gaze, as objects of pleasure, desire and for consumption.

Participants, however, had multiple ways of constructing how through deploying techniques of fashion and make-up, the look can be liberatory:

> *Danni*: I've played round a little bit more with like, wearing different styles that are really, really feminine. And maybe a while ago, I would have not wanted to, because they, I, I can very easily not be read as queer

> *Luke*: It's the bits that other people were seeing. Those were the bits I needed to change and so being able to wear a flat top, otherwise if I have boobs then that stuff’s for girls.

> *Arlo*: whether you're coming from assigned female or assigned male or you internalise the ideals of being a being your assigned sex at birth, so you feel that pressure to conform to that…all of these all these societal pressures…say dirty media is one of the biggest things, making sure that the media like songs that you consume are, are curated towards nonbinary, made by nonbinary people made by trans people and also just finding the sort of quirks within, like, if you can't find a good nonbinary character, fine - queer your own characters. Growing up I queered [inaudible name] because he constantly wore bright blue eyeshadow. And so just that small thing, focusing on presentation over physical presentation focusing on how you dress yourself, how you how you adorn yourself as sort of your expression of, of androgyny, I would say would be would be the first step to kind of kind of

> decentralise your narrative off of your physical body instead of to more of like you're presenting body.

What Danni, Arlo and Luke describe is how techniques of fashioning the body require a conscious focus on how identity can be mapped against an existing culture of femininity, and how fashion and make-up can disrupt a feminine, heterosexual narrative to be 'read as queer' and 'decentralise your narrative off of your physical body'. Jennifer Craik argues that fashion is a technical device, or a technique of self (Foucault, 1980) in the sense that clothing bodies is an active process or a technical means for constructing and presenting the bodily self, and which articulates the relationship between bodies, and their lived milieu (Craik, 2003). The above excerpts construct fashion and make-up as disruptive, devices, that might resist cisheteronormative standards of appearance or femininity.

Other discourses converge on and diverge from romantic discourse. For example, the beautiful thin 'girl' as a consumer is present in the fashion industry and promoted in magazines that condition the problems of femininity they seek to solve (Bordo, 2009) by stoking insecurities that women feel about appearance and femininity and then selling the solutions for that insecurity at a premium. Fashion as a training ground for femininity is a phenomenon that has conditioned and regulated the rules and techniques of femininity and sexuality for centuries, with men dominating the arena (Craik, 2003). This can be read in Sam's comments on 'better hair, better make-up…eventually I'll look like that person the in magazine'. This reflects a well-documented and ongoing discourse of the corporate fashion and media world representing young women with unrealistic images of bodies dominated by the White racial frame (Feagin, 2020), cisheterosexual, thin, and abled-bodied person (Bordo, 2009; Eckermann, 2009; Jones & Malson, 2011). This sends a clear and damaging message to women, that the size and shape of your body is the most important thing about you, and you should be disgusted by it (Campos, 2004).

One of the most recognisable advertising straplines in the last 150 years is 'Maybe she's born with it, maybe it's Maybelline' inviting women to use make-up to achieve a seemingly effortless 'natural' beauty. Another example of how cisheteronormativity is constructed as the standard is in the hair care brand 'Herbal Essences' owned by Proctor and Gamble. They commissioned an advert that ran for ten years until 2005, featuring controlling images (Collins, 2000) women washing their long, glossy hair, whilst simulating orgasm, whilst conditioner bottles metaphorically ejaculate white liquid (Shampooads, 2019). These ads reinforce a dominant feminine beauty standard that is reflected explicitly in Sam's

comment ‘eventually I'll look like that person in the magazine’ and conveniently disregards any alternative representation of femininity. It also reinforces the trope of women seeking men’s sexual validation. Sam’s comment of ‘there’s no choice, like, I didn't know there was anything else’ speaks to a lack of agency located in the absence of alternate possibilities to vary the category of ‘girl’ and the lack of diverse representation of the signifiers of womanhood and female bodies. In this context fatness is negatively discursively produced as a signifier of transgressing ‘ideal’ feminine beauty and of abnormality. Danni and Charlie shared their thoughts on fatness:

> *Charlie*: “no you just have to lose weight you just have to have self-discipline and eat less, right?” …my gender has definitely played a part…being perceived as a young woman played a big part because of the encouragement to restrict. …it’s very difficult to navigate this world, for a person of size, you know, and I don’t want to make my life harder… I think I have to lose over a third of my body weight to be “normal”, and that’s just, it’s not [inaudible] [laughs] for a lot of reasons

> *Danni*: I kind of always have had the feeling of, well, I'm already disabled, I'm already queer, I can't be fat on top of that. And so, it really is just kind of trying to fit that ideal, as much as you can, almost to the point where you're going so extreme with this one thing to make up for your so-called flaws. It’s so harmful

In these accounts, fatness is construed as ‘abnormal’ and a threat to increase an experience of already being marginalised at multiple intersections ‘I'm already disabled, I'm already queer, I can't be fat’ and ‘it’s very difficult to navigate this world, for a person of size…I don’t want to make my life harder’. Danni constructs fatness as something that can be controlled, and that by striving for thinness the Othering can be offset or minimised. Charlie’s excerpt also constitutes fatness as being a target of observation and judgement, marginalised within society and a lifestyle choice emblematic of a lack of ‘self-discipline’. This is literally dictated by biomedical discourses around bodyweight management that construct fatness as a lack of self-discipline with ‘eat less, move more’ messages (English & Vallis, 2023). Further complicating these discourses, fat hatred or fatmisia is a lived reality that can be seen and felt widely across multiple domains (healthcare, transport, education, fashion) and it circulates as an affective economy, orienting behaviours, and actions to the affect, organising subjects and

spaces with the purpose to eradicate and discipline non-normative living intertwined with fatness (Rinaldi et al, 2019) – and increases the risk of Othering.

In these excerpts the fat body is discursively constructed as a flaw or abnormality that can be controlled. This reflects the dominant biomedical and cultural discourses on fat bodies are that are grounded in discourses of Cartesian dualism that produces constructions of 'fat equals disease' and 'thin equals healthy', where body weight is considered to be a consequence of 'bad' lifestyle choices (Campos, 2004; Bacon & Aphramor, 2011; Gotovac et al, 2018). This is also despite health researchers that have critiqued the outdated assumption that fatness is a behavioural disease caused by overeating and sedation, and now understands fatness in more complex social, genetic, economic, and political terms, which debunks fatness as a health risk, in and of itself (Flegal et al, 2013; Morris et al, 2018). Women have historically been subject to greater pressure than men to conform to gendered body ideals and particularly to idealised thinness (Bordo, 1993; Orbach, 2006) and Charlie's comments on how being perceived as female was instrumental in his drive to restrict food reflect this.

Other accounts describe how discourses of femininity, shape and weight converge on the body to produce discomfort and resentment:

> *Luke*: my biggest issue is that if I don't train or don't eat fairly balanced around that then I start to gain weight and it goes straight to my stomach and hips…that's the worst place it can go to…I don't like that and I see it as feminine, that really, triggers me and then I feel like I have to put more effort in to change that… it's always triggered by the hips and the stomach…I'm really uncomfortable with that…that waist and hip area I cannot label it male in my head. Its labelled terminally as female in my head and that's why its triggering. It's that hourglass thing. Bloody hourglass thing…I see it as such a female thing and I just I have to reject that completely

> *Sam*: it's uncomfortable, more uncomfortable for me to be seen as, just like the gender assigned at birth [female]…if I do take hormones, then the fat will be kind of distributed in kind of different areas and so I think it's less about the weight, but more about where the weight holds itself in my body. …having kind of smaller bum, and like smaller hips, it's easier to kind of hide in clothes…I don't like people thinking I'm a woman…I'm less, less comfortable being perceived as kind of

feminine…SH: Why? Sam: I'm not sure. I think it's just like, when people sort of say ‘her, she’, that there's kind of discomfort there.

Danni: the things that are considered womanly about me, like my curves…I kind of just resent them…I have this resentment

Sam and Luke described the bum, hips, and stomach as being both a location of felt sense or embodied femininity and a signifier perceived as female by others. Danni describes ‘resenting’ her curves. Weight gain in these areas comes to signify an eroticised feminine ‘bodilyness’ that is uncomfortable, threatening and alien (Bordo, 1993, Malson, 1998). Typically, the controlling image (Collins, 2000) - ‘curves’ of femininity develop in puberty, so the disavowal of this shape of woman can be a rejection of femininities as embodied, and the femininities signified by the post-pubertal body, of being hyper-visible, objectified and curated by and for the male gaze. Luke describes certain body parts ‘terminally female’, as though it is a threatening pathological condition that might metastasise and kill him should he not be vigilant, and he creates distance by not identifying with it and by describing a ‘bloody hourglass thing…such a female thing…I have to reject that completely’. A ‘thing’ constructs the body as separate, inanimate, a rejected device of femininity that represents threat, something to be destroyed. The practices of exercise, dietary restriction and hormonal therapy are constructed as solutions or acts of resistance to a kind of construction of femininity that cannot be embodied comfortably.

The thin ‘straight, boyish’ body, then becomes a multiplicity of gendered constructions in that it may signify ‘non-body’ or ‘non-woman’ through a rejection of a particular kind of hyper-sexualised ‘curvy’ femininity, or a triumph over an unruly female body. Technologies such as training in the gym or hormonal therapy serve to be self-destructive and re-productive - to reconfigure the body so it may be felt and seen differently (Foucault, 1984). These different discourses that converge upon the body constitute each body in different ways, and the power that each discourse brings flows through and around each body, influencing exercise, routine, sensation and meaning. Weight comes to signify the self, the female gendered self is located in the body, and the curvy, softer, body signifies femininity (Malson 1998) or at least a kind of hyper-visible heterosexual femininity, with specific emphasis on the area of the body concerned with reproduction and sex organs:

Nathan: my body pre-transition was soft, like all over there's no other way to describe it. And now all my favourite parts of my body are the bits that don't have that sort of, you know, my arms are getting muscular and my chest, there's no like fat there or anything like that anymore…It's always the hips, 'cos that what gives you away. That's what looks feminine, that's what I try to hide at the start of my transition, when I was desperately trying to pass to like flatten every sign of a curve

Discursive productions of womanhood as in/visible, traumatic, and dis/un/embodied

What these excerpts have in common is that the perception and visibility of the female body is associated with a constellation of negative affect including discomfort, resentment, 'triggering', painful and stressful. The perception of bodyweight functions as a metonym for female embodiment:

Indie: I don't want to gain weight…part of what I am so uncomfortable with in my body right now that that it's gained weight is that I really just cannot handle my chest.

SH: So you're saying that there's something about weight gain, which makes your gender assigned at birth more salient?

Indie: Yeah, absolutely. Because I think, yeah, I am carrying more weight, it is in kind of [inaudible] a stereotypically feminine pattern…it does feel hard to hide…I want my gender to be confusing. I want people to like, not know what to make of me, you know? And it feels hard to hide.

The excerpts above construct the feminised body as hyper-visible 'hips…that what gives you away…looks feminine, that's what I try to hide…it does feel hard to hide'. Returning to Foucault's concept of the Panopticon (1977) as the architecture of surveillance, the gaze of surveillance is constituted as male, thus dominant or hegemonic masculinity (see chapter four, appendix b for the masculinity analysis) produces disciplined women by rendering them constantly visible (Malson & Ussher, 1997; Tischner, 2013). The constructions of discomfort in being perceived as female in this excerpt, echo Danni and Bill's earlier comments on how being seen as female led to harassment. These excerpts speak to how visibility for women is a material reality and statistically a risk factor, as being seen alone at night can prove fatal for women. Even when innocent victim gender-based violence, the threat of being additionally victim shamed offers little reassurance of justice and protection, particularly as women are

routinely blamed for men's violence and told to protect themselves by staying hidden (Taylor, 2020). 71% of all victims of human trafficking are women and girls (stopthetraffik.org, 2022) so the risks of being perceived female is a lived reality. I do not attempt to explain gender or e/d's exclusively within a discourse of trauma, however as both can be construed in multiple, contradictory ways. As the participant named Indie said:

> *Indie*: No, I'm not trans because of trauma. But trauma has certainly shaped my relationship to my gender.

Nathan's excerpt can be read in multiple ways, but significantly they seem to articulate a production of unequal power relations in a panoptic system where the oppressed group under surveillance are constituted and regulated as powerless and vulnerable. This is reflected in wider accounts on women's bodies and body size that found themes of women feeling policed, judged, or seeking to evade surveillance as by being visible they are more vulnerable to experiencing objectification and sexualisation (Riley, 1988; Bordo, 1993; Malson, 1998; Tischner, 2013).

A theme of not wanting to be seen or perceived as female can be found in other quotes:

> *Charlie*: maybe I was a girl then but not anymore, but it was still a very painful experience to be perceived in that way and realising sort of in my mid-teens "OK that feels really wrong". I don't like when people see me that way, I don't like being expected to behave that way that just feels just truly not in alignment with who I am… [laughs] and [sighs] it's just that I think I'm very content and unbothered to be perceived as a man.

> *Luke*: I started at second pegging being seen as a female…when he perceived me to be male it was like 'Oh, that's alright, we're equal, it's all good…we're friends, and then when he perceived me to be female it was like 'oh, I'm so sorry I mean, I could have knocked you over you're so weak and delicate

In these excerpts, being perceived as feminine is constructed as 'painful' and 'wrong', and 'truly not in alignment'. Luke described being seen as female as 'starting at second pegging', a phrase that articulates the always-already unequal gender power relations, that

positions femininity as second to or inferior to masculinity (Bates, 2018). This excerpt seems to express a rejection of the dominant culture of unequal gender power relations at the same time a collusion with the construct that to be seen as masculine is to evade the threat of the gaze. Luke said that in being perceived female, he was treated as 'weak and delicate', a description that we can construe negatively, or at odds with the controlling images (Collins, 2000) of masculinity nor with Luke's experience of sensate embodiment. When he was perceived as male he was treated as 'equal, good, friends'. Thus, for this experience of equality to be achieved, the female identity or perception of it, must be destroyed and reproduced to be read as male. These excerpts speak to the discomfort in the construct of an internal, felt sense, or an embodied self that is misaligned with the feminine presenting self, given the cultural messages received about femininity.

Other participants also spoke about how being perceived as female led to being dismissed or lacking credibility – a common experience for all women and here is part of the trans/nonbinary experience:

> *Bill*: I was actually, at the time, the master carpenter for the scene shop… they would automatically go towards [inaudible] who's male, even though I, except for the fact that I had boobs and like long hair, or actually no, I didn't even have long hair then, …I dressed like pretty much exactly the same way he did - baggy jeans tools on the belt…But, you know, it was, I was being dismissed.

Bill is talking here about his work as a master carpenter at a US college, and how despite presenting in many ways like other male skilled tradespeople, says because 'I had boobs…I was being dismissed'. Bill's comments about being dismissed also relate back to Luke's in how being seen as 'weak and delicate' when perceived as female, reinforced an experience of inequality. Bill's experience of being dismissed as a credible professional is a common experience for women who must prove themselves worthy in a masculine dominated field of work like skilled trades. However, everyday sexism is not confined to just typically masculine arenas but is a pervasive and insidious 'drip feed' (Bates, 2018, p.21; Phipps et al, 2018) that begins before girls are able to challenge it – for example pre-school girls are already worrying about the size and shape of their bodies, and continue to over the course of life (Puhl & Luedicke, 2012; Halliwell, Diedrichs, & Orbach, 2014). Research shows that parents interrupt female children more than male, and that boys speak up more in the

classroom, grooming girls into a culture of sexism, harassment, and assault so that the idea of being a second-class citizen is so ingrained it becomes normalised (Bates, 2014; 2016; 2018). Other participants spoke about how womanhood was constructed around trauma, force and disconnection or distancing:

> *Charlie*: I had a lot of traumatic experiences happen in the realm of my womanhood that it feels better to distance myself from as well.

> *Danni*: I definitely don't connect to being a woman…I feel no power from it…womanhood is a very powerful thing, and especially with what like AFAB bodies can do with like birthing children…in terms of just coping with, like having this terrible pain all the time and…women are very inspiring, but I just don't feel connected to it…I just don't feel anything when I think of like, 'oh, yeah, I'm a woman'

Much has been written in critical feminist literature on e/ds about Cartesian dualism - that the mind and body are separated, with the mind privileged as superior, and associated with masculinity, rationality and objectivity (Henriques et al, 1984; Bordo, 1993; Malson, 2010; Willig, 2013; Tischner, 2013). Within Cartesian dualism, binary constructions serve to act as a way of privileging object over subject, male over female and mind over self or body. This can be seen in qualitative accounts of anorexia in the wider literature, that the (thin) body is discursively produced as controlled by the mind or the product of 'self' control (Malson, 1998; Tischner, 2013). A phantasy (Klein, 1975, p.290) of this dualistic fiction of dis/un/embodiment is that one can control body shape and weight and should. In short, Cartesian duality, a philosophy upon which selfhood and controlling gender role images are built, discursively produces the female body as alien to the mind and discursively produces the need for control and discipline over the body (Malson, 1998, p.124). If I complicate this analysis further to the material effect and affect of everyday sexism on the psyche and nervous systems of female presenting people, disconnection from the body is a common hallmark of trauma, driven by a need to create distance from the object of threat (the body), and emblematic of coping strategies that disavow the female body or subjectivities. How can a person connect to their body, when it is discursively constructed as horrifying, weak and chaotic? Sam begins to touch upon that question in this excerpt:

> *Sam*: I'm less, less comfortable being perceived as kind of feminine …it was just about like taking up as little space as possible…Whereas I feel like if I can take testosterone and be more comfortable in myself, then I can take up more space because I'm taking up space as myself…before, it was just like, this is uncomfortable so we're going to try and make it as small as possible…So let's try that like this so that we can kind of create a distance from what is uncomfortable to try and yeah, I guess, trying to find some kind of comfort in my body and how people view me.

Sam describes the sense of discomfort in being perceived as female and the drive to take up as little space as they can, whereas being perceived as masculine offers distance and relief from this felt-sense - there is comfort associated with masculinity and with the body.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored how multiple discourses (of Cartesian dualism, Christianity, patriarchy, neoliberalism, romantic) constitutes femininity as bodily, and the body as inferior, eruptive, weak, out-of-control, pathological and traumatic. The body is also constituted as separate to the mind – and a mind that is associated with the controlling depictions of 'masculine' qualities - of logic, reason, and rationality. In constituting the body as a possibly eruptive, out-of-control threat, it produces the call to control, deny, discipline or distance from the body and hegemonic femininity. This discursive relationship between the dual mind/body (re)produces an interior domination-submission dynamic that reflects the exterior domination-submission dynamic that has its roots in the violence of the colonial gender binary system. Multiple discourses, I have argued, produce a (fictional) problem in the female body that conditions people assigned female at birth to be in adversity with their bodies. This produces a traumatic bond with the body, and one that must be negotiated with multiple technologies, and practices made available within the social contexts. In the context of patriarchy, the thin, gender neutral or masculinised body (see chapter four, appendix b) comes to signify strength, safety, power, equality, and credibility. I argue that e/ds are part of a constellation of practices that are produced by this context, that are normalised and contradictorily encouraged.

Ideological constructions of 'woman' as bodily and 'the female body' as both inferior and commodified, have a long history in Western culture that many critical feminist scholars have written about (Bordo, 1993; Epstein, 1995; Malson, 1998). I have sought to briefly illustrate (see chapter one for further explanation) that beyond the histories of the west, there

are Othered histories of communities and societies that were non-hierarchical, non-monogamous, and/or matriarchal. These communities in which gender did not have a clear or uniform relationship to power (as our own heavily binarised, cisheteropatriarchal culture does) were the target of colonial male violence, that attempted to erase global south discourses, and sought to narrow the categories of gender, and sexuality in the service of White male violence. In this sense then, femininity *is* under attack, both in the material and theoretical sense, and given their histories, we cannot split misogyny from racism, nor e/ds from gender. We must though, position them along axes of power and privilege.

Chapter two

Discursive productions of masculinity

MOSAICS OF MASCULINITY

Discursive productions of masculinity

This chapter presents analyses of excerpts that talk about masculinities and relates them to wider cultural discourses and literature. But what is 'masculinity'? As for femininity, there is not one unitary category of masculinity, but multiple masculinities that are difficult to parse from maleness, power, and domination (Halberstam, 2012). In analysing how masculinities are constructed here, rather than seek an essentialist category of masculinity, I am focusing on the social context and multiplicities required to illustrate the masculinities discursively constructed by the participants, without foregrounding cisgendered male bodies and the social practices of hegemonic masculinity. Where internal or embodied intersubjectivities are mentioned, I position these within social and cultural discourses of patriarchy and the colonial binary gender system. My conceptualisation of patriarchy is informed by bell hooks phrase, 'imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy' (hooks, 2004) that describes a political-social system that insists that (White) males are inherently dominant, superior to everyone and everything deemed weak, especially females. Thus, however it is defined, patriarchal, dominant, traditional, or hegemonic masculinity inevitably assumes the normalising or 'master' category in this analysis. In this respect, I turn to Audre Lorde (1984) who cautions us to account for black/white, gay/straight/queer, and cis/trans masculinities in taking an intersectional approach . Hence, masculinities are understood here in relation to colonialism, capitalism, cisheterosexualism and cisheteronormativity. This is after all, an analysis of masculinity as constructed by individuals who were assigned female at birth, by a researcher who was also assigned female at birth. We are all understanding and talking about masculinity from multiple positions.

Fundamentally this chapter explores how the participants constructed what kind of things men do, how they look, feel, what it means to be male, masculine or identify as a man, and how someone assigned female at birth might perform or embody a masculine identity or qualities. Initially I present how masculinity is constructed as comfortable, muscular, or powerful, skinny, and White racially framed (Feagin, 2020). This is produced as a masculinity in performance. I then explore how hegemonic discourses produce masculinity as

liberated, powerful, and able to take up space. Discourses of masculine appearance ideals produce a body that is muscled, bearded and 'normal'.

Discursive productions of masculinity as performative and the 'Master Category'

Within the following excerpts, masculinity is described as the 'least painful' of the genders to perform:

> *Charlie*: 11 years now, I've been on testosterone…I don't have a strong feeling of being a man or a woman or another necessarily… I've chosen to continue living my life socially as if I'm a man because it is the least painful way for me to experience my life.

> *Sam*: I wouldn't say I kind of identify as kind of masculine but if I had to choose between female and male, I would rather kind of go towards kind of masculine. *Simone*: Why? *Sam*:I feel like if I can take testosterone and be more comfortable in myself, then I can take up more space because I'm taking up space as myself…find some kind of comfort in my body and how people view me.

Charlie's choice to live socially 'as if a man' is described as the 'least painful' way for him to experience his life. In doing so he discursively produces his choice as a performance rather than an integral identity. Butler, (1990) suggests that gender is performance, and that gendered bodies are "styles of the flesh" contingent on history – histories that condition and limit the possibilities (p.190). In considering the historical context of the colonial gender binary system, to live 'as if a man' produces a constellation of privileges that women and other genders are not beneficiary. (Some of those privileges can be further explored in chapter 3, appendix a, and chapter one). One of the privileges that Charlie speaks of, is less pain. Sam described things slightly differently in that gender is presented as a dilemma – a 'Morton's Fork', meaning that the pressure to choose is between two undesirable options ('if I had to choose') of which masculinity presents the better option. Sam's 'kind of masculine' choosing is positioned as marginally better than femininity in the sense that Sam can 'take up more space' and 'find more comfort'. That Sam constructs masculinity as the better of two less than ideal choices, can be located in the analysis in femininity where femininity is constructed as bodily, and negatively. Masculinity here then, is constructed as a compromise that affords *relative* comfort, that in the context of the gender binary holds some rational. If

we consider though, that cisheterosexuality has been central in Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity, (that is the 'poster boy of patriarchy') (Duncanson, 2015) trans masculinity remains subordinate but not *as* subordinate as femininity. Sam's discursive production of masculinity is constructed as a 'kind of' hybrid masculinity/femininity rather than a fully endorsed subscription to hegemonic masculinity. Bridges and Pascoe (2014) suggest that hybrid masculinities refer to the selective incorporation of parts of an identity that is typically associated with marginalised and subordinated masculinities and identities (also Messerschmidt, 2010). Sam's construction of a masculinity as a route for relative comfort, can be construed as a production of a hybrid femininity, but even this would serve to uphold the binary. The issue for Sam seems to be more complex - it is located in both the devaluing of femininity/privileging of masculinity, *and* in the very presumption of a stable gender binary. These accounts can be read as part of the wider discourses of patriarchy that disproportionately rewards men over women and is characterised by male domination and power (Bradshaw, 1992; Bates, 2016,2018). These excerpts construct a masculine identity that is being forged to be useful for securing comfort, obscuring visibility, and avoiding pain. What pain or discomfort specifically, is construed as the pain of being perceived as, or living as female, especially when these accounts are read in relation to the excerpts in the previous chapter where femininity is rejected and construed as weak, disembodied, painful, fragmented and an object of threat or risk. Indie described masculinity as the 'default':

> *Indie*: masculinity feels like the default right…which is always such an interesting and frustrating thing to me…my way of kind of causing confusion, kind of in terms of the perception of others of my gender is to kind of lean more masculine, just because it feels like the way of quote unquote, balancing out, I guess.

Indie's use of the word 'default' and the notion of 'male comfort' bears more analysis. Audre Lorde (1984) underscores the White, male, slim, young, financially stable, heterosexual Christian body as the 'mythical norm' and argues that the myth acts as the normative, regulatory, and aspirational category (Butler, 2007; Rubin, 2017). Others have argued (Rail & Jette, 2015; LaMarre et al, 2017) that White male racial framing (Feagin, 2020) (able-bodied, cisgender, heterosexual) are constructed as a 'normalising' standard or master category against which others are produced and judged (LaMarre et al, 2017). Thus, under patriarchal capitalism, maleness is afforded privilege and femaleness is subjugated,

subordinated, and suppressed (hooks, 2004). As previously mentioned, whilst patriarchy existed before capitalism, both systems are bound in a mutually reinforcing system and dialectal relationship that privileges production (Eisenstein, 2004) and where certain kinds of knowledge and knowledge production is valued, objectified, and commodified (Bernstein, 2001). This system produces and relies on biopedagogies, that are sometimes subtle subtle and (sometimes not so subtle) pervasive teachings on gender, body management and conduct, that work in, though, between and around bodies (Foucault, 1978; LaMarre et al, 2017). Charlie, Sam, and later Nathan too, all expressed a preference to perform masculinities, reflecting how under patriarchy, the male role is construed as ideal, privileged, an authority, dominator, father figure, and powerful, particularly as men disproportionally receive more rewards from patriarchy, chiefly because it relies upon this myth to be sustained. From an outsider or Other perspective, in the context of patriarchy, qualitatively maleness *is* relatively more comfortable.

However, whilst Indie, Charlie, and Sam construct masculinity as preferable to femininity, there is a lack in the possibility of masculinity feeling fully comfortable. The subscription to masculinity as Indie says, is constructed as 'frustrating' because it 'feels like the default' to position masculinity as dominant. The discursive distancing in their choice to live as male ('if I had to choose', 'I don't have a strong feeling of being a man or a woman') does not outrightly reject femininity or completely subscribe to masculinity, but instead (re)configures gender to (re)negotiate selfhood. I argue that it is because gender *is* the construct that society produces to measure power and privilege, it is gender that *must* be (re)negotiated in the pursuit of a 'comfortable' selfhood. For example, Indie's excerpt ("interesting and frustrating") implies a curiosity towards the construct of masculinity as "default". "Frustration" can be construed as a low-level anger and one that perhaps signifies a desire to access some of those "default" privileges afford to people assigned male at birth or who are masculine presenting. It might also be construed as frustration that people assigned female are not afforded those privileges. This is, I argue, how social scripts become incorporated into the self, to produce an interior 'felt sense' of dis/un/embodiment, disempowerment, and disconnection.

The 'comfort' of living as male is therefore constructed not without conflict nor blind to the violence of patriarchy, but as a (re)negotiation or (re)configuration of identity through the expression of masculine qualities associated with comfort. In the absence of anarchy negotiating comfort and safety within a violent system of (gendered, racialised) domination is a matter of creativity and human spirit. Jack Halberstam says, 'every now and then it

[trans/femme masculinity] represent the healthful alternative to what are considered the histrionic of conventional femininities' (1998, p.9). I analyse these excerpts then, not as a reactionary resistance to patriarchal masculinity, for this serves to reproduce it as the defining standard - the kiln in which everything must be forged. Whilst the consequences of patriarchy are real, I argue that once made explicit, they must also be made experiential, and then relational. After all, power corrupts.

In naming the privileges and rewards afforded to men within patriarchy, Sam says (when on testosterone), 'I can take up more space' whereas in the previous chapter Sam said that when presenting as female, they would try to take up as little space as possible. I construe this to broadly mean occupying more physical space, expression, being heard or being seen without risk, and read it as part of the wider discourses of masculinity that symbolise power to control spaces such as the street and playgrounds, authority over institutions such as family, medicine, and near total control over coercive institutions and their means of violence (weapons, military training) (Connell, 2020). To take up space is construed as signifying as the opportunity to be taken seriously, and to enjoy the entitlement to take up space – in a boardroom, conversation, meeting, relationship etc. It can also be construed to mean it is safe to be seen. To be perceived as a man means statistically you are relatively free from the threat of rape and serious domestic violence (Connell, 2020). Taking up space is also a fundamental characteristic of hegemonic masculinity, that dominates, competes, and shows aggression (Anderson, 2007; Connell, 2020).

Taking up space can also be construed as feeling comfortable having a (larger) body or appetite. Tischner (2013) found in her analysis, that her participants construed fatness in men as more acceptable than in women, and that being judged on body size was just one aspect of masculinity, whereas for women it defines their entire identity and value. This is reflected in Helen Malson's analysis (1998) that masculinity is more easily defined 'independently of physical appearance' than femininity (p.106). In this, performing masculinity can be seen as evading hyper-visibility, objectification and even sexualisation. Taking up space can be constituted as taking up a gender neutralised or (more) masculine identity (for people AFAB) in that the destruction of the female scripted body erases or obscures the female identity that is problematised within society (Malson, 1998) thus producing a bodily self that can perform, access and 'feel' more expansive. Taking up space and/or finding comfort can also be grounded in media discourses of the bodily female that produces images of women's bodies as decapitated, dehumanised, and fragmented (see

https://headlesswomenofhollywood.com/). Sam and Luke talked more about the conflicts of favouring masculinity:

> *Sam*: when I'm kind of trying to kind of take up masculine space, I feel, I feel like that's more of a conflict there because…I still value these things that people kind of see as kind of feminine, and I sort of don't see it as a, as a weakness in a way more of like a kind of strength to kind of be kind of vulnerable and, and kind of emotional. And that kind of conflicts with kind of masculinity. And so for me, it's, it's still this kind of binary of like, men and women. I think I kind of value things like kind of vulnerability, and kind of things that are maybe stereotypically seen as kind of feminine…men are meant to be kind of tough…to be masculine, you have to be, you know, not emotional

> *Luke*: I like having the aligned power privilege of other, the other men get in society, but it's terrible that we have that in the first place and actually I don't like that and I don't want to be want to be associated with that, and so it's this constant struggle…Cis men tend to stereotypically have all the power and privilege and they get taken seriously and we've got cis females next…now I have more power than what I started with because I'm perceived in that way…people wouldn't know I'm trans

Sam describes how stereotypical masculinity demands that men be 'tough', 'not emotional'. Sam also said they value the stereotypically feminine qualities, constructed as vulnerability and emotionality, but that these "conflict" with masculinity. Rather than being an essential quality of masculinity and men, it is the discourses of patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity constitute and regulate masculinity and male bodies to be strong, powerful, and dominating (Bates, 2016, 2018; Messerschmidt& Messner, 2018; Connell, 2020) and produce emotion as a typically feminine quality. This is also reproduced by the archetype of the 'dark brooding male' who is emotionally mute and rewarded accordingly. hooks (2004) writes, that the first act of violence that patriarchy demands of males is that they undertake acts of psychic self-mutilation and kill off the emotional parts of themselves. This might account for why almost two-thirds of deaths from suicide worldwide are by men (Dattani, Rodés-Guirao, Ritchie, Roser, Ortiz-Ospina, 2023). Luke explicitly says he likes 'having the aligned power and privilege…men get in society but it's terrible that we have that in the first place'.

"Terrible" can be construed as a reflection of the explicit violence within patriarchal society that narrows the options of safety and comfort for anyone not able to access the privileges of those deemed acceptable (White, male, able-bodied, cisheterosexual, financially stable etc). The process of negotiating gender identity is constituted as a 'struggle' in aspiring to the power and privilege afforded to him within a system that values masculinity and diminishes femininity (Malson, 1999).

Finn Mackay argues, (like Butler, 1990) there is no original gender, we do gender because we are schooled into it (2021). This undergirds my analysis in that Luke construes the performance of masculinity not as a wish to 'be' a man, but to (re)negotiate power. This is *because* gender is produced by the colonial gender binary as the foundational component of both domination and oppression that it serves as the device for repositioning oneself along the axes of power and oppression. This of course, is dependent upon on certain technologies and practices (Foucault, 1984) to rescript the body, and to be 'read' as masculine, and thus, worthy of masculine privileges *and* able to construct an interiority that 'feels' aligned to a selfhood that *is* self-determined and agentic. Luke and Sam both describe negotiating their identities within the existing framework of binary gender and construct this as an ongoing process of 'constant struggle' and negotiation – ('when I'm trying to…take up masculine space').

Like Indie earlier, Sam, and Luke articulate process of becoming that is confined by the existing binary gender system - ('it's still this…binary'). The negotiation or hybridising (Bridges & Pascoe, 202014) of the typically masculine/feminine qualities can be construed as a conscious resistance of the binary system. These are sometimes called 'protest masculinities' (Connell, 2004). For many trans people though, gender switching can be seen as a triumph over the flesh (Connell, 2009) where the body is both a product of and an active means of subverting or co-opting power. It can also be seen as a co-opting of patriarchal power, and in the same sense one could argue any woman who cuts her hair short, or wears trousers is co-opting power.

Discursive productions of masculinity as unconstrained, 'normal' and a signifier of credibility

Nathan describes being jealous of how his (male) cousins could enjoy the freedom of 'running round with their tops off' and wanting to be perceived as a 'nice normal bloke'.

> Nathan: my stepdad, for example, I used to like spend my mornings on a weekend with him…when I pictured myself growing up, that's what I want it to look like, that was the, like ideal in my head… my male cousins as well, like that's…how I felt that I should be looking. So seeing them grow into their bodies I was like, very jealous… I was like, Why? Why did they get to have you know, bodies like that? Why do they get to run around with their tops off and, and you know, have short hair…I know that identity isn't about what you look like, I know that that's expression. But I also know that I feel male, to my very core…I want to express my gender in a typically masculine way…That's how I feel comfortable. I want to wear boring men's clothes, and I want to have a boring, short back and sides. Like, I want stubble. And I want to be a little bit muscly not overly so. But all of those things that you see, just you could see any guy walking down the street and you just look at him and just think seems like a nice, normal, bloke. Like that's just what I want to be like.

Nathan said, 'I was jealous…why do they get to run around with their tops off…have short hair…I feel male…that's how I feel comfortable'. Again, like Charlie and Sam said, masculinity is construed as comfortable, but additionally it is constructed as evading the violence of the predatory male gaze, particularly as Nathan said the boys had "their tops off". This articulates the culpability that is weighted onto women in the event of a gender-based attack, and how women are often scrutinised and blamed for the attack by their choice of clothing or showing too much flesh (Taylor, 2020) (see chapter three, appendix a, for more on victim blaming and female visibility). Men, conversely, are often constructed as being at the mercy of a predatory "natural" sex drive, that constructs sexual access to women as a 'natural' right, or biological entitlement. One such trope is the colloquial 'blue balls' syndrome, that suggests a man has not ejaculated recently and thus, is in physical need of sex.

Boyhood is construed as safe or comfortable under surveillance and it is through the possibility of surveillance and the normalising gaze that one might be constituted as a (disciplined) individual (Malson, 1998). Whilst femininity and 'woman' are constituted as docile and passive, objectified and powerless, masculinity and 'men' are rendered unconstrained, active, normal (García-Favaro & Gill, 2016). Foucault (1977) described an 'economy of visibility' that places individuals in a field of surveillance, both producing and controlling the individual and Nathan's accounts constitutes surveillance of the man as less painful or harmful than surveillance of the woman. Whilst Nathan does not explicitly say that

he enjoys the freedom from the kind of surveillance that girls and women are subjected to, surveillance (and that living socially as a man might offer), he says 'I want to express my gender in a typically masculine way…that's how I feel comfortable'. He describes his masculine aspirations to be 'typically masculine', to be a 'nice normal bloke' who is moderately stubbled and muscled. This reflects the relative safety afforded to men under patriarchy and serves to negotiate on how to access these benefits through technologies of the self (Foucault, 1984) and through the destruction of the female bodily identity (Malson & Ussher, 2010). By assuming a typically masculine appearance, Nathan (re)configures how he might be perceived. Luke commented directly on drinking beer as 'the man thing to do':

> *Luke*: when I came out I changed my name on Facebook…I had, like, to have a beer beforehand, which is weird cos I never drink beer. So I thought I was definitely doing that as like a "here's the man thing to do before you go and out it out, so well I'll have a bottle of beer, I can do this!" Which is weird isn't it? Like I never drink beer!

The comment of 'normal bloke' and Luke's reference to beer can also be read as part of the wider discourses of 'normal bloke' that regulate and discipline traditional masculinity, and associate's men and masculinity with a narrow range of consumer products (cars, heterosexual pornography) and interests (sports, gambling, drinking, smoking) (García-Favaro & Gill, 2016). By the narrowing of men's interests, patriarchy confines men to the performance of hegemonic masculinity by coding other more emotionally expressive pursuits, as feminised, gay, subversive, or Other (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014). Masculinity, like femininity, has its own hierarchy, that is performed and experienced at various intersections of power and privilege. This speaks to the previously mentioned 'master category' construction of masculinity and relates back to Indie's comments on masculinity being the 'default' setting that allows for surveillance to be reconfigured. Nathan offers a constellation of qualities for the 'typically masculine' - 'boring men's clothes…boring, short back and sides...stubble…little bit muscly…nice, normal, bloke'. Whilst a slender body is the socially constructed beauty ideal for women (Bordo, 1993; Malson, 1998), a 'big but lean body' is often intentionally valued as a signifier of ideal masculinity (Tischner, 2013). This also relates to the wider discourse on gender roles and of family life, where the man is constructed as having to be a strong provider and protector (Bordo, 1993; Tischner, 2013) and the embodiment of masculinity as being inherently one of physicality and movement (Connell,

2020). Nathan offer's the words 'nice, normal' positions this 'typical' man as unthreatening, not violent, or aggressive, as if to make explicit the reluctance to co-opt fully the dominance of hegemonic masculinity.

Nathan said, 'I feel male, to my very core' that reflects Luke's comment – ("my innate feeling of being a boy"). Luke said he identified with male peers and was more relaxed as a male. This produces a male identity as interior, integral, and identity as a 'felt sense'. However, it is the construction of a male exterior, scripted upon the body that reifies masculinity as an identity.

> *Luke*: my innate feeling of being a boy was looking at male peers and identifying with them in interests and well, what I wanted to play…I just walked more male and I was more relaxed like that.

Luke comments of 'what I wanted to play' echoes Sam's excerpt in the femininity analysis where they speak on the gender divide of activities in puberty, where girls are restricted from certain activities deemed only for boys. This can be grounded in wider discourses of women's sports. For example, women's football was very popular in the early twentieth century and there is evidence of women playing as far back as medieval history. However, in the early 1920's, there was a re-emergence of unsubstantiated theories that suggested football threatened women's health and morality (Shackles, 2014), and the FA banned all women's teams form playing, on the grounds that the game is "not fitted for females" (Williams, 2003). The first world cup was played in 1930, yet it wasn't until 1991 that women were allowed to take part and this year's winners prize fund for women is £24 million whereas for men it is £315 million (Zeen, 2023). For many girls and women, the penalisation for playing 'boys' games' is severe. bell hooks (2004) wrote about her experience of being beaten by her father because she insisted on playing marbles despite being told "that it was a boy's game":

> "He beat me and he beat me…Our family sat spellbound, rapt before the pornography of patriarchal violence…Mama came into the bedroom to soothe the pain, telling me in her soft southern voice, "I tried to warn you. You need to accept that you are just a little girl and girls can't do what boys do." In service to patriarchy her task was to reinforce that Dad had done the right thing by putting me in my place, by restoring the natural social order.

Of course, globally, the consequences for women who betray the patriarchal order can be actual death - honour killings, child brides, female genital mutilation, and death though lack of access to abortion. Inarguably lack of access to education for girls and women contributes to early death. These culturally specific discourses are grounded in patriarchal inequality, that constitute women's lives and deaths (Malson & Ussher, 2010). Luke spoke about the young male body with nostalgia:

> *Simone:* talk to me more about the meanings of the female body versus the meanings of the male body? *Luke*: Yeah, I felt that being thin was being male and so, I also think it – and this is a bit more realisation as we're talking about it - I think it gave me back that three-year-old boy…I feel really emotional. I never really thought about it before. Yeah, that like that 3 yr old boy that didn't know anything about the pressures of how society and how other people are going to view you and say no, you're not this thing. I have so many pictures of me when I was little just shorts on no top running around like I'm really quite small build…I was completely oblivious, and unaware. Happy Child, none of these constraints on me. Yeah, the thin body was me, as that person and me as masculine…when I transitioned…I just walked more male. And I was more relaxed like that…I don't know if that's like a modelling thing, the men around us…I know that I take a lot of my dad's posture - the way I sit, the way I eat, the way I lean on the table. When I talk, the way I hug my partner, it's like an imitation of how he moves. It's just so strange because it's so subconscious. Just when you bring it into conscious talk it's just a bit mind blowing.

Luke construes boyhood with the thin body and that relates to his childhood, a time that he was 'oblivious and unaware' about life's pressures, relating to 'how other people view you'. The body of this reverie is constructed as masculine, 'the thin body was me, as that person and me as masculine' giving us a sense that what is able to be accessed in youth via a genderless identity, has been lost to the painful awareness of being feminine, and not being masculine; of being oppressed, self-conscious, tense and Othered: 'that 3 year old boy that didn't know anything about the pressures of how society and how other people are going to view you and say no, you're not this thing'. I was particularly affected by this, thinking about the earliest memories of my own awareness of my female bodyliness and sexuality as a 9-

year-old child and what it cost me to be perceived as female, by my own father. It is a common theme of femininity, as read in this poem:

> The first day I was a girl was in my backyard with my brother picking up brush to burn in a pile and my dad said I had to put a shirt on that summer even though it was hot and my brother was shirtless and I was six or seven and helping clean up the backyard and it was a wooded lot down a long gravel drive and there was nobody to see it but I was a girl in that heat and always would be.

('Girlhood', Stevie Edwards, 2017)

This illustrates how the sexed and gendered body comes into existence and is seen to bear meaning (Butler, 2007). Like Nathan, Luke spoke wistfully about childhood experiences of being free to be topless without fears of surveillance. Halberstam (1998) argues that tomboyism tends to be associated with a 'natural' desire for greater freedoms enjoyed by boys that is often read as a sign of greater self-determination and independence. This is reflected in the excerpts, particularly Arlo's:

> *Arlo*: I was not allowed to cut my hair at all like growing up and it had to be extremely long…in college…I was like, I want a super masculine cut, and I was still presenting female at this time…my hair was down to my waist and she {the friend} just cut it all off… It was amazing… But it was at that point...I have agency over my body…that small thing of cutting your hair, I feel like has, it's just such like an emblematic experience because it's like, so many mothers are very much very protective of, of their children's hair for some reason for especially their daughter's hair and like that sort of moment was yeah, was necessary.

Arlo describes cutting his hair as an act of self-determination 'I have agency over my body'. This relates to comments from the previous chapter about being forced from a carefree existence into a femininity that feels under threat, objectified, and as Riley wrote 'now maddeningly, I'm pushed into this female gender' (1988. p.96). The death of the 'happy child' is marked by the emergence of femininity, thus the visibility of femininity rings the bell that heralds the beginning of non-consensual servitude to the patriarchal order. Luke says that when he transitioned, he 'walked more male and was more relaxed like that' and Arlo

said it was an ‘emblematic experience’ constructing the performance of masculinity to reclaim some of that lost ease, lost power, and to distance from the appearance-based constraints of femininity (‘so many mothers are…protective of, of their children's hair…especially their daughter’s’). hooks (2004) argues that patriarchy is a kind of madness that indoctrinates all into being of service – mothers placing pressure onto their daughters to maintain gendered appearance ideals of long hair is just one way that this might occur.

Luke and Nathan’s comments broadly reflect hegemonic masculinity, the ‘poster boy of patriarchy’ (Mackay, 2021) represented via discourses of role, perspective, behaviour, or personal characteristic (Ricciardelli et al, 2010) that privileges freedom in organisational power, income, freedom from domestic labour (Connell, 2020) caring duties, and reproductive and sexual freedom. Hegemonic masculinity discourses shift over time, but generally whenever these discourses are challenged, a new hegemonic form emerges, and it becomes more powerful due to its ability to adapt and resist change (Connell & Wood, 2005). It is an ideal that remains unrealisable for most cis gendered men (Connell, 2005) and further complicated at the intersections of trans or nonbinary genders. This analysis recognises the heterogeneity within masculinities whilst addressing the patriarchy as a complex governing structure, and whilst it would be an oversimplification to say that people who transition female to male (ftm) do so solely to the aspiration of mobility within gender hierarchy, there *are* qualitatively different experiences to be had when presenting as male or female. For example, in the following excerpt, rather that construct masculinity as freedom from the constraints of the male gaze, Bill seems to be co-opting the patriarchal power available to him, when he is behaving as “one of the guys”:

> Bill: we would just rip back and forth like, typical, like, male locker room talk. So I was like, hey, do you see so and so's bra sticking out today? Or thong sticking out today or whatever? When I was up on the up on like, on the catwalk, being like, oh, yeah, the shirt that [inaudible] was wearing? You could see straight down her shirt today or whatever…Yeah, it was like locker room talk. And I was I was honestly just seen as one of the guys like, they didn't even, a lot of them didn't even really think of me as female necessarily.

An interesting aspect of Bill’s description of masculinity is how casual the sexism and sexually objectifying behaviour is discursively constituted around the trope of being ‘one of the guys’ and ‘locker room talk’. Bill asserts his evasion of the gaze ‘a lot of them didn't even

really think of me as female'. The phrase 'locker room talk' was deployed by Donald Trump in his defence of a leaked videotape in where he is heard saying about women: 'Grab 'em by the pussy. You can do anything' (Trump, 2005 - NYtimes 2016). The trope of masculinity involving 'lad culture' or rape culture (Gavey, 2019) is a group mentality articulated through activities such as sport and heavy alcohol consumption (the locker room being a sporting reference) characterised by sexist and homophobic banter (Phipps et al, 2018). Rape culture refers to a set of cultural beliefs constructed around the support of men's violence against women, including the idea that violence is naturally masculine (alpha/dominance theory that has been since debunked widely) that men are active, women passive and that men are entitled to sexual intercourse. More recently, Andrew Tate, self-proclaimed misogynist, and media influencer (Radford, 2023) has over 3.5 million followers on Twitter and has said that 'women should bear responsibility for being sexually assaulted' and 'there is no such thing as an independent female'. Many of Tate's followers identify as incels (an online subculture of men who define themselves as unable to get a sexual partner, associated with hostile views towards women) and many of his fans are young, lonely and 'involuntarily celibate' men. This dominant of masculinity is enacted in myriad ways - Luke's excerpt describes the power imbalance between genders and the qualitatively different ways one might be perceived and treated:

> *Luke*: Cis men…they get taken seriously and we've got cis females next, and trans is just this much further down the line…I started at second pegging being seen as a female and then kind of moved into a trans space and just that whole experience of losing that kind of power um was I mean, I don't think you can kind of be prepared for that it was quite shocking…You could be treated completely differently…Simone: How? *Luke*: And well, you're taken more seriously. Men kind of see you, as, other men, I'm assuming cismen, see you as equal.

Not only does Luke construct (cis) men as having 'all the power and privilege' but he says they get taken seriously. Masculinity is constructed as serious, and it is associated with serious qualities such as honour, loyalty, courage, and strength (Mackay, 2021). Masculinity is a serious matter, defined against a femininity that is culturally constructed as silly, frivolous, and vain, whether performed in a female or male sexed body (Mackay, 2021). Luke says that when passing as male he experiences equal treatment by other men, presumably who in viewing him as cisgendered, see him as serious, and thus deserving of the respect that a cisgendered man might be entitled. Luke's excerpt speaks to a common experience for

people in a non-male sexed body, of being dismissed or seen as inferior by men. In my own experience recently at a garage, I had to despatch a male companion to obtain information about my vehicle because I had been casually dismissed by the male mechanic, as too simple (code - female) to understand the problem. These are the events of everyday sexism (Bates, 2018) that serve to discursively reproduce gender inequalities and (re)produce hegemonic masculine pluralities Connell, 2020) as the baseline, equal to, greater than but never less than other genders and the 'master category' (Warner, 2008; Rinaldi, Rice, Kotow, & Lind, 2020).

Discursive productions of the masculine body as fit, muscled and powerful

Almost all participants stated the importance of exercise, specifically gym-based resistance training, in cultivating a more masculine presenting body shape. The masculine body was constructed as 'fit', "tight" and muscular. These constructions relate to the wider hegemonic and cisheterosexual discourses around masculine appearance ideals that are associated with muscles and physical fitness:

> *Nathan*: My step dad, he's just a typical masculine looking guy, with muscles…that was like, how I wanted to look… slightly muscular, can tell they sometimes go to the gym, they're not obsessed with it…I've semi achieved that…I'm starting to see the faintest outline of a pec… it makes me happy…I have days where I bloated, or I'm feeling flabby round the sides where my love handles are, and I'm like that doesn't look masculine having flabby love handles, that's when it gets me down again…I wake up and I'm feeling really good and I'm feeling tight

The last three decades have seen the physically fit body become the ideal and the media portrayal of male body image ideals have become increasingly more muscular for both men and women. Male models in the media have become larger and leaner (Pope, Olivardia, Gruber & Borowiecki, 1999) and male actions figures have portrayed larger, more muscular body proportions (Leit, Pope & Gray, 2001). I would argue these muscled bodies are impossible to attain without the use of anabolic steroids and are impossible to sustain, as many actors admit (Gallagher, 2022). Yet the promotion of these images put continued appearance pressures on men and people who identity as masculine or male. Physical fitness products and services also constitute a multi-billion-dollar industry in western societies and promotes naturalistic understandings of the technologies of fitness that are (mostly) accepted as 'scientifically' informed way to optimise health, productivity, longevity, and happiness

(Pronger, 2002). The ‘science’ that undergirds these discourses is of course, a patriarchally founded positivism (Pronger, 2002) that subtly (and not so subtly) (re)produces, constitutes, and regulates the body as a ‘thing’ (Pronger, 2002) that signifies the location of the individual along axes of gender and class (ideologies). These neoliberal discourses that name the body as ‘bio-mechanical’ or ‘functional’ also (re)produce dichotomous Cartesian discourses of the body as ‘fit/unfit’ ‘normal/abnormal’ (LaMarre, Rice, Jankowski, 2017). In this, the (muscular) body is politicised, and a manifestation of multiple scripts and discourses that produce the (privileged) body as economically productive, and a device to undergird a body fascist agenda (Pronger 2002).

That said, transgender people usually wish to be taken seriously and perceived as credible members of the gender class to which they feel most aligned with (Green, 2006) as illustrated by Sam and Luke:

> *Sam*: I think there probably is still some kind of like, I guess, maybe some like kind of heteronormativity…to be masculine is to kind of be muscle, muscular…even though I kind of reject that…I think that's still kind of there in my head. Because I exist in this kind of heteronormative world…*Simone*: What are you hoping that testosterone will do for you? *Sam*: I hope that it will change the way that people see me. So even when I feel like I look masculine or androgynous and then I got out into the world and realise that what I think I look like is completely different to what everyone else thinks I look like and everyone still just sees me as my gender assigned at birth. So yeah, it's - if I have just created some distance between my gender assigned at birth, and like, so, yeah, so there's like a bit of distance there. And then I guess, in terms of like, physicality…fat distribution…I like kind of working out…trying to build like more muscle.

> *Luke*: I do feel happier when I am smaller but then I also want to be bigger up top so I'm completely unknowingly conforming to that male ideal look…when I have been training and I tend to, my muscle gain is quite - like if I do everyday, I gain muscle and it stays – I have to do it all the time. If I've missed a couple of weeks and you can really notice difference…when I’ve been on it sort of five days a week or four weeks running and my food choices been good generally, I get those comments…I get that positive reinforcement from other people "oh you look good, I

> see your shoulders have got really big and you look really fit in that top ” cos my shoulders are up here and my chest is like ‘boom’

Nathan, Sam, and Luke all construe the ideal masculine body as having a muscular physique ‘he’s just a typical masculine looking guy, with muscles’ and ‘to be masculine is to…be muscular’. The stereotypical masculine body ideal of traditional or hegemonic masculinity signifies dominance, strength, and control, particularly as boys are socialised early that being ‘wimpy’ or ‘weedy’ is associated with being feminine or weak. Boys learn that to be considered truly ‘manly’ they must command respect, dominate women and be tough (hooks, 2004). Muscles therefore represent the continued reproduction of selfhood and the affirming of a masculine identity. The drive for muscles is reinforced positively by comments received from others ‘I get that positive reinforcement from other people’ that serves to reproduce the ideal and reinforce the desire to cultivate a ‘manly’ muscular body. This drive for muscle is not exclusive to masculinity though, as postfeminist biopedagogies around ideal bodies for both men and women promote fitness and muscle building (Camacho-Miñano et al, 2019). Of course, these are always evolving.

In this it is easier to say what masculinity is not, rather than what it is. Masculinity is not ‘flabby…bloated…love handles’ or ‘fat’ or small. Masculinity takes up space ‘my shoulders are up here, and my chest is like ‘boom’’ articulating the explosive, expansive and active qualities associated with a muscly masculine body. Some trans men do not wish to present as queer or odd but wish to be seen as the men they are, (Mackay, 2021) and in this the participants are gender conforming, just not to the gender they were assigned at birth. All but one of the participants did not want to be perceived as female, four wanted to be perceived as muscular, fit men, and the remaining three androgynous with a preference for ‘more’ masculine than feminine presentation. Femininity was considered a performance relying on clothing, and make-up, whereas masculinity depended upon bodily changes of weight and shape that necessitates being lean, with no visible or felt weight on the hips, bum, breasts, and stomach. The ‘shape’ of masculinity then, is constructed of straight lines, whereas the ‘shape’ of femininity is one of curves.

Co-opting qualities, style or performances from masculinities obscures symbolic and social boundaries or expectations relating to femininity and expands upon how an individual might experience or relate to themselves as weak, uncomfortable, restricted, threatened, or vulnerable versus powerful, safe, and expansive. However, whether this further embeds the idea of male privilege and normative masculinity or disrupts/reconfigures the power relations

remains open. These accounts reflect the research that argues like women, men are increasingly being held responsible for and are defined by the appearance of their body (Shilling, 1993; Featherstone, 2010). Over the last couple of decades there has been a sharp rise in the visibility of men's bodies in the media and popular culture (Gill et al, 2005). Some scholars say that the male body has become the object of the gaze rather than exclusively the bearer of the look and that they have gone from near invisibility to hypervisibility (Gill et al, 2005). The gaze is significant for our contributors who all seek to manage it in the ways they speak about how they are perceived by others, for example when Sam says, 'I am hoping it will change the way that people see me'. This also speaks to how men's and women's bodies are construed qualitatively differently, if we recall how the chest area when sexed as female was discursively produced in negative terms in the previous chapter but when talking about the masculine body Luke says positively 'my chest is like boom!'. The female chest is passive, sexualised, and disembodied, but the male chest is integrated and active.

Managing the gaze is a theme for the participants whether presenting and sexed as female, male, or nonbinary. The dilemma of visibility for the participants is complicated, because for Nathan, Sam, and Luke, the trans or masculine body has the dual task of not just performing a credible version of masculinity in and of itself, but of curating an identity that effectively distances the gender assigned at birth (Duffy et al, 2016; Jones et al, 2016; Coelho, 2019; Nowaskie et al, 2021). Still though, the muscular body is constructed as the 'male ideal' that we see represented in popular culture, and like the female body it is multiply constituted (Martino, 1995). Sam queried heteronormativity as the framework for gendered body ideals, and certainly much research argues that regimes of heterosexuality (Wittig, 1992; Tudor, 2019)) or the 'heterosexual matrix (Butler, 2007) play an essential role in defining, stabilising, and reproducing gender. Working out or muscle building may also be construed to reproduce the body as an ongoing and unfinished project of masculinity, that reinforced by consumerism, is charged with the task of maintaining a coherent and credible sense of self-identity through the attention to the body's surface and to be in control. 'To be a man means to be at the controls and at all times to feel yourself in control' (Susan Faludi in hooks, 2004, p.31).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored how the participants in this study multiply produced masculinity as an ensemble of culturally controlling images (Collins, 2000) and hegemonic masculine attitudes, behaviours, occupations, body languages and speech. This assemblage of

characteristics constructed an expression of masculinity that can be grounded in multiple discourses – (Cartesian dualism, science, health, fitness, patriarchy, media) that constitutes and regulates (hegemonic) masculinity as powerful, entitled, serious, credible, dominant, unconstrained, in-control, emotionally shut down, fit, muscular, and productive. All the participants said (whether implied or explicit) that expressions of masculinity were contingent upon the cultural understandings of maleness. In this respect though, for many participants, masculinity was not exclusively contingent upon having or cultivating a male body or a penis, that (unlike femininity – see chapter three, appendix a) would suggest that masculinity is not restricted to the territory of the body. There were specific bodily constructions though, that relate to the erasure of typically feminine proportions (like curved hips) and muscle building. This can be construed as produced by the construction of masculinity as entitled to 'taking up more space'. This is achieved through technologies or practices, such as exercise and diet that produced embodiments or a 'felt sense' of masculinity through scripting the body's exterior. The masculinities in this study are trans masculinities, in that they draw from the hegemonic controlling image (Collins, 2000), some of which are co-opted or hybridised to (re)negotiate on power and privilege. What I mean by that more plainly is, that the participants in this study felt safer, felt less under male sexual surveillance, were treated better, and could negotiate socially with more comfort when they embodied or performed typically masculine qualities and/or distanced themselves from femininity. All participants had complicated relationships with masculinity and spoke to conflicts and tensons arising from the disparities of power held within the binary. In this, it can be construed that whilst constructions of masculinity are inherently violent and problematic, they are both produced by the colonial two-gender binary system and the means to maintains it. For the participants in this study, masculinity was a signification of positive aspects of their selfhood (such as agency, self-determination, confidence) that could be expressed more sufficiently by co-opting controlling images (Collins, 2000) of masculinities – not because of any *essentially* masculine qualities, but because of the ways they are constructed. The 'problem' then, I argue, is not femininity or masculinity, but the colonial two-gender binary system that constructs female as inferior and conditions men (and women) to see maleness and masculinity and not feminine.

Chapter three

Discursive productions of eating dis/orders

STORIES OF FOOD AND BODY, LOVE, HATE AND AMBIVALENCE

The discursive construction of e/ds

In other chapters of analysis (see appendices a and b) I discuss how bodies and subjectivities that are gendered as female are constructed as chaotic, eruptive, round, vulnerable, fat, fragmented and weak, and the (traditionally) male gendered body and subjectivities are constructed as strong, integrated, serious, powerful, credible, muscular, and 'normal'. In chapter three (appendix a) the participants spoke of how being gendered as female was a negative experience and discursively implicated this in their desires to lose weight and put distance between the self and the feminine identity. In chapter four (see appendix b), participants discursively constructed masculinity as relatively less painful. This chapter discusses how e/ds are multiply constituted primarily within discourses of Cartesian dualism, individualism and biopedagogies (Malson, Clarke & Finn, 2008; Rice, 2015), and that e/d's, rather than being easily captured or categorised, reflect socially constituted discursive dilemmas. Like other critical feminist research, this chapter challenges the division between people who have and do not have e/ds, and instead position e/ds on a continuum in both the pursuit and disavowal of normative femininity (Wolf, 1991; Bordo, 1993; Malson, 1998; Saukko, 2008). Some practices of e/ds in this chapter, can also be positioned on a continuum in the pursuit of 'ideal' masculinity (Bordo, 2000, Thapliyal et al, 2018) and 'normative' health (Rice, 2015). In this, there are similarities with how participants constructed trans and nonbinary genders as becoming. I demonstrate within this analysis that e/ds are expressive of a multiplicity of concerns produced by the politico-socio-economic dynamics of post-capitalist Western culture (Malson, 1998; Bordo, 1993; Eckerman, 2009; Rice, 2009, 2015).

The discursive production of ed/s as evading or managing patriarchal gender violence

As demonstrated in previous chapters, cultural prescriptions about the 'ideal' body function in service of the patriarchal regulation and re-production of bodies (see Henriques et al, 1984) with feminine bodies as fragmented, docile, and passive (Malson, 1999; Tischner, 2013) and masculine bodies as stable, dominant, and active (hooks, 2004). This can be read

in the ways that participants constructed the emergence of puberty with their awareness of femininity, and with the onset of body management and self-surveillance practices:

> Luke: I think it {puberty} is everything to do with it {restriction} because you get below a certain weight and then you don't have periods anymore and the only thing that can stop that happening apart from that is to take hormones...I just didn't understand what was going on in my body...I just couldn't identify with it. It was just a really out of control time, I was really lost.

> Danni: I did start puberty right around then {when anorexia began}, I got my period at 11, and I just, ballooned isn't the right word (laughing). But I pretty much like, (.) my chest was growing, my hips were growing, I was getting a very, like, womanly kind of shape to me, when all of my friends were still little stick figures (laughing)...I was just generally very uncomfortable (..) with just all these things happening.

The body is constructed here as 'out of control' and 'uncomfortable', and female puberty as an 'out of control time' associated with weight, growth, and embodiment, reflecting discourses of Cartesian dualism that produced the body as 'uncontrolled and threatening and alien to the disembodied subject position of mind/self' (Malson, 1998, p.121). This reflects analyses in chapter 3 (see appendix a). The female body is described as a collection of parts, which Danni implies are a signifier of unwanted femininity. This reflects how female puberty is discursively constructed as a spectacle, and a time where women typically begin to see their bodies as a measure of womanhood (Rice, 2014). This can also be grounded in wider patriarchal discourses that constitute and regulate the female body in puberty as Other (Tischner, 2013; Belsky, 2016). Whilst women's bodies are often constituted as 'fragmented collections of often faulty body parts' (Tischner, 2013, p.114) women are simultaneously construed and defined entirely by their bodies (Malson, 1998).

Luke's use of the word 'lost' may be construed as a metaphor for a loss of connection to the (integrated) body or a loss of embodiment due to the loss of a safe connection to the body (Malson, 1998, p.121; Orbach, 2006, p.201) that is now symbolic of a fragmented and unnavigable assemblage. Others have discussed how negative experiences in the realm of womanhood often overshadow the joys of embodiment (Rice, 2014) and later I discuss how Sam, Danni, Charlie, Bill, and Indie all talk about disconnection, dissociation, and

disembodiment. Luke's comment of feeling 'out of control' is relevant to the ways that e/d practices are later described as self-management or 'control' practices that function to reassert control over the self. Indie, Danni and Arlo, and how cultural discourses dictate a qualitatively different corporeal experience for women, that oftentimes interrupts bodily connectedness (Rice, 2014).

Danni used the word 'ballooned' that constructs the body as an object - a thing, suddenly inflating into a round 'womanly' shape. This is contrasted against the description of her friends as 'still little stick figures' - a phrase emblematic of childish scribbles, childhood, play, and fun. At the same time, it can also be construed as signifying grief that the prepubescent, non-feminine, non-eruptive, stable, thin body, and everything it facilitates, is forever lost. The body constructed as an Object can be multiply construed. It reflects for example, how patriarchal discourses condition the female body to be the passive bearer of the male gaze, to be surveillance and both valued and devalued on appearance, and to be sexualised and dominated (Bordo, 1992). It is through the possibility of surveillance, and the normalising gaze that one might be constituted as a (disciplined) and gendered individual (Malson, 1998). Others have described this surveillance as a device and product of 'everyday sexism' (Bates, 2018). Luke spoke about identifying as male, distancing himself from femininity and how this was implicated in his e/d:

> Luke: I think that {e/d} actually was like a real rejection of who I was for me, because having periods was not supposed to be happening to somebody who identified as a man or boy. And growing boobs...it's just not supposed to be happening. I really struggled with that, and I think the eating disorder was a lot to do with that.

For Luke and Danni, (female) puberty is constructed around discourses of uncertainty, discomfort, and eruption, which are mirrored in the wider cultural discourses around female puberty as eruptive, disruptive, and out-of-control (Malson, 1998; Ussher, 2006). Restriction is constructed as a practice to control or suppress female bodily processes and the female identity (Malson, 1998). This can be construed as also minimizing the risk of further gendered violence's. Restriction then, is discursively produced as a self-destructive, and self-(re)productive practice (Malson & Ussher, 1997). As Luke said '{puberty} is everything to do with it {restriction}' and Danni's association of puberty with 'balloon…chest…hips…growing…womanly shape…uncomfortable' articulates the

discursive conditions that problematise the female body and makes it the object of patriarchal oppression and hate, and the conditions that produces the urge to restrict food, and visible femininity. These restriction practices can be described as 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1984), through which the self/body is transformed within existing power relations. Restriction, therefore, can be multiply construed here as a rejection of the (female), Othered body (Malson & Ussher, 1997) that erupts and disrupts (Bordo, 1992) and as articulating that the body is both the object of resistance to power and the means by which power is disseminated (Grosz 1986). More fundamentally, it can be construed as a rejected of the patriarchal, colonial conditions that continually enact violence's upon Othered genders (non-White, non-hegemonic male).

All participants articulated a desire to distance themselves from being identified as female and from experiencing 'female' embodiments as negative. For example, Bill and Luke said they found it hard to 'care' when presenting as female:

> Bill: when I hit puberty, I do have PCOS, which does affect metabolism quite a bit…I started quickly gaining weight and getting heavier from then on pretty much…part of that was just I never cared [...] to moderate my, my eating. Because, like, once I was hitting puberty, it […] doesn't matter how much I watch what I eat or workout. […] I'm not going to look like what my ideal is, anyways, it's not possible for me to look like my ideal […] it was actually always more a male figure. [...] so I let myself emotionally, I let myself just eat...I would eat because I was bored. I would, because I was, you know, I would eat because I was upset.

> Nathan: bingeing definitely was like, something I did before {transition}…I just didn't care about my body at all, like a hate in my body. And eating made me feel better. So you know, getting fat, and being obese and whatever, didn't really care all that much. Like I didn't really want to be obese. But at the same time, I hated everything about my body. So what was what was one more thing to hate about it.

Bill and Nathan both say they were unable to 'care' about their female-identifying body. They construct care around discourses of body management and 'moderate' eating. This reference to 'moderation' relates to discourses within "anti-obesity" biopedagogies ("that is, normalising and moralising instructions for life") (Rice, 2015, 387) that are implicated in the

individualising of social issues and the responsibilisation of bodies, which associate's fatness with a lack of discipline or care (LaMarre e al, 2017). Women with 'large appetites' are also routinely constructed as problematic in these discourses (Temple Newhook et al, 2015). In an age of an 'obesity crisis' then, self 'care' discourses are associated with restraint, exercise, moral responsibility, and thinness (Temple Newhook et al, 2015). Bill said he 'never cared' because he would never 'look like my ideal…male figure' and Nathan said he had 'a hate in my body', similarly articulating the reluctance to 'care' for, rather than annihilate the (female) body.

Paradoxically, eating is also described as care, and as comforting or soothing 'I would eat because I was upset', and 'eating made me feel better'. In these excerpts the female gendered body corporeal is constructed as shameful and hated, and the 'I', or 'me' that symbolises a separate selfhood, is constructed as suffering and fragile and desperate to be realised. The 'I/me' symbolises perhaps, a self that is separate to the body corporeal - one that is only provisionally established, fragile, riddled with anxiety and 'in a constant struggle to survive' (Kalshed, 1996, p.97). I'/me' can be construed as a construction symbolic of a separate 'authentic self, as that Winnicott referred to as 'the true self' (1960). It is both the 'I' that suffers and the 'I' that initiates the neglect of the body, and so then, the paradoxical constructions represent a splitting of the 'self', and a splitting of the body/consciousness as per discourses of Cartesian dualism.

Bill's words above particularly, also signify a devaluing or rejection of emotion. Cartesian dualism dictates that the mind is privileged as superior, and is associated with masculinity, rationality, and objectivity, with the body associated with femininity and emotion (Henriques et al, 1984; Bordo, 1993; Malson, 2010; Willig, 2013; Tischner, 2013). Luke also refers explicitly to this:

> Luke: I'm not female in my head…But that waist and hip area I cannot label it male in my head. It's labelled terminally as female

This reflects the historical associations between masculinity and the mind, logic and reason and the associations of womanhood with the body, weakness, and emotionality (Malson & Ussher, 1996; Riley, Evans, Robson, 2019). It is interesting too that Luke chose the phrase "terminally female", that can be construed as a symbol of necrotic female body parts, slowly being starved of the energy required to survive, or be seen, named, and realised.

The discursive production of e/ds as self-discipline

The discursive construction of the female body and femininity as passive, fragmented and out of control can be located in discourses of Cartesian dualism (Bordo, 1993; Malson, 1998; Tischner, 2013) and patriarchy (hooks, 2004; Bates, 2018). This discourse also produces dualistic constructions of the gendered, body as thin/fat, good/bad, able/disabled, normal/abnormal:

> Charlie: I mean it's very difficult to navigate this world, for a person of size, you know and I don't want to make my life harder.

> Danni: I'm already disabled, I'm already queer, I can't be fat on top of that. And so it really is just kind of trying to fit that ideal, as much as you can, almost to the point where you're going so extreme with this one thing to make up for your so called flaws.

> Nathan: from the bingeing and stuff I used to be, I used to be obese. And now I'm at a healthy BMI. But like, I'm constantly afraid that I'm that, like, I'm constantly afraid if I go over on my calories, I'm gonna be overweight again, or obese again, or I'm gonna get back to being like that.

These excerpts can be multiply constituted in discourses of dualism and patriarchy, and in the concept of biopower, a term that Foucault (1978) used to describe the subtle and (not so subtle) diffuse power that demands individuals manage their own health. Such biopedagogies, (meaning subtle and diffuse messages) define which bodies have status and value, using binary and biomedical criteria like healthy/unhealthy, fit/unfit (Rice, 2015; LaMarre et al, 2017). Likewise, others have argued that normative health policy discourses have become anorexified, that is to say that the values and practices that have been characterized as 'anorexic' have paradoxically become increasingly indistinguishable from 'normal' values to the extent that, it might be argued, current normative health policy discourses of weight management have become anorexified" (Malson, Clarke & Finn, 2008, p.418). This can be read in how Nathan referenced 'BMI' to define his 'healthy' status and validate his fear that should he eat 'over on my calories' he'll be categorised as 'overweight or obese'. This speaks to the need and possibility to control the 'out of control' body with bodily surveillance and management techniques, such as monitoring calorie consumption

rather than on other measures of health, such as quality of relationships, affect and life experiences. Biopedagogies rely on normative, dominant, and unrealistic standards of the fit, healthy, and productive body (White, Western, able-bodied and masculine) (Rice, 2015; LaMarre et al, 2017; Rinaldi et al, 2020) which creates unfit, unproductive, unhealthy or 'abnormal' bodies, marked by gender, racism, disability and size difference (Rail & Jett, 2015). Further to this, fatmisia or fat hatred, present in multiple public sites such as the gym, public transport, and the clinic, was shown to be contingent and compounded by other bodily markers such as race, gender, gender identity, ability, and class, (Rinaldi et al, 2020). These serve to shape people's self-perception, and it becomes the lens through which bodies are appraised and valued. Other scholars have highlighted the problematic and contradictory nature of e/d prevention biopedagogies that intersect with 'anti-obesity' biopedagogies and instead propose 'body becoming pedagogies' (Rice, 2014, 2015) that honours body diversity.

Within these neoliberal discourses of 'healthism' that preach conformity to narrowly defined ideas of a 'healthy' body, people who cannot live up to the normative standards are marginalised at various intersection of identity, whether size, ability, and sexuality. Danni said: 'I'm already disabled, I'm already queer, I can't be fat', listing the multiple ways they transgress the culturally 'normal' (feminine, fit, flawless) body (Rice, 2009). Danni's e/d, in 'trying to fit that ideal' is described as an 'extreme' practice, that is discursively produced by the absence of alternate possibilities that lie outside, or more accurately in-between the dichotomies of fat/unfit, normal/abnormal, and thin/fit biopedagogies (Rice, 2015). Therefore, it can be construed that people who are interpellated as 'other' are both potentially more vulnerable to "anorexified" biopedagogies (Malson, Clarke & Finn, 2008), and are also the specific target audience. Gender is imbricated in this discourse in that it 're-produces patriarchal dichotomies of male/female, mind/body, controlled/uncontrolled' (Malson, 1998, p.136) and fatness is still very much associated with femininity and unfitness (Rice, 2015). To control the body therefore requires disconnection from the (female) body, and a dehumanisation via disintegration and splitting. The body and self are constructed as mutually exclusive - the body is produced as insufferable, rendered corporeal, fleshy, and 'obese' and the self-suffering, a spirit, or essence. In this, the extracts articulate a conflict in 'suffering the self'.

The discursive production of e/ds as dis/un/embodiment

Embodiment theory posits that 'internalised gender-based social discourses' (Piran & Cormier, 2005, p.556) can cause women to feel a 'disembodiment' that goes beyond a

dissatisfaction with one's body to a detachment (Piran & Teal, 2012, cited in Hussain et al, 2022). As the gendered (female) body becomes a metonym for fatness, pathology, threat, vulnerability, and eruption, it came as no surprise that many participants spoke of their disembodiment, disconnection, or dissociation:

> Sam: I have very little, I guess, embodiment kind of, below my shoulders, like I kind of experience everything kind of in my head…if someone says like, like, draw a picture of a body, and said, where are you? I'm just circling my head, and I wouldn't even look at kind of the rest of my body…the rest of me is just like, parts of me that function like to do certain things…I sometimes find it difficult to notice, kind of bodily sensations…whether I'm hungry, or if certain parts of me are cold, because I, I feel like I don't have that connection to that part of my body.

> Indie: when my appetite increased, that was really kind of triggering, and turned back into a pretty adversarial relationship with my body…I was in some pretty deep eating disorder behaviours…embodiment has always been hard for me

> Charlie: Being in the body, you know, being a body…I still have a lot of difficulty existing within my physical form and forcing myself to sit down in there, whereas I think it's much easier to float six feet behind myself

> Bill: I spent a nice chunk of high school, like, unable to unable to really figure out who I was because I was wearing such a strong mask, I didn't know who I was anymore. I was like, I don't know who I am anymore…I didn't even really identify myself as myself much…I never shed a tear like multiple years, ever allowed my, even my parents, like no one hugged me for multiple years, because I refuse to be touched…I was so disassociated from myself…I didn't let myself feel it at all

These accounts draw on discourses of Cartesian dualism, the idea of separating the body from the mind. Within these extracts, the body and appetite is produced as a threat at sensate and physical level: 'I sometimes find it difficult to notice, kind of bodily sensations', 'difficulty existing within my physical form' and 'I refuse to be touched' and 'I didn't let myself feel it at all'. The mind or psychic domain is produced as a safe realm to exist 'it's much easier to float six feet behind myself', 'I'm just circling my head' and thus, the mind or

psyche is split off from the threatening body. Psychoanalysis has long understood that splitting, fragmentation, dissociation, and idealisation are 'primitive' defenses that characterise trauma and sustain it (Kalsched, 1996). Defenses though, also perform a valuable function of defending or preserving an 'inviolable personal spirit at the core of an individual's true self'(Kalsched, 1996, p.12).

As demonstrated in previous paragraphs, the 'injuries' of fatness, emotion, and femininity are manifest in the (feminised) body and thus the body becomes dissociated. Jung said that withdrawal is the psyche's normal reaction to trauma, and if withdrawal from the scene of the injury is not possible (in this case, society) then a part of the self must instead be withdrawn, split, fragmented, or dissociated (Jung, 1928 in Kalshed, 1996). In taking a psychoanalytic interpretation of the psyche's self-care system in response to trauma (Kalshed, 1996) disconnection, fragmentation, splitting and dissociating can all be construed as withdrawal that is seen as a primary defense against injury (psychic and otherwise). There is a disconnection from interoceptive bodily hunger cues (that initiate the drive to eat) mentioned in Sam's excerpt. Appetite is then discursively produced as 'triggering' signifying a defensive response that exiles the traumatic. One possible Jungian psychoanalytic interpretation of this, is that the balancing of disintegration (diabolic) and integration (symbolic) is a necessary regulatory process that takes place at the 'transitional interface between the psyche and outer reality' (Kalshed, 1997, p.17). At the beginning of life, negotiating between these fragments is vested in the maternal self-object, who serves as a kind of 'external metabolising organ' for the infant's experience. Through attunement and comfort, the mother cultivates homeostatic balance, and an integrated 'self' (Kalshed, 1997). However, this interpretation may reinforce 'mother-blaming' discourses that fail to critically contextualise the contradictory guidance mothers are given on feeding children (Rice, 2015). Julia Epstein's essay "The Pregnant Imagination" (1995), provides a historical account of the politicising of pregnancy and how this led to social and medico-legal discourses of 'mother blaming'. Epstein wrote, that in a sense, "female interiority has been made public, while women's bodily exterior has attained juridical and moral privacy rights" (p.140). In this context then, women's lives are not under their autonomous control, but are the 'property' of the state. Indie's excerpt constructs the bodily exterior as feeling 'inauthentic' that can be construed as another signifier of disconnection, or put another way, of distance from the female bodily exterior:

> Indie: I think we need to complicate what we mean by body image too, right? Because I think when we say body image, we often kind of fall into this idea of all body image is this white female, sort of ideal…I struggle with my body image, not because I don't look like someone on the magazine, but because my body doesn't feel authentic to me…I've always maintained for most of my eating disorder, that body image was never a concern for me…but body image is actually a concern, right?

Body image here is constructed as an emergent concern rather than a diagnostic marker. This conflicts with the dominant construction of e/d's as relating to 'body image' and a preoccupation with weight and shape. The IDC 11 states preoccupation with weight and shape as one the essential diagnostic markers for AN (WHO, 2023). This demonstrates that whilst hegemonic beauty ideals are clearly problematic (Beale, Malson, & Tischner, 2016), scientific discourse on the prevalence and etiology of e/d's is insufficient to understand how gendered binaries and gendered hierarchies constitute one's identity and affect a person's interactions with the world (Randall, 2010 in Hussain, Dar & Ganson, 2021). Indie's invitation to 'complicate what we mean by body image' then, can be construed as a concern with deconstructing dominant, normative ideals of the female body 'image' standard as thin, White, heterosexual and cisgendered (Jones & Malson, 2011). For example, men, trans people, fat, non-heterosexual, and people of colour are often assumed to be at lower risk, perhaps because they fall outside of this body 'image' standard (Bordo, 2009; LaMarre, Rice & Jankowski, 2017). Also, body 'image' issues in recovery discourses may legitimise body 'image' dissatisfaction in people with larger bodies, that legitimises dieting as a method to reduce adverse health effects of body 'image' dissatisfaction by reducing the body weight of people who are in larger bodies (Gotovac, LaMarre, & Lafreniere, 2018). The invitation to "complicate' body image, also reflects many other accounts of e/d recoveries that seek a voice to share what it means to have an e/d, (Malson, 1998; Malson et al, 2010; Moulding, 2015; Hussain, Dar & Ganson, 2021; LaMarre, Levine, Holmes,& Malson; 2022).

So, considering anti-fat and anti-feminine discourses steeped within the culture of patriarchy, the constructions of the (female) body as both traumatic and a source of trauma, and the ensuing trauma of disconnection, is unsurprising. E/ds negotiate the narrow, liminal space between the body and becoming, both categorising and articulating the trauma arising from the lack of discursive and symbolic 'space' to become anything other than a thin, productive, healthy, perfect body.

The discursive productions of e/ds as bids to regulate, and anxiety related to neoliberal biopedagogies and moral discourses

Participants described how their e/d's functioned as attempts to express feelings and regulate a body that 'transgresses' norms:

> Sam: So I just need to try harder and then just make myself thinner…that's where that those feelings maybe came out because I didn't really have anywhere else to express them...

> Luke: weight loss was a way of me saying somebody please help me I'm really not OK, in my head. Also if I'm thin I won't have, my breasts won't get too big, or I won't have periods or gain like a womanly shape either with hips and stuff

> Danni: even beyond just the disability factor…if you're above a certain BMI, you might just not get care…I started restricting more, which is horrible, but I kind of had this idea of like, okay, I need them to acknowledge that something's going on. So they'll help me

E/ds are discursively constructed here as bids to manage uncomfortable feelings and embodiments arising from presenting as female or fat: ''I just need…to make myself thinner…that's where those feelings came out' and 'if I'm thin I won't have, my breasts won't get too big, or I won't have periods or gain like a womanly shape either with hips and stuff'. The presence of e/d thoughts and practices then, are construed as symbolic of distress and make visible the destructive energies that are re-directed back toward to body and self, rather than toxic, not-self objects. Not-self objects in this context can be construed as the pre-existing political, social, cultural discourses, and biopedagogies (Rice, 2015) that 'constitute and regulate women's experiences of eating and not eating, gender subjectivity and embodiments' (Malson, 1998, p.187).

The 'problem' of the (fat/female) body then, can be (re)located socially, as one of the most prominent ways the female body is discursively constructed and regulated in Western culture is through the social significations conferred to body weight and shape (Woolf, 1990) and biopedagogies that do little to disrupt the cultural devaluation of fat (Rice, 2015) and/or femininity. Therefore, fat, and thin bodies, eating or not eating, become signifiers loaded with multiple, contradictory meanings of gendered love and hate. For example, in

biomedical/public health and media discourses, the fat body is multiply produced as ugly, unhealthy, lazy, undisciplined, and undesirable (Bordo, 1993; Malson & Ussher, 1996; Rice, 2014) and the thin (female) body is constructed as beautiful, healthy, childlike (Malson,1998). However, in biomedical e/d recovery discourses, the thin body is construed as sick and BMI a marker of 'sick enough to deserve care', (LaMarre, Rice & Jankowski, 2017) read in Danni's 'if you're above a certain BMI, you might just not get care'.

E/d practices are again here, self-destructive, and self-(re)productive, but also a signifier of distress and invitation to connect, 'somebody please help'. The site of the distress is positioned as the fat, female body under attack, both from society and from the individual, 'if I'm thin…my breasts won't get too big…I won't have periods or gain like a womanly shape'. As other literature has discussed, the internalisation of emotion particularly shame and disgust are the fundamental means by which children follow biopedagological instruction (Evans, Rich, Allwood, & Davies, 2008; Leahy, 2009 in Rice, 2015). All the participants who contributed to this study said they were adolescent or younger at the onset of their e/ds. For all the participants, the process of becoming identified as fat and female, negatively affected embodiment, eating and movement practices, (Rice, 2014).

The role of gender and agency in e/d's was a pervasive theme in the interviews:

> Indie: when it {e/d} started, it didn't feel like it had much to do with gender. Actually, I think it didn't feel like it had much to do with my body either. Honestly, it felt like a way of managing, feeling, really unsure and really scared and really afraid of the future. Feeling kind of directionless, and wanting to have something to hold on to…that relapse was pretty clearly connected to gender dysphoria…I don't want to gain weight, because right now my body is manageable for me in terms of my gender and my feelings of being able to inhabit it in that way

> Danni: from when I was about 11, to 22, I was anorexic…I definitely know that part of it is tied into my gender and that the thinner you are, the more kind of androgynous you can come off. So there was that and then I'm also disabled. So I really clung on to food as the thing I could control because there were so many other aspects that just happened to me and I couldn't do anything about it.

> Arlo: It [e/d] was also a way to cope with a lot of, I felt like a lot of stress of, you know, I can't cut my hair, I can't bind, I can barely, like, no matter what I how I dress,

it's going to be wrong. So being able to choose what I ate and choose how I physically moved in that way. It felt very empowering in a dark way

Anorexia nervosa has frequently been construed as a response to feeling out of control, and a bid to enact control by controlling the body with food (Malson 1998). Cartesian dualism constitutes the body as threatening and eruptive, producing the need for controlling or denying the body. As I have previously discussed, femininity is discursively constructed as located in the body, and it is the female body and embodiments that are produced as alien, threatening, out of control (Bordo, 1993). In these extracts, (female) gender is constituted as bodily and problematic (see also chapter one), and gender is constructed as the motivation to restrict, as Danni said, 'the thinner you are, the more kind of androgynous you can come off'. Indie said, 'I don't want to gain weight, because right now my body is manageable for me in terms of my gender'. His comments about 'feeling…unsure, really scared…afraid of the future…directionless, holding onto something' constructs his e/d as a defense, providing a pseudo parent role of offering regulation and structure. A component of dieting is that it relies on structure, and surveillance, and the promise of reaching a 'goal', that is constituted as hope, predictability, salvation, and a beacon of light, directing the dark terrain of suffering. Of course, anti-obesity biopedagogies have constructed dieting as a moral solution to disease (LeBesco, 2009). Metaphorically then, dieting can signify both a defense in the attack on the female 'interior' and an attack on the bodily exterior rendered 'transgressive' by multiple discourses and biopedagogies. Remember that Indie earlier refers to his body as 'adversarial', reflecting how the split social body limits the possibilities for a fully integrated embodied experience in people who do identify with or present as the 'norm'.

There is something vital about the role of e/d's as mediating control/out of control-ness over the body and gender. It is only through the construction of the body and gender as something unruly, that it may become the arena for shame, self-destruction and domination, as Arlo said, 'being able to choose what I ate and choose how I physically moved…It felt very empowering in a dark way'. 'Dark' may signify moral binaries of good and evil, that a psychoanalytic interpretation might suggest is reflective of a persecutory inner world that finds it 'outer mirror in repeating self-defeating re-enactments' as though possessed by a 'dark' 'diabolical' power (Kalshed, 1997, p.5). That is to say, the 'dark' represents the incorporation of a (feminine) self-hatred, that is produced in and by the wider discourses of femininity. The 'dark' then, represents a fight for the survival of the 'true' ("adversarial, authentic", female) body over a 'false' (dark, thin, powerful, defensive) self, that is produced

by a lack of cultural acceptance of the fat or female body. Danni's excerpt also reflects this internal conflict over meaning and selfhood, 'I really clung on to food as the thing I could control…so many other aspects…I couldn't do anything about'. This positions food and eating as the solitary facets of life where power may be enacted, also rendering life an arena of limited choices. The phrase 'clung onto food' may then signify a 'subtextual subjectivity of 'failure' in all other aspects of life (Malson, 1998, p.123) and signifies a subjectivity of a person who is desperately 'clinging' onto control in the restricted domains of life women (and fat people) are both permitted and encouraged to do so. Another way to theorise e/d's is that they signify an identity where there is a lack of identity, or where categories of womanhood and femininity fail to provide an identity that feels authentic (Malson, 1998).

Some excerpts take a moral turn in describing e/ds as the denial, punishment, or discipline of desire:

> Indie: no one's experience of their eating disorder really maps on to mine…It's just a metric of like, how good I am at hurting myself. Right, the more it {weight} goes down I know I'm doing better at hurting myself…I think I think gender has something to do with that

> Charlie: my eating disorder developed as a sort of dual pronged experience between self-harm, through deprivation and forcing myself to throw up and [sighs] also body image…I still struggle very, very hard with…not feeding myself, basically. Restricting…I was forcing myself to throw up for like a few years, but it wasn't because I was bingeing, it was just a matter of self-harm…my gender has definitely played a part and before I was out I think definitely being perceived as a young woman played a big part because of the encouragement to restrict.

Self-harm is construed here as signifying both corporeal punishment through the denial of food and the denial of desire. Indie said, 'the more it {weight} goes down…I'm doing better at hurting myself' and Charlie, 'restricting…forcing myself to throw up…it was just a matter of self-harm' which reveals a portrayal of self-flagellation that can be found historically in religious rhetoric:

> 'I chastise my body and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified.' (1 Corinthians, 9:27)

It is well documented that the construction of a morally superior individual (produced through denial, self-sacrifice, and purity) is embedded within a Christian rhetoric, (Orbach, 1978; Malson, 1999; Saukko, 2008; Riley et al, 2008). Corporeal punishment and flagellation specifically, have long been associated with religious asceticism, through the act of beating the body with implements, like whips, knives, or chains, and fasting, as corporeal punishment but also to purge the body of sin and thus, prevent disease (Zentner, 2015).

Food may be construed as sinful or threatening and the body as passive and weak to its seduction. In this the body and spirit are split, as if to distance different parts of the self from the other. This is the body of dualist discourse that rearticulates Cartesian dualism, and patriarchal dichotomies that equate woman with the body, with weakness, irrationality, and a lack of control, and man with the mind, with rationality, strength, and control (Malson & Ussher, 1996). Further splitting of other moral categories are thus reproduced, such as good/evil and discipline/desire, that converge upon the body and selfhood to produce contradictory or conflicting messages about appetite and gender.

Gender is further implicated in the discursive production of e/ds as a strategy of (female) punishment, through the location of the women in religious discourses. Womanhood and women have been largely subordinated by patriarchal religions, and the construction of God as man, who dominates and rules. The Christian original 'sins of Eve' ground women and womanhood in the disciplining and punishment of desire, and in forbidden sexual desire, that it is not "hard to find here a theological analogy between monstrous offspring and forbidden fruit" (Epstein, 1995, p.148). These historical discourses produce and regulate the ongoing institutionalised marginalisation of women. As Charlie and Indie said, 'I think gender has something to do with that' and 'being perceived as a young woman played a big part because of the encouragement to restrict.'

From a Foucauldian perspective (Foucault, 1977), modern individuality is produced specifically through the exact observation and detailed examination of the body and self. Foucault (1977) argues that the Classical Age (the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) displaced traditional regimes of domination, with a political anatomy of power that produces subjected and practised 'docile' bodies (Foucault, 1977; Malson, 1998). It is through this 'new micro-physics of power' that a 'political anatomy of detail' emerged (Foucault, 1977 in Malson, 1998) and thus it is through detailed 'surveillance and knowledge instead of 'violent physical coercion' (Malson, 1998, p.170) that human bodies are rendered docile, disciplined, and intelligible.

The construction of 'self-starvation to discipline a morally bad, out-of-control, fat, female body, positions weight loss as a quasi-spiritual struggle against a female body and identity (as Indie said, he had an 'adversarial relationship' with his body), and one that is reproduced by everyday hostile phrases used by the diet and exercise industry, such as 'fight the flab' and 'burning off calories' (Bordo, 1990). Nathan also described his desire to eat as going 'wild':

> Nathan: all I wanted to do was binge, and I had to…I spoke to my other half and was like look, this is what I want to do right now, but I don't actually want to do that, can you stop me doing that because I will just go and do it and then I'll feel terrible…it's just asking her to not let me go wild when I want too.

The desire to binge is constructed as an internal struggle of desire and restraint. I asked Luke to explain to me what he considered a binge, that prompted me to ask, "do you think you're just hungry?" to which he reflected that yes, maybe he was legitimately in need of more food, but felt he did not deserve to eat. His use of 'wild' then, constructs the part of him that desires food as animalistic and sub-human. "Wild" then, is symbolic of a part of the self that is a feral, untamed animal. Wild can also be construed as signifying the sexualised body, (de Beauvoir, 1953; Ussher, 1992 in Malson, 1998) and the pathologized, defective, and disruptive body, (see Ussher, 1991 in Malson, 1998, p.119) and the excluded body (Malson, 1998, p.119). Further to this, "racist ideology and imagery constructs non-European "races" as 'primitive' and 'animal', 'savage' and sexually animalistic, and indeed more bodily that White "races" (Bordo, 1993, p.9). The legacy of colonialism then, is that anti-fat, racist and misogynist discourses are intertwined and are produced and regulated by, patriarchal religious discourses, (Strings, 2019). Each of these discourses produce qualitatively different manifestations, depending on one's location in the intersectional "matrix of domination" (Collins, 1990; Warner, 2008).

Neoliberal biopedagogies of health (that is moralising and normalising instructions for life) (Rice, 2015; LaMarre, Rice, Jankowski, 2017) it can be argued, are body 'fascist', as bodies that fall outside of 'normative' constructions (White, male, thin, cisgender, able, heterosexual) are marginalised and thus, under intensified scrutiny. Politically and economically, 'risky' bodies may also be construed as 'unproductive' bodies (Pronger, 2002; Malson, 1998). Technologies of the self, such as dieting, exercise and physical fitness write a 'relatively coherent script for the body, suggesting limited and productive directions for

desire that it is a script not for freedom, but for subjection to the modernist quest for sovereignty, for salvation in a life described as essentially lacking' (Pronger, 2002, p.226). I would extend this further by positing that a coherent script may serve as a fantasy to stabilise the selfhood and subjectivities of an identity under attack, specifically the non-White, non-cisgendered, non-male, disabled, queer, lesbian or gay identity.

As food is identity work, how we relate to food and our food choices says something of who we are and want to be (Gard, 2009). It is well documented that social class, gender, and ethnicity play a considerable role in people food choices (Sayer, 2009). (One of the reasons I always hated 'Mr Brains Faggots' was that they transported me back to my sub-working-class roots. Hence, my preference for vegetables and disgust with processed meats, was about more than just tastebuds, it was a rejection of food that I associated with a 'poor and unhealthy identity). Neoliberal biopedagogies, that are undergirded by the capitalist ethic, construct and produce the individual as responsible and thus, culpable for their food choices, health status as body (Ibid 2009). Set against a moral discourse of the 'obesity epidemic', 'normal' eating becomes counter-cultural (LaMarre & Rice, 2016) and the construction of fatness as a 'choice' to avoid restricting food then, becomes constructed as a moral failing. This is despite well documented evidence that social class, gender, ethnicity, and many other variables plays a significant role in people's food choices (Sayers, 2002; Gard, 2009). I can be argued then, that multiple dictates of fitness, beauty, anti-consumerism, and ecological and climate concern, converge upon the body and identity, that produce, regulate and discipline individuals by, suppressing desire (for food and where the desire for food/eating is symbolic of autonomy, liberation and self-expression). The disciplining of 'Othered' bodies and identities (female, non-European, disabled, trans, non-cisgendered, non-heterosexual, poor, or transgressive in myriad ways) through the production of narrow, gendered 'ideals' then, can be construed as 'body fascism' (Pronger, 2002). This can be read in Bill's excerpt where he describes himself as 'bad':

> Bill: I was aware that I shouldn't be eating as much or as high quality or as much junk or whatever as I was, but I also I felt driven to eat anyways...I was very aware of what you're supposed to eat and stuff. And so, it's kind of, you know, trying to mitigate how bad I was

Bill's description of himself as 'bad' constructs the self as morally sinful, positioning dieting as a counterpoint to redress a fundamentally flawed self that is 'driven to eat' 'high

quality junk'. Food of this type is of course, highly palatable and, yet the 'problem' here is within the 'bad' self that cannot deny it's urges. Postmodern and post-structuralist feminist theories have found in e/d research, conflicting imperatives between a search for selfhood (the body as project of selfhood) and the quest for sainthood, (through denial or denigration of the body) in constructions of women's identities (Eckerman, 1994). This reflects the tensions in Bill's excerpt, of wanting to realise his appetite, (symbolising an expression of his individuality) and the competing social prescriptions embedded in discourses of 'health'. Self-starvation then, crystallises the search for transcendence, and has symbolic significance as a parody of 'healthism', anti-consumerism and of "not taking up too much space" (Eckerman, 2009).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored some of the multiplicity of competing constructions of e/ds. By taking a feminist poststructuralist approach, I have located e/ds in a historical, social, and discursive context, in order to move beyond the conceptualization of e/ds as individual pathology, and (re)locate e/ds to within multiple gendered discourses that constitute and regulate the (female) body and subjectivities as out-of-control, passive, shameful, culpable, eruptive, pathological, and threatening (see appendices a) (I place 'female' within parentheses as all the participants in this study were AFAB but identify as male, trans, agender or nonbinary). Here, I suggest that e/ds express a multiplicity of sometimes paradoxical and contradictory relationships with the culturally dominant constructions of what it means to be gendered as cis, female, trans, nonbinary, or male, what it means to be queer, gay, or straight, fat, able/disabled, fit, and/or 'healthy', and construed as inside or outside the White racial frame (Feagin 2020). In this, multiple discourses converge upon the body, along axes of power and privilege, to produce qualitatively different experiences for people with different identities. Many of the construction of e/ds here then, can be construed as attempts to distance from the exterior *bodily* female, and both overcome and/or surrender to modern, or Cartesian conceptualisations of gendered selfhood, that have similarities and differences with the constructions of trans and nonbinary gender identities.

This analysis demonstrates the multiple ways that the participants negotiate their impossible embodiments and identities produced within a society that privileges only narrow categories of identity *and* how e/ds are produced by the gendered politics of coloniality, capitalism and neoliberalism. These gendered politics are always oppressive, often fascist and controlling by their very design. In reading some of the fragmented and negative self-

constructions in the transcripts, I analysed how e/d's can be construed as an incorporation of these agendas – they are self-punishing and self-destructive, and yet self-productive. I have argued that e/d's can be construed as multiple technologies of the self, (like renegotiating gender) with meanings that can be multiple, shifting, and contradictory. It can be read as a discursive practice, to both discipline a (social) body and identity construed as under attack and as attempts at expressing and regulating a body and self in distress. E/ds are also construed as the means to subjugate desire, that I argue are grounded in moral and political discourses of oppression.

Whilst this study represents only a very limited exploration of the trans or nonbinary constructions of e/ds, (and is in no way meant to be representative of all trans or nonbinary people), this way of theorising e/ds has potential consequences for all stages of therapeutic interventions, for gender and e/ds, whether it be conceptualisations, diagnosis, screening, or the treatment of e/ds. In a 2016 study of transgender clients' experiences of e/d treatment (Duffy, Henkel & Earnshaw), none of the 84 participants reported having positive experiences and some even expressed that they wished they had never gone to treatment at all, despite acknowledging this probably saved their lives. My hope is that this analysis will contribute to the growing body of critical feminist research into the non-cisgender experiences of e/ds by situating e/ds *and* gender distress within sociological contexts.

Chapter four

Discursive productions of trans and nonbinary

BECOMING, UNFLODING, INTERTWINING LAYERS

A significant body of critical feminist research demonstrates that gender plays a fundamental role in e/ds (Bordo, 1993; Orbach, 1994; Malson, 1998; Gremillion, 2003; Saukko, 2008; Tischner, 2013; Holmes, 2016). Dominant theories of gender are influenced by modernist understandings of development, that view the self as essentialist, innate or singular, and developing in linear fashion from childhood, (transient), to adulthood (a stable and unified self) (Linstead & Pullen, 2006). This analysis of trans and nonbinary gender constructions turns to Linstead and Pullen's "Gender as Multiplicity" (2006) that is influenced by the philosophies of Deleuze & Gutarri, (1988). These works implement the Deleuzian concept of (gender as) 'becoming'- "rhizomatic, nomadic, a constant journey with no final destination" (Linstead & Pullen, 2006, p.1292). This theoretical perspective turns away from binary, cisheteronormative and positivist understandings of gender and selfhood (often seen in the field of psychology and e/ds) and instead looks to a more appropriate theory to understanding trans and nonbinary constructions.

The discursive construction of trans and nonbinary selfhood as becoming or transforming through gender affirming technologies and e/d practices

Selfhood as becoming can be read in the excerpt of Indie, who identifies as nonbinary, is androgynous presenting and uses they/them pronouns. Indie describes the self as 'becoming' by experimenting with testosterone, and how the possibility of shifting gender embodiments allows them to (re)negotiate the desire to engage in e/d practices:

> *Indie*: I have been on a low dose of testosterone for almost a year now…this is an opportunity to kind of tease apart what is eating disorder and what is gender stuff… it has felt really kind of wonderful. When my voice started changing, there was the sense of…like I can feel the resonance of my voice in my body in a way that isn't unpleasant. And that, yeah, this can feel like me. And I recently started exploring top surgery for kind of the same reason. I know, I have known for a long time now that one of the triggers for restriction and for my eating disorder behaviour is my

relationship with my chest. And so finding a way to shift my body that doesn't involve me needing to, you know, engage in eating disorder feels exciting.

In this excerpt Indie describes how being on testosterone produced an "opportunity…to tease apart what is e/d and what is gender". To "tease apart" then, can be construed as a desire to clarify e/d and gender, and simultaneously produces e/d and gender as potentially mutually exclusive. Alternatively, it can be construed that by taking testosterone, Indie's identity is able to undergo a transformation, and 'become' less feminine, thus distancing them from experiencing typical 'feminine' embodiments (of a higher frequency voice for example). If we contextualise this in the analysis of femininity, (see chapter one, appendix a), discursively distancing from the 'problems' produced by the *bodily* female, might be construed as a route through which relief (from the social, political, and economic consequences of being scripted as female) can be sought. One might interpret this as a desire to embody masculinity and aspire to the privileges of maleness, but there is more complexity in Indie's account than a simple desire to 'be a man'. Rather, Indie's unfolding desire is discursively constructed to "find a way" that "feels exciting". This possibility for (re)negotiation of selfhood is produced by Indie's capacity to resist the discursive binary regulation of their identity, and not by the desire to switch their position in the binary divide.

Indie said of their shifting embodiments, "this can feel like me" that articulates a sense of selfhood that was not currently represented by the exterior of the body but had potential to be reified by ongoing improvised bodily inscription. Indie said they started "exploring top surgery" to (re)negotiate the relationship with their chest, and how their chest is a "trigger" for their e/d practices. Both surgery and e/d practices can be construed then, as a multiplicity of technologies of the self (Foucault, 1984) that produce opportunities to become more comfortably embodied, and express a selfhood that is constantly shifting, realigned, and improvised (Linstead & Pullen, 2006).

As mentioned, Indie said testosterone positively transformed the experience of the "resonance" of their voice. On questioning, Indie expanded on the significance of voice:

Indie: I was a singer, actually…I had a music teacher telling me I couldn't do it, which was actually one of the things that kind of triggered the eating disorder in the first place…now that you've mentioned that, oh, yeah, the voice seems really important. It's like, oh, yeah, I don't know why I didn't realise that sooner. Of course,

it's important that now finally, my voice feels like mine. Right? And not something I'm doing in spite of someone.

Beyond the corporeal inscriptions then, and beyond even binary or nonbinary gender aspirations, the change in Indie's voice (that is produced by testosterone), can be construed as an expression of individuality or (re)negotiation and (re)production of power, related to them taking ownership of their voice. Through testosterone, the voice is transformed beyond the old voice that was criticised, to a new voice, that can "feel like mine". The transformation is facilitated by testosterone, but it is not masculinity that is sought, but the opportunity to transcend "feeling" something negative. Transformative interventions that Foucault (1984) described as "technologies of the self", act to discursively reconfigure the self and subjectivities within existing power relations. He suggests that technologies of the self:

> permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality.
> (Foucault, 1988, p. 18)

Whilst the discourse of the 'wrong body' is archaic and offensive, it was pervasive in the 1980's and is still sometimes still used, by trans and nonbinary people alike (Halberstam, 2018). However, here Indie's excerpt articulates one way the 'wrong body' is created, by the inscription of a 'wrong voice'. This seems to have played a part of creating a degree of separation between the self and body, that can be "teased apart" to create a discursive third space where alternate selfhood and embodiments might become.

Indie further constructs e/ds and gender as *both* mutually exclusive *and* implicated in the manifestation of e/ds. They describe how they were afraid that in an e/d treatment setting, they would be perceived as trying to 'escape' womanhood through e/d practices, because of the threat that gender might be absented from the context:

> *Indie*: I had so much…internalised transphobia…are you really just trying to identify out of womanhood…I have a history of sexual trauma too. So there was this big fear of like, Oh, I'm just trying to identify out of being a victim…in an eating disorder setting, I think I was afraid that someone was going to validate that right and

> say, Oh, it's not gender. It's just you have an eating disorder, and so it's, you know, you're absolutely, you actually are a woman. Right? And you're just trying to get out of it. I was afraid. I think I was afraid someone was going to say that to m…I think there's definitely something honestly a little self-protective about that…hearing that was going to be was actually, going to be pretty devastating.

Indie's fear of being invalidated by the e/d treatment process is reflected in research that demonstrated how e/d treatments consistently fail to address gendered subjectivities (Moulding, 2016) and at times often cause unintended harm to people who identify as trans (Duffy, Henkel & Earnshaw, 2016). Whilst trauma and womanhood may be implicated in Indie's excerpt, if we contextualise their excerpts and view them as a 'journey' of becoming, it is possible to construed Indie's emerging selfhood as a desire to *become*, not masculine or feminine, but as a *possibility* to resist the inscription of a hegemonic, binary identity, one that is inscribed as a fixed and singular experience (Vincent, 2020).

For Foucault, (1972) said that bodies are compelled to signify the prohibitive cultural laws, (in this context, the binary gender order and the cisheterosexual matrix) (Butler 1990) and that these 'laws' are incorporated with the consequence that bodies are produced to signify those laws on and through the body, where they are manifest as the "essence" of self (ibid, p.183). Once manifest, the laws do not appear as external to the bodies they subject and subjugate. For Indie though, the inscription of these laws is resisted through the reconfiguration of the body and the possibilities of becoming *something else.* Indie makes something inner (selfhood), outer (body) that is both resistant of the gender binary and is produced by the gender binary. As Butler said, "inner and outer makes sense only with reference to a mediating boundary that strives for stability (1990, p.182). As Preciado (2013) writes, masculinity is just one of the many results of testosterone. Rather than positioning the bodily changes that testosterone produces as essentially masculine, instead here, they are construed as simply 'change' that facilitates the possibility of 'becoming'.

Discursive productions of trans and nonbinary selfhood becoming through representation

Sam, (AFAB, white) identifies as agender/trans/nonbinary. Sam described 'knowing' in junior school that they were not female, but not until mid to late teens were they able to explore their identity. Sam described becoming trans as a discovery:

> *Sam*: I was kind of aware of what trans was in terms of kind of binary trans identities, but I was not aware that there was kind of other kind of identities within the kind of trans umbrella. So I think that for me was quite big kind of discovery, and kind of seeing other people kind of exist, and kind of identify as that then kind of allowed me to kind of explore my identity. So I think that's kind of a journey I've been on since kind of then to kind of now…I'd say I've kind of always felt like this, but I've only had the kind of language to kind of express it in the last six years.

In this excerpt Sam describes how identity transformation and the "language to…express it" was made available by "seeing other people…exist". Sam describes this as a "journey" or "discovery", that can be construed as a construction of selfhood unfolding through meaning making. For Sam then, identity is produced as a journey of discovery, where "meaning is constructed by the system of representation…and the codes which govern the relationships of translation between them" (Hall, 2013, p.7). I turn to Hall's 'routes not roots' conceptualisation of identity formation to analyse Sam's excerpt. Drawing from Lacan's (1949) 'mirror phase', Hall argues that identity formation is a process of *differentiation* that happens when a child recognises their image, identifies it as their own and separate from the mothers' image (Hall, 2012). It is by the incorporation of the external perceptions of oneself that we acquire the perception of identity, and by a *route* that emerges as a meeting of different points, by which people have come to be now, *and*, how they are an emergence of the sum of those differences. For Sam, discourse undergirds their route, scaffolding the signifying capacities of appearance to determine specifically which "binary trans identities" Sam identifies with and seeks to be identified as. Trans 'language' is constructed then, as both the product of representation and the discursive device by which they can articulate their embodied differences that exist beyond (and because of) the gender binary. Therefore, identity is always unfinished and "a process of articulation, a suturing, an overdetermination, not a subsumption" (Hall 2012, p. 3). Like Butler, (1990), Hall (2012) argues that identity formulates through *différance,* and requires the closing and demarcation of symbolic boundaries, that in brief, map out conceptual, epochal shifts of the subject, from the subject of the classical age to the postmodern subject. From the sovereign body to a body that is de-centred. The postmodern 'route' then, that has questioned classical epistemologies and ontologies, has opened diverse possibilities for identities to unfold, while producing a 'rhizomatic' representation of gender, as both a social identity, and a resistance to being

marked by gender, beyond the binary (meaning to articulate a process of existence and growth that does not emerge from a single point of origin) (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988).

In thinking about *origins*, third (fourth and fifth etc) spaces of gender have always existed in history (Linstead & Pullen, 2006) and it was only a few hundred years ago that gender was not routinely or instinctively binarised (Vincent & Manzano, 2017). Historical accounts of the early colonial period suggest that Indigenous cultures of sex and gender were the focus of European male violence from the inception of colonialisation (Smith, 2021). For example, in some of the earliest records of Spanish colonisation of the Americas, there are records of the Spanish conquistador Vasco Núñez de Balboa, who upon entering the home of an Indigenous leader of the Chibchan people, finds the leaders relatives and many others, whom Balboa mistook as men dressed as women, living in supposedly same-sex relationships and in an act of gendercide, he ordered them to be eaten alive by dogs, whilst Spanish soldiers forced remaining members of the Indigenous community to watch (from Peter Martyr d'Anghiera's 'De orbe novo decades' in Smith, 2021). Acts of male colonial violence were not limited to nonbinary people but were also targeted toward non-hierarchical, nonmonogamous and/or matriarchal gender relations, that colonisers perceived to be a threat to power (Smith, 2021) and these acts were not isolated events but a scourge of violence upon nonbinary genders at a global level.

Hence, there are multiple historical and cultural exceptions to the binary gender system (Castro, 1993 in Pullen & Linstead, 2006) and Bolin (1994, 1996) identifies up to five significant forms of global gender diversity. The role of gender was too, was not *always* a marker of power as it is in post-capitalist society. In pre-colonial societies for example, gender was a crucial part of Indigenous life, but it did not always have a clear or uniform relation to power, prior to colonialisation (Smith, 2021). For example, Indigenous women were often land stewards with significant influence in society, and in other examples, there were matriarchs who wielded major power and influence over men, and individuals who would wear the dress of, and perform practices associated with, alternate 'gendered' identities (Smith, 2021). In brief then, the current gender system, is a "modern colonial gender system" (Lugones, 2008) that slowly supressed culturally diverse gender systems found through the slow, discontinuous, and heterogenous processes that also "violently interiorized colonized women" (Lugones, 2008). In this context then, the cisheterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990) is matrix of domination, where the negotiation of power is located across multiple (dichotomised) intersections of colour, gender, ability/disability, class, age, body size, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, and education. The female body, in being

a marker of identity, and an identity under threat, is one that is produced (and narrowed) by violent patriarchal discourses, that becomes to site of both oppression and negotiation.

For Sam, the opportunity to 'explore' or (re)negotiate, disrupt gender, constructs a gender as 'becoming'. Sam's excerpt describes possibilities between the self that has "always felt like this" and the *trans* self that desires to 'become' that like Indie, articulates the always-already gendered body. This relates to the If I look to Lacan's mirror phase (1884), this might be construed as a disidentification with the mother, *and* with the mother as woman, who represents women, and therefore a desire to distance from the construct of femininity. Sam's "always felt like this" then, can be positioned within the context of the always-already (colonial) gender system that only privileges (cis) masculinity and oppresses femininity, (and other non-hegemonic non-masculine genders) that produces the desire for comfortable embodiments beyond conscious memory. Subjects are produced by and in the colonial gender system, that makes it impossible to "parse apart" (Indie's words) the 'individual' body from the social body. There is therefore, no 'a priori' gendered body, but a body as 'becoming', of which gender forms only part of an assemblage of that is always in motion. Sam's excerpt constructs the possibility to become 'other' than female, by the 'discovery' and representation of trans subjectivities and genders. In this, trans identities can be construed as creative, liberatory and may have the potential to greatly impact feminist and transgender politics (Ableson, 2016) and deconstruct the binary gender system.

Bill and Luke's comments on the representation of trans people are constructed as offering new routes for "making sense". Bill (white, AFAB) identifies as a trans man. He has undergone medical and surgical transition. He told me he grew up in a "good Christian town" with traditional values:

> *Bill*: The only representation I ever saw of trans people growing up was in the old 80s and 90s movies…always a trans woman who was working with street corner as a hooker…doing sex work…trying to, you know, trick men into having gay sex…I never heard the word transgender…It wasn't till I was in my mid 30s. I was at a trans lives matter March and they had a trans woman and a trans man speak beforehand and I turned to my spouse, I'm like, wait, this is a real, this is a thing. My life makes sense…then I started to come out…I had a hysterectomy…I started testosterone…my ideal was…more a male figure

Bill said that trans representation allowed his life to 'make sense'. It reminds me of Indie's comments of "finding a way to shift my body that doesn't involve…needing to…engage in eating disorder". Like Indie, Bill said disrupting gender through hormones and potential surgeries alleviated the need to engage in e/d behaviours. The move toward a less female presentation, reduced the need to restrict, in that restriction was a means to produce and signify a less female presenting body. Bill told me that in having a hysterectomy, he felt less concerned about exercising too, because the concern about fertility was removed – later in this chapter Arlo also mentions the significance of not being pregnant and how this relates to the the thin, androgynous body. Bill constructs (positive) trans representations as the device that produces alternate trans discourses beyond that of the "duping" sex worker. For Bill, it is then through representation and trans discourses that the trans identity is reconfigured and reified as something that "makes sense". Luke too described the absence of "vocabulary" because of the lack of representation. Luke (AFAB, white) has undergone medical and surgical transition, identifies as trans, male, and told me he felt a lot of fear around coming out socially:

> *Luke*: I grew up in a like a small town…[gender identity] was something I couldn't talk about…I would probably would have been aware of it if I had been aware that trans people even existed. There was one trans person…a trans woman in our town and it was just like that person was just treated as like you know, the village weirdo…tormented by everybody…If this person was seen about, kids would just like bully, verbally abuse them and that was like my only one. I didn't even have the vocabulary trans at the time, so in my head, what I was seeing was cross dressing. And that was my example.

Like Bill, Luke grounds his excerpt in the "small town" that produced a constellation of discursive constructions and practices: of parochialism, conservatism, patriarchy, and heteronormativity. Luke's fears can be related to wider discourses and experiences of trans people, who frequently face multiple forms of discrimination, including structural violence, harassment, and rejection (Velez, Breslow, Brewster, & Foster, 2016; McBride, 2021; Axios, 2023). Moreover, the anti-trans culture in Luke and Bill's home towns promote the incorporation of oppressive, cisgender appearance ideals, (where the 'ideal man' is muscular, lean) that in turn leads to greater self-surveillance practices and worse mental and physical

wellbeing (Velez, Breslow, Brewster, & Foster, 2016). Luke goes further to explain his feelings about this:

> *Luke*: I've always been comfortable with myself as trans, but it's never come out socially and part of that I think was around fear. But the other part of it I think was around the fact that I'm like - no, why should I have to do that, but why should I have to take hormones for the rest of my life to be seen as this person? Seen for who I am and why do I have to, you know, go and have surgery and spend loads of money and lose my right to have children…why can't I just be in the body I'm in? Society won at the end of it because I just couldn't…It was just exhausting…it just brings me down…I've gotta, we gotta give into the world and go to that other end of the binary because why? I need to do that to be, I need to be affirmed in the world as that.I don't really have any genital dysphoria so that's not a problem either, so I haven't, so in that respect I am kind of staying true to saying I'm comfortable myself, it's the bits that other people were seeing. Those were the bits I needed to change and so being able to wear a flat top. Otherwise if I have boobs then that stuff's for girls. And facial hair really helps make that distinction

Luke grounds his motivation to be seen as male in social and political discourses and he also aligns his sense of identity with representations of masculinity. Luke said that "it's the bits that other people were seeing" that required "technologies of the self" (Foucault, 1984) to transform others' perceptions of him from female to male –hormones, surgery, *and* e/d practices. In this excerpt the body is constructed as the central agent in the pursuit of masculine affirmation, to socially signify a credible masculinity that Luke calls going to "that other end of the binary". This might reflect trans discourses that at times enforce norms of masculinity or hierarchies of trans legitimacy (Abelson, 2019). For Luke there is a rescripting of the body to (re)negotiate existing power dynamics, and a compromise involved in the surgical and medical intervention constructed as mandatory to express a legible 'self. For many people binary-oriented and nonbinary alike, non-cisgender identity can be "double-edged", where catharsis is found in sense making but also presents material risks (Vincent, 2020; Javaid, 2020). Luke constructs his transformation as a nexus of interior drives to be affirmed and exterior pressures to be seen as masculine and his transition can be construed as conforming to patriarchal discourses, that can be read in the way he asserts that a masculine face is a hairy face. However, like many other people who identity as masculine, (Green,

2005) for Luke, masculinity does not depend on having a male body or on having a penis but is contingent on being recognised as male socially. So, whilst the body is constructed as central for Luke to perform gender identity, it is the social scripting of the body that reaffirms Luke's gender identity. I would argue then that Luke's performance is not at the other end of the binary but is reconfiguring the binary by transforming masculine and feminine parameters of bodily differentiation with the materiality of the body. Thus, as Barad (2003) said, "transforming the body becomes about more than transforming how the body looks; it changes the way the body is lived". The body is both constituted, regulated and (re)produced within the existing colonial gender system, and has the power to resist that system by (re)negotiating exiting power relations. So then, it is representation that has the power to disrupt and re-construct new possibilities of gender identity, that can be plural (Hall, 2013; Abelson 2019) hybrid (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014) or liminal (Vincent, 2020).

The discursive production of trans and nonbinary selfhood as liminal

The concept of liminality has been frequently used in transgender studies, to articulate the "in-betweenness" of trans and nonbinary identities (Vincent, 2020). I turn to liminality here to analyse accounts of gender identity where there was a dynamic sense of the development and shift of identity over time and space, that defied the 'wrong body' discourse of hegemonic medical conceptualisation. The word "becoming" being an intransitory verb, requires no object to take meaning, and liminal, can be construed as meaning barely perceptible *or* transitional. In this analysis, 'becoming' trans or nonbinary, is construed to produce a multiplicity of liminality, that may be constructed as on the threshold, in the midst and/or imperceptible of gender.

Charlie, (white, AFAB) takes testosterone but had no surgical interventions, and identifies as trans, male). Charlie told me he'd had a difficult journey with mental health and weight gain and said that presenting as binary male was the 'least painful' way to experience his life:

> *Charlie*: I was sixteen and it was kind of a sudden realisation, I was like "Oh, I don't think I'm a girl" and then from there I was like "maybe I'm nonbinary" and then pretty soon after that I was like "no, OK I'm trans, like I'm a man or whatever and when I was eighteen I sought medical transition and I've been on hormones since I was eighteen, so eleven years now I've been on testosterone and er, then I think somewhere along the way I just lost my gender like it somehow just fell off the map and I don't think I have one any more…I think my gender has evolved with me…if I

present myself in a binary manner I don't have to talk about it because it feels so deeply personal.

Gender is constructed here as "becoming" with Charlie over time, and a constant renegotiation of identity in flux. Charlie said he would like to have surgical transition, but due to costs (U.S. healthcare system) and the restrictions on BMI, he had limited options. He said he felt the bodyweight restrictions to surgery had adversely affected his health. Charlie's comment of "I just lost my gender" then, may be construed as distancing from gender to preserve a sense of agency by a 'non-choice', and a rejection of the binary order, thus creating a liminal space for multiple, unceasing options of identity to unfold, as they had since he was sixteen. Charlie's overarching gender identity then is constructed around liminality and absence. In this sense, Charlie is constructing an identity that is both constituted by the colonial gender system, and resistant to it, that in a rejection of the entire system, Charlie's gender "fell off". For Charlie, gender is 'in perpetua', evolving and shifting with him over time. In staying in motion, Charlie's gender resists those inscriptions that might fix it, and name it, that produce gender *as* an identity – it becomes liminal. Of course, Charlie said that this is "personal" and that to avoid having to "talk about it" he presents as binary because it is "so deeply personal". Charlie's "sudden realisation" that they were not a girl (at sixteen) reflects other accounts in chapter one in which womanhood is signified as bodily and produced as hyper-sexual under the predatory male gaze. Charlie said (in chapter one) that gender was a significant part of his e/d because of restriction was encouraged when he was perceived as a young woman. Gender then, (and specifically presenting as a girl) meant harm, through anti-fat, neoliberal discourses of dieting, that was alleviated by rescripting the body, and disrupting gendered presentations.

As Foucault (1982) said, the 'subject' is *produced within discourse,* and the wider discourses of trans and nonbinary identities construct a narrow discursive space within which trans, and nonbinary identities might emerge. For example, the multiple ways that trans and nonbinary identities are produced by media discourses produces them (The discursive borderlands of the colonial binary gender system are discussed in chapters one and two, see appendices a and b). The trans or nonbinary identity is produced from the emergent space between these discourses, that are endlessly (re)negotiated by the changing representations of trans and nonbinary identities over time. Recent research shows a trend towards trans people being represented in increasingly positive and ground-breaking ways, although there is more

work to be done in increasingly the range and complexity of such representations (McLaren, Bryant, & Brown, 2021).

Although Charlie is 'out' socially as a man, he does not identify as male, and prefers to avoid conversations around his gender identity because "it feels so deeply personal". There is often a space between how one presents in some spaces to how one identifies personally, depending on the chances of being understood, respected, or legitimised, which relates to the "comparative lack of cultural intelligibility and ontological validity of nonbinary discourses (Vincent, 2020, p.119). Charlie said he was keen to avoid having to discuss his nonbinary identity due to the potential emotional and educational labour required to afford him the possibility of being culturally intelligible or respected. This experience is reflected in other literature exploring nonbinary and trans lives (Martínez-Iñigo et al, 2007, in, Vincent, 2020). Charlie's construction of the liminal space between the social and personal gender identity then, can be construed as contextual and contingent upon the discourses available in the given space and time.

Charlie's and Luke's account also challenge the essentialising 'wrong body' biomedical hegemonic discourses that are deployed to command respect and equal treatment, due to gender being 'permanent' in nature, or 'natural' and Charlie also resists the normative pressure to identity as either permanently male or female. Vincent, (2020) said that trans spaces are liminal spaces that create possibilities for people who are not openly trans (or surgically trans) to become something else, for a limited time, in that space. Danni (AFAB, white) identifies as nonbinary, said being 'read' as queer was an important part of the nonbinary identity:

> *Danni*: I definitely identify as nonbinary and not trans. It's just because I present very femininely and I'm not really too dysphoric about it…But within that, I'm mostly agender…I've played round a little bit more with like, wearing different styles that are really, really feminine. And maybe a while ago, I would have not wanted to, because they, I, I can very easily not be read as queer, and I usually don't like that.

Likewise, Arlo, (AFAB, white presenting, indigenous heritage) identifies as agender and is masculine presenting. He takes testosterone but has undergone no surgical interventions. Arlo said:

> *Arlo*: I'm hoping to transition at least partway so that I read as male socially

Both Danni and Arlo construct their gender identity as contingent on an intelligible social "reading", and on an identity that is "partway" or liminal. As Foucault (1984) said, the subject is *produced within discourses*, so the possibilities of identity production are perpetually renegotiated within the social environments in which they are situated. Halberstam (2005), too said that queer space and time often emerges in opposition to institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction. Danni was the only participant who went by female pronouns and presented "femininely". Danni told me she had undergone hysterectomy two years prior, due to severe pain from endometriosis. Women have long been defined as 'productive' by their fertility status and they are constantly reminded of a ticking 'biological clock' - a clock grounded in the time of the 'heterosexual matrix' (Butler, 1990). The blurring of masculine and feminine boundaries, produce a "queer" social reading that for Danni is central to her identity and for her to reconfigure normative prescriptions of a 'healthy, productive' female identity. Interestingly, Arlo also repeatedly affirmed that by staying thin (by deploying e/d strategies), they could appear more androgynous and avoid the risk of being perceived as female and pregnant:

> *Arlo*: it's losing weight so that I am thinner, so I appear more, more like a like a twink more androgynous and then also keeping weight off so that this association of you know being pregnant is is gone as well…androgyny in the media is that very thin, pale person…the cultural idea of androgyny is something I feel really drives my eating disorder in the way that I want to look like them.

Arlo's excerpt constitutes the 'drive' for thinness and e/d practices in the cultural discourse of the androgynous body. The androgynous body is constructed here as thin, pale, sterile, and unable to be pregnant. Arlo told me the characters that inspired him, referring to "Klaus" from the Umbrella Academy (Blackman, 2021) who is a pansexual, nonbinary character with substance misuse issues, who is characterised as vulnerable, narcissist, nihilistic, and wounded. Another character was "Crowley", the 'fallen angel' in the show "Good Omens" (Gaiman, 2019) who is similarly self-serving and anarchic. Both characters are masculine presenting, white, thin, and scripted as 'disruptive'. Arlo's discursive production of the androgynous body and their "drive" to look like them, can be construed as desire to resist dominant gendered scripts, and oppressive patriarchal discourses. Arlo's concern with pregnancy can be located in the medical discourses of the late twentieth

century, where women ceased to have authority over their bodies and wombs during pregnancy, and once pregnant, the woman's rights became separate, and subordinate to the rights of the foetus (Epstein, 1995). The foetus then, renders the woman's body, state property (Epstein, 1995). Arlo's discursive construction of the androgynous person is embedded within a network of social, legal, medical, and political discourses that construct certain possibilities for an androgynous person to remove the child form the body, and more legitimately evade the "brutally coercive stance towards pregnant women" (Gallagher, in Epstein, 1995). The liminality of nonbinary then, is a becoming of bodily integrity and self-determination that a binary identity is unable to enact. (See also chapter one, appendix a, on the analysis of femininity and chapter three on e/ds to read more on how this relates to gender and e/ds). Sam describes the nonbinary space as constrained:

> Sam: I…don't really identify with gender…I don't really want to have to bother with it. Obviously, we kind of live in a very gendered world so that's quite difficult. Obviously, genders like everywhere…like filling in forms that have to do with gender, and bathrooms and changing everything is sort of gendered…it's quite difficult when you kind of literally put yourself right in the middle of sort of male and female. That there isn't that there isn't so much that space. But that that's the kind of space I kind of want to occupy.

The constraints of the nonbinary liminal space can be construed as a metaphor - for the constrains of a system that supresses the expression of identities that are viewed as 'alternative' or disruptive. This is produced by oppressive political systems and societies that specifically direct structural violence against trans and nonbinary populations (Kritz, 2021) under the guise of 'moral concern'. Whilst there are promising advances in Europe for trans rights there are other examples, particularly in the US of increasing trans hatred (Axios, 2023). Axios ('ethical' news reporting) said: "It's very clear to trans activists and LGBTI organizations that the global far-right, anti-democratic, anti-rights movement is interconnected and is sharing strategies and talking points and narrative development," (2023). It is this 'interconnectedness' that produces individuals multiply constituted through discourses of coloniality, patriarchy, neoliberalism, religion etc. In this, the relationship between gender and e/ds cannot be understated. For example, in chapter three (on e/ds) Sam said, that when identifying as female they had to make themselves thinner, occupy less space. When interconnected with this metaphor of the space between the binary for liminality

(becoming) the body is produced as a site for multiple scripts, to (re)negotiate selfhood, by disrupting gender, through both e/ds and hormones. Ultimately, to become smaller, to 'fit' the space produced by the constraint of the existing system.

In Foucault's, (1973) *The Birth of the Clinic*, it is through the medical gaze that the individual is produced. Both visibility and legibility are the same, in what appears to the clinician is what is produced by his examination. The body's interior, now available to the clinician's gaze may be then categorised based on similarities and difference, as Foucault describes in *The Order of Things* (1970). The pregnant body is however, absent from *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973) and yet, many scholars, such as Shaw (2012) argue that the pregnant body can be read metaphorically in this text, in that it doubles as the *corpse* body. Shaw (2012) writes:

> "I am making the claim that the dead body, whose interior processes are mapped, calculated and systematized, serves as a double for the pregnant body, and the methods used to make the dead body an object of knowledge are another version of medicine's effort to do the same regarding the female body in its capacity for conception."

It can be multiply construed then, that 'becoming' androgynous and/or nonbinary, by losing weight, and appearing thinner, "like a twink" is for Arlo, a route to resisting being inscribed as a passive, corpse body, and, to deny the *possibility* of inscription as female *and* to produce, be 'read' or be legible as male, thereby inverting the power relations in the existing binary system.

Danni (who had recently a hysterectomy) said something similar:

> Danni: I definitely know that part of it {e/d} is tied into my gender and that the thinner you are, the more kind of androgynous you can come off.

Like Arlo, Danni constructs androgyny as thin. It is through thinness, that a nonbinary gender is signified, and through thinness that gender and identity or the self are scripted as queer. Danni is keen to be 'read' as queer, as she previously said, to distance from cisheterosexual discourses of identity. Queering gender, through multiple 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1984), that may include e/d practices, can be construed as a signifier of resistance to the patriarchal mores of gender, and a discursive strategy to define one's identity

outside of the gender binary, and therefore avoid privileging one gender over the other. It also signifies to other queer people that you are an ally, and many participants said that the queer and trans community played a fundamental role in belonging and wellbeing. In scripting the body as queer, the body's materiality then creates a 'queer' liminal 'space" to signify the possibilities of selfhood that exist outside the cisheterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990). Being bodily 'read' or legible then, is signified by (re)scripting the body as non-female, non-heterosexual, nonbinary, and/or by achieving thinness through self-starvation. Self-starving (and/or 'dieting') in this context then, is multiply construed as a way of disrupting gender.

The concept of bodily integration can be construed in Indie's excerpt as follows:

> *Indie*: so in terms of body, I feel like I have a pretty felt sense of what feels natural to me. And I've been able to move towards that. And then there's that added layer of OK, and how are other people perceiving this, right? Because gender is something that yes, I feel internally. But now, if I want to be understood in the way I mean to be, how can I make myself legible? Right? And definitely make myself legible within a binary that doesn't actually fit. Right. I think one of the things that I've had a hard time with is that I can have the felt sense of like, okay, this is my gender, this is what my body could feel like if it felt like mine. And then, there is no, there is no, there's no translation for that. Right? Like I had to come to terms of the like, a little while ago with the idea that like, passing is a bankrupt concept for me, right? Like, I cannot pass. It's something that society doesn't actually recognise right now.

Indie struggles to "make…legible" a selfhood that is 'felt' interior, within a binary gender system that has limited categories and scripts available. The discourses (for the development of selfhood) that are available within the colonial gender system are narrow and cisheteronormative. It is by design that the colonial, binary gender system of Eurocentered global capitalism, by the very "process of narrowing the concept of gender to the authority of sex, its resources, and products constitutes gender domination" (Lugones, 2008). Here, gender identity is emergent from a liminal space between the borders of "what feels natural" and "how other people are perceiving this". The liminal space is constructed by Indie as 'becoming' when he said "I cannot pass. It's something that society doesn't actually recognise right now". This signifies a *possibility* in (queer) space and time (Halberstam, 2005) *to* become. Indie's selfhood is also multiply constructed as in motion, and gender just one facet of creative productivity. Gender and e/ds then, are discursively and multiply constituted

within a relational, evolving process, and where the interiority of the body is both felt, *and* scripted, both internally and socially constructed. In this, Indie's 'felt sense' of self, I argue, are emotions that can be regarded as both constitutive and products of social and cultural practices (Ahmed, 2004).

Indie said, for example, "this is what my body could *feel* like if it *felt* like mine", almost echoing Luke's cry of" why can't I just be in the body I'm in?". I imagined Indie fighting to protect a body from being scripted in harmful, risky, limiting ways, in a discursive landscape fraught with threats. The way that all the participants' gender was perceived by others really mattered to them, and they did not want to be misgendered (or gendered at all, for some of them). Indie's construction of the body as "illegible" then, can be construed as an resistance to being scripted or "authored" by others, by being *imperceptible*. Here, the body is construed as illegible text, where binary gendered social scripts may be denied authorial access through the process of *becoming* and an unwillingness to *arrive*. This body is the central agent in creating confusion in others' perceptions because it is visible, and because gender (selfhood) is signified by the body and because authorial rights can be asserted by the owner in multiple ways.

In "The Death of the Author" (1968) and "The Pleasure of the Text" (1973) Barthes, proposed that that the liberation of a text is contingent upon the erasure of its author. For Barthes, the 'readable' (legible) text, conforms to normative discursive constructions, whereas the writerly (scriptable) text is one of "a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds" (Barthes 1970, p. 5). Similarly, Butler (2004) suggested how one might confront corporeal difference or gender non-conformity which "calls our grids of intelligibility into question" (p.5). Indie's excerpt constructs the body as ambiguous, and a social, cultural, and historical 'writerly' body that presents gender as an open question, that as Butler (2004) said, is "in the mode of becoming" (p.217). Here, gender becomes nomadic in the sense that it is dissipated, dissolving gender boundaries and resisting all inscriptions that fix it and name it, so it resists being perceived as "*an* identity - it becomes imperceptible" (Linstead & Pullen, 2006). In returning to a rhizomatic molecularity, Deleuze and Guttari (1987) also discuss the ultimate becoming-woman and becoming-animal, as becoming imperceptible. Indie's gender then, is both liminal and in a state of constant becoming. Although liminality suggests borders between, that might convey a start and end, Arlo suggests that rather than a beginning, there is only a middle:

Arlo: your expression of, of androgyny, I would say would be, would be the first step to kind of, kind of decentralise your narrative off of your physical body instead of to more of like your presenting body.

Here the transgendered body is constructed as multiple; as both physical and presenting. This seems to be like Luke and Indie who described a desire to have their exterior be legible or read, as something that might feel 'authentic' to the interior. Arlo constructs the 'presenting' body as the site where androgyny might be inscribed, and to creatively display just one facet of gendered selfhood. Arlo's use of the word 'decentralise' can be construed as a signified of bodily integration or sovereignty, in that he is dissipating the power that gender holds on his selfhood, and on the possibility of being 'read' or scripted by others. In terms of Barthes too, in "decentralising" the body, it evades the naturalising scriptures of the dominant discourses that still have a foothold in modernity, sovereignty and Descartes. By 'decentralising the narrative' Arlo asserts his desire, for autonomy and expression, not as a physical body, but as a relational force, an energy and a performance that might ebb and flow, "beyond opposition and dialectics" (Linstead & Pullen, 2006).

Arlo spoke about what inspired his desire for transition:

Arlo: I kind of came to the realisation that I need to transition and no matter what, because I had kind of just buried that part of myself, and it was listening to Thomas Dolby…"she blinded me with science"…I just saw myself in him just so clearly just this guy in a, you know, white suit, and he's like, five foot eight. He's not he's not very tall, and he has like short hair that's like wild, and at this time, he didn't have glasses but, and, he like comes in and comes into the psychiatrists office and he lays down on the couch and then they zoom in and he has eyeliner on. He has a smoky eye and it's this guy who's a very masculine person who is talking about, you know, this, you know, his lab assistant who is, you know, tricking him in some way and it's not about his gender at all. It's not about him being, performing this masculine man of like, you know, having sex with this woman or whatever, it's like, no, they've had sex. And that's completely besides the point. It's this - we're talking about science right now. It's completely irrelevant.

Arlo said, "I saw myself in him". 'Him' (Thomas Dolby) is a man, wearing eyeliner, on a psychiatrist's couch, who is navigating his way around a psychiatric institution. Arlo

emphasised that here, sex is “completely irrelevant”. I watched the video, and I was compelled by a scene where Thomas Dolby is playing with a shape sorting toy and is struggling to get the shapes to fit the holes. This can be construed as a metaphor for, as Indie put it a nonbinary identity trying to be legible, within “a binary that doesn't actually fit”. Also, the songs title of ‘she blinded me with science’ could be construed as part of Arlo’s (and others) trans subjectivities, to reject biological essentialism and avoid being ‘blinded’ by the ‘science’ of sex. So, here, Arlo is constructing trans and/or nonbinary gender as becoming by ‘decentralising’ the gendered narrative. Binaries are disrupted by practices and performances, that constructs gender as social and cultural practice *and* a *multiplicity of difference and dispersion* (Linstead & Pullen, 2006). It is through the possibilities of playfulness and creativity, that Arlo ‘becomes’ liminal, and becomes trans, and through multiple processes. Iin this, Arlo resists the scripting of the colonial binary system, and asserts his capacity to maintain autonomy over his physical body, via the presenting body.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed how the discursive constructions of trans, and nonbinary gender identities are produced as becoming, both through bodily inscription (involving technologies of the self) (Foucault, 1984) and representation (Hall, 2012). I have argued that rather than arriving at a fixed state of identity, a trans and nonbinary identity is realised through the continual ebb and flow of discursive practices and constructions, that can be grounded in the resistance of and conformity to, existing dominant discourses within the colonial binary gender system. Of this, trans, nonbinary and e/d subjectivities, and practices are inexorably intertwined. They are signifiers that can be actioned to rescript the body and disrupt gender, and in the context of this study, to specifically obfuscate, distance from, or destroy femininity. The trans, nonbinary and e/d identities signify often contradictory or paradoxical meanings, that have the capacity to disrupt gender, and consequently the way that power and privilege is (re)negotiated.

This production of an identity under (re)negotiation, I have argued, occurs within multiple spaces, one of which can be construed to be a *liminal* space, that is produced by and despite the colonial binary gender order. This space is always-already, waxing and waning over time, expanding and contracting within multiple discursive contexts. I have sought (briefly) to articulate the violence of Eurocentric colonialism that (re)produced the binary gender system and continues to constitute regulate and the individual produced within it.

In turning to Deleuze and Guttari (1987), Linstead and Pullen (2006) and Barthes (1968, 1973) I have argued that it is within this liminal space that gender *as* identity marker is denied, consequently asserting the rights of the individual to become something else. In this, gender 'incongruence' can be construed as a boundary demarcating the borders of selfhood. The concept of gender as performance or a gendered physical body (and identity) are, as Arlo puts it, "decentralised" – that is, the power the body holds is disrupted through a shift in focus to clothes, attitude, behaviour etc. This seems an important message for all people experiencing e/ds and other symptoms of gender violence. Trans and nonbinary gender then, is construed as a process, that flows not *between* the borders of male and female, but over them, through them, and between them, in dynamical ways, creating a rhizomatic flow of gender that begins and ends, at the centre. E/d practices are construed in part to facilitate this process of disrupting gender, as part of a constellation of practices (like hormones, surgery etc) that might be enacted to signify multiple selfhoods, and subjectivities.

Historically and culturally, trans, and nonbinary becoming's then, have always-already existed. They are both the product, target, and the agent of epochal shifts. It is e/d practices that can be multiply construed as produced by and implicated in this process, neither mutually exclusive nor inclusive. As Indie said:

> *Indie*: "I probably would have identified as trans regardless of what had happened to me. And what has happened to me has shaped the way I interact with my gender"

In this current era of hyper-speed, hyper-reality, anti-democracy, rising global fascism and White nationalism, and climate collapse, patriarchy/capitalism is holding on with White knuckles. Trans and nonbinary selfhood is under attack because they are produced historically to represent a threat to the patriarchal order of *things* (Foucault, 1970), and the possibility that *things*, might be *ordered*. This is because transgender and nonbinary becoming's are multiply constituted and continually unfolding in non-linear, non-orderly, rhizomatic patterns that are at odds with the orderly, productive, binary economies of a capitalist society. As Heidegger points out, calling means naming, (1971, p.198) and to name is to measure, calculate and to train to function as the dominant system demands. How and what the body is called then, has an intense effect in what appears in the various scripts of selfhood. Discourses of femininity then (as all participants were AFAB) are implicated in the productions of all scripts, and all scripts are gendered.

DISCUSSION

This final chapter presents the concluding discussion of this thesis. Firstly, I present the aims and overview of the study, then briefly the process of analysis, and a summary of the findings. I evaluate and critique issues in the research process, that I hope will be of service to other researchers with an interest in this methodology and field. I make recommendations for future research and lastly, suggest the implications and applications of the findings herein, with a bid specifically to my fellow counselling psychology trainees working in the field of e/ds and/or gender.

Aims and overview of the research design

This thesis explored the discursive constructions of gender and e/ds from the vantage of trans and nonbinary people. The broad aim of this study was to contribute to the already significant body of critical feminist research on e/ds whilst foregrounding the perspectives of trans and nonbinary participants, that today, remain proportionally unrepresented in e/d research (Jones & Malson, 2011; LaMarre, & Rice, 2016; LaMarre, Levine, Holmes, & Malson, 2022). The explicit aim of this study was to open a conversation around the trans and nonbinary of experienced e/ds and engage with the complexity and diversity of those experiences by analysing how they were discursively constructed. In doing so, this study demonstrated how trans and nonbinary constructions of gender and e/ds, rather than being individual, are discursive problems, and are socio-historically situated.

A sample of 8 people contributed to this study, and I chose semi-structured interviews that are appropriate for discourse analysis (Willig, 2015). Interviews were conducted online due to them commencing during the first Covid lockdown of 2020, and this being the only way to interview participants. What might be available to the in-person interview experience may be lost in translation in the digital environment, that cannot be accounted for in the analyses, but this being a discourse analysis, focuses on text and spoken word regardless. This study represents only a small sample of trans and nonbinary people, and all were AFAB, white presenting, residing in the UK and US, and all educated to university level. Equally too, this study focuses on the trans and nonbinary perspectives on e/ds, and this was a deliberate strategy (although, not all participants had a formal diagnosis in this case were self-identified as having had an e/d). Further research with larger and more demographically diverse groups of participants is warranted, with a call for research involving Indigenous

community members (for further demographics see appendix c). One strength of a smaller sample is in the rich data that can be produced. Intentionally, discourse analysis does not attempt to evaluate research in the same way as positivist research (Willig, 2015). Instead of reliability, validity and replicability, this study is socially situated, context specific and contingent, in that the participants talked about their individual experiences, situated within multiple, shifting contexts. I reflexively analysed the data from my own specific situated-ness and context - hence this research is not neutral nor replicable and does not seek to be. I would argue that there is coherence to the data, however, if I were to analyse the data in the future, as 'future me', alternative interpretations might unfold. The analysis of the transcripts and the findings have been explicated to produce a thesis that ratifies standards of rigour and good practice in qualitative research and this study can be evaluated on the relevance to counselling psychology research and practice, application to the field of e/ds and gender, and value to the population in question (Taylor, 2003).

I fully recognise the multiple ways this research was incepted by my position as a white, AFAB, gender fluid person with a history of e/d, and how my situation may relate to the interviews, analytic decision-making, and findings. I have sought to take seriously the reflexivity practice throughout and reveal this to the reader as point of reference.

Process of analysis

There is no uniform way to perform a Foucauldian discourse analysis (O'Farrell, 2005) and this analysis is interdisciplinary and influenced by the work of other feminist scholars such as Malson, Walkerdine, Wheedon and Willig, and Black/post-colonial feminist scholars Crenshaw, Strings and Lugones. The process of analysis (in line with Willig's (2015) six step process) involved several general stages however, beginning with reading and re-reading of the transcripts to identify the following:

1. Discursive constructions
2. Discourses
3. Action orientation
4. Positioning's
5. Practice
6. Subjectivity

Then followed a search for any inconsistencies, contradictions, and patterns of variability of accounts in the transcripts. Any repeated descriptions, constructions, or implied underlying meanings within or between transcripts were identified. Finally, I categorised the data as relating to gender/s or e/ds. The categories were not intended to be discrete or cleanly organised, but to potentially reflect the complexity and diversity in the trans and nonbinary experience of e/ds.

Summary of findings

My main interest in exploring e/ds and gender was in exploring how they are conceptualised (by society, the medical and 'psych' professions) versus what is salient to the individuals experiencing them and the ways they talk about their experience of e/ds and body distress when the topic of gender is introduced explicitly in conversation. Broadly the analysis demonstrates a multiplicity of dominant gender norms, relations and values that imbricate between and through the trans and nonbinary experience of e/ds. The analysis demonstrates that for the participants who contributed to this study, both e/ds *and* gender are socially contingent and hold complex, multiple meanings that go well beyond an understanding of e/ds as a pursuit of idealised 'body-as-image' conceptualisation. This analysis traces how the participants e/ds experiences serve to rescript the body in multiple ways, to be gender disrupting or affirming, and substantiates the primacy of gender in the in the manifestation of distressed eating and body practices. For example, restricting food was explicitly described as relating to negative feelings, thoughts and embodiments associated with the multiple ways that femininity is negatively coded, embodied, constructed, and considered culturally in the western world. Food restriction was discursively produced to mobilise negative feelings or thoughts towards femininity. Participants implied and explicit described that by overcoming appetite, making the body physically smaller, and enacting a sense of control, gendered selfhood is both disrupted and reconfigured, and at times essential categories of gender rejected entirely. Being trans and/or nonbinary was also discursively produced as a route to reconfigure or reject femininity, and/or feminine qualities, to alleviate the suffering of being misgendered female and to reconfigure the gendered selfhood. The findings that related to gender and e/ds were given headings and are presented in a table (i) below:

(i) Table of analysis summary

Category	Discursive productions
Femininity	• Femininity as a bodily experience below the neck – Cartesian head/body split • Femininity is traumatic and produces other splits such as dis/un-embodiment • (Negative) femaleness is produced by the objectifying male gaze from early childhood/puberty – pervasive • The female body as pathological, eruptive, leaky, out-of-control, • Beauty ideals based on colonial standards - health, size, White, productive, able, fertile, cishet, eroticised/fetishized versus maternal • 'Ideal' woman are consumers
Masculinity	• Masculinity is performative and a 'Morton's Fork' – least painful of binary but not without issue • Masculinity or non-femininity is a route beyond constraints of femininity • Masculine identity is not constrained to having a male body • Masculinity as unconstrained, 'normal', and credible, safe, powerful, transformative • The trans/masculine body as fit and muscled, 'big', lean, strong, disciplined
Eating dis/orders	• Ed/s as becoming something else • As a route to refuse/resist/reauthor/articulate the harms inflicted upon the female identity by the dominant sexist/fatphobic norms • As a route to self-discipline • To articulate marginalisation anxiety related to size/ability/gender/health status/heritage • As the product of dis/un/embodiment • As bids to regulate or connect • Relating to moral discourses of desire/denial
Trans & nonbinary genders	• As becoming something else - transforming selfhood • Becoming through medical/surgical technologies and/or e/d practices and/or body practices • Becoming through representation – witnessing non-cis people and their increased visibility as a route to self-expression opportunities • Becoming trans or nonbinary as 'liminality' – occupying a self-made space of creative possibility with no need to essentially categorise or arrive

How the chapters analyses intertwine

The analysis chapters 1-4 were presented to reflect the order of the conversations in the interviews. We began by talking about femininity as all participants had been assigned female at birth, and this felt like a natural starting point. We moved on to discussing masculinity, then to e/ds, then finally to discussing trans/nonbinary gender. Presenting the findings in this way, I trace and analyse the multiplicity of dominant gender norms, relations and values that imbricate in and through the trans and nonbinary participants accounts of gender, e/d and body-related distress. More saliently, and throughout the analysis chapters, I reveal the primacy of gender and gendered meanings that the participants cast on their e/d affects/thoughts/practices and how they mobilise this assemblage of affects/thoughts/practices to reauthor/negotiate/resist/deny the gendered power issues presented in their everyday lives.

In chapter one, I show how the participants experiences of femininity, described overwhelmingly as negative, are located within dominant discourses of Cartesian dualism, capitalism, surveillance, neoliberalism, colonialism, healthism, and cisheteronormativity. Participants said that it felt almost impossible to identify with femininity safely, comfortably or to inhabit a female presenting body, or to reimagine femininity without disrupting, or disavowing femininity as it is embodied or presented. The negative discourses of femininity co-construct the participants embodied experiences that act as a catalyst to seek to transform beyond the constrictions of the dominant culture's categories for what constitutes acceptable femininity and look to cultivate something else beyond. The analysis then traces the participants journey away from femininity as a route of possibility towards that 'beyond'.

Masculinity is described as marginally more comfortable than femininity, but I used the term 'Morton's fork' to articulate the *relative* ease of discomfort that moving *across* the gender binary permits. Some of the participants said it was vexing to have to deny femininity to access power, agency, 'normalcy', comfort, freedom from constraint or surveillance, and acknowledged that the gendered discourses and everyday gendered power struggles made it necessary to distance/disavow/reconfigure the AFAB status at all. Some participants said they felt male to their core, and that this was neither social in nature, nor driven by the need to access a kind of male privilege, nor contingent of possessing a penis. Their accounts of exploring or presenting, identifying, or transitioning to masculinity demonstrated how aspects of agency, strength, feeling safe, unconstrained, and more powerful were made available by resisting/disavowing femininity, but this was not without struggle, particularly in the pursuit

and maintenance of an idealised masculine body, required to be strong, fit, muscled, and disciplined.

In chapter three, I show how e/d thoughts, affects and practices serve to mobilise some of the pain and struggle of gendered selfhood within a dominant framework of corporeal supremacy, and facilitate a reconfiguration of gendered selfhood, that can negotiate the everyday challenges of inhabiting an AFAB/gendered body in a sexist, fatphobic world more comfortably. E/d constructs were located within multiple discourses of morality, Cartesian dualism, and patriarchy. I show how recoveries for the participants have been facilitated by opportunities for each of them to explore their own meanings and experiences of gender (or have been limited by the absence of this opportunity) in relation to eating and embodiment, so they can cultivate a liveable body, and by that, I mean one that aligns sufficiently with their felt sense of self/gender/disavowal of gender, to cultivate a body that aligns with a felt-sense identity.

In chapter four, on trans and nonbinary gender, I show how the possibilities for e/d recovery are both implicitly and explicitly entangled with gender, and how they may be untangled too. I present how the participants construct trans and nonbinary gender identity, practices, and technologies as opportunities to resist and/or produce an intelligible gender and/or cultivate a sense of embodied being that is intelligible to themselves. I show how the participants describe the construction of the binary gender order as deeply problematic, located in colonial gender constructs and how the transformation of gendered selfhood across the binary, outside or beyond the binary as the vehicle for recovery. I rely on Deleuzian terms to described gendered becoming as 'rhizomatic' in that selfhood is a never ending, dynamical process of unfolding, from no centre point, with no pre-determined end point. Another useful metaphor for this is to imagine that the language of gender is water running over and shaping the terrain of selfhood, and the body is a corporeal landmark that can be reconfigured to signify, redirect, and plot selfhood, acting as a corporeal path of least to greatest resistance. Gendered discourses flow over and through the body, and gendered selfhood is manipulated by how participants discursively related to the body's interiority and materiality, *and* how these discourses are shaped by the interactions with the always-already discourses - because the ways gendered discourses shape the participant's lived experience *is* the concern, and so inevitably, e/d and bodily thoughts, affects and practices entangle with gender to produce a route through what is a discursive (and material) landscape, peppered with challenges of privilege, power, marginalisation, oppression, and domination/submission. Simply put then,

the gendered body is constructed as the problem and locus of solution, because *any* body that transgresses the gender 'ideal' is discursively produced as problematic.

Consequently, the findings of this analysis make a significant and original contribution to understanding the trans and nonbinary experiences of e/ds, the primacy of gender in the role of e/ds in terms of their manifestation, maintenance, and recovery, and I demonstrate how theorising e/ds through gender politics, discourses, Black feminist, and postcolonial ontologies has important implications for therapeutic screening, conceptualisations, diagnosis, and treatment of e/ds.

Recommendations for Further Research

This research does not propose to be generally representative of trans and/or nonbinary people. Rather, this study explored the experiences of 8 trans and/or nonbinary people in the USA and UK at a specific time and place. Consequently, the findings can only be said to represent these specific people, and because language and people are constantly unfolding, the findings herein may or may not be salient according to time and context, nor could they be reproduced. All participants were AFAB and white presenting, English speaking with no non-white, AMAB or Indigenous participants. Two participants suspected themselves neurodivergent and three were disabled.

This study is a richly composed, theoretically vigilant, and methodologically rigorous piece of research that engages with and makes valuable contribution to the field of e/ds and body image from the perspective of people who identity as trans and/or nonbinary. I have contributed original knowledge by offering the e/d field a roadmap for conducting affirmative research and/or clinical therapy with trans and nonbinary people, that considers and captures the participants experiential knowledge about their own embodied lives, to develop practice-applicable theory about how gender is interwoven with, and can be unwoven from food, eating and body struggles in support of people's recoveries. Accordingly, my work contributes methodologically and theoretically to counselling psychology scholarship, furthering methods of inquiry into, and offering affirmative, respectful theories and languages for reimagining the role of gender and e/d issues.

A significant strength of my work is found in the interdisciplinary or trans methodology and specifically my orientation to understanding gender as a historical, colonial construct and femininity as both the threat to and scapegoat of the dominant white supremacist binary gender order. By understanding the binary gender order as a colonial construct that advantages white European men, I analyse comprehensively and from an

interdisciplinary perspective, why participants feel compelled to distance themselves from a female-coded body. By theorising e/ds though the lens of gendered politics of coloniality, modern or Cartesian conceptualisations of gendered selfhood, capitalism, and neoliberalism, the ways that the categorical logics of Eurocentric thought systems not only contribute to producing e/ds, but also shape the infrastructure and public health systems that are supposed to be intervening in and treating e/ds is revealed. By layering Crenshaw's intersectionality theory with Lugones' mestizaje-informed of gender as colonial construct, I open new lines of inquiry into the conversation with trans and nonbinary people's experiences of the excruciating physical and psychological work they've had to shoulder in a binary gendered, cisheteronormative and fatmisic social order. Consequently, the findings contribute new knowledge to the pursuit of decolonising the psych professions, that I discuss in the applications and implications. My work makes three significant contributions to advancing empirical and clinical research and practice in the e/d field:

1. I trace and analyse the multiplicity of dominant gendered norms, values and relations that are interwoven in trans, and nonbinary participants accounts of their e/d and body-related struggles
2. I reveal the primacy of gendered meanings that participants signify to their e/d affects/thoughts/practices and how these mobilise this assemblage to negotiate gendered power issues in their everyday lives
3. Demonstrate how recoveries for participants have orbited around their own explorations of gender and embodiment so that they can cultivate a liveable body, that aligns and presents to the felt-sense gender, and feels tolerable to occupy

Despite my interdisciplinary/trans methodology, I think it is important to mention that a poststructuralist philosophy on this analysis has missed the intricacies of sensation, perception and affect that permeate and shape bodies, especially bodies of difference. I hold a professional qualification and passion for nutrition with some interest in epigenetics, and in the role of the gut microbiome, particularly in the understanding of appetite. Given the human body is in fact, over 50% not human, it is entirely possible and well evidenced that food and eating behaviours are influenced by the many bacteria we live in symbiosis, and dysbiosis with. I found the work of Karen Barad to be illuminating here and felt some regret that I hadn't the time or scope to explore this further. In taking a neo-material or affect frame approach, a wealth of sensate and perceptive wisdom could be mined from the embodied

experiences of trans and nonbinary people. In taking an Indigenous feminist frame, this study could have taken a process-oriented approach that might have revealed how bodies, psyches and cultures intertwine, to explores more complex constructions of personhood, and how these co-create experiences beyond the purely textual. My taking a poststructuralist, critical realist and critical feminist approach was a decision shaped by the resources available, comprehension at the time of proposal and word count. There are rich, textual, and creative and visuals arts collaborative stories to be shared in taking this further.

A strength of postmodern understandings of gender and e/ds though, is that they can understand beyond, and de-centre methodologies that are grounded in patriarchally positivist values, and challenge epistemic exclusion (Warner, Settles & Shields, 2016; Settles, Warner, & Buchanan, 2019). I have attempted to reconcile the (now obvious) contradictions between poststructuralist epistemologies, Indigenous and post-colonial theories in naming this methodology as trans – in the sense that this is interdisciplinary, creative, unique, and non-replicable.

Implications and Applications

This thesis produced important findings consistent with other research about trans and nonbinary people's experiences and novel findings that are useful for practitioners, policy, and organisations. This thesis is a guidebook on how professionals working in the e/d field might conduct gender affirming research and engage with trans and nonbinary community members respectfully, and to collaborate with those members to harvest their stories and embodied experiences without causing harm. This study produced applicable theory that I offer to help practitioners be alive to the primacy of gender in the e/d field, and how to potentially begin to disentangle gender from food, eating and body related distress. I will offer some theoretical and practical ways the research can benefit policy, organisations, and practitioners, trans and nonbinary community members and finally I offer a personal message to my fellow trainee counselling psychologists.

Policy and Organisation

This study found that representation was of vital significance to trans and nonbinary participants positive experiences and recovery. This thesis calls for increased incorporation of Black feminist, postcolonial feminist, Indigenous methodologies and LGBTQIA++ led research in scholarship to promote systematic change from the bottom up. Moreover, it is vital that trans and nonbinary people are properly affirmed, validated, and accounted for in

data collection to increase their visibility, as this can contribute to further representation and more diverse stories of gender, and selfhood that can help reduce the experiences of isolation and lack of social intelligibility that non-cisgendered people can experience.

Given the colonial histories of western science, also described as epistemic exclusion, I recommend that the underrepresentation of LGBTQIA++ scholars and non-dominant methodologies in counselling psychology research are intertwined with the agenda for decolonising psychology. Critical feminist research aligns with the existential-phenomenological philosophical foundations of counselling psychology (Spinelli, 2003) and importantly with the current pressing agenda to decolonise psychology (Waheed, 2022).

The assumed superiority of certain (White) methodologies and concepts, curricula, and clinical practice guidelines, has diverted attentions from the validity of rich emotional vocabularies, meaning making, and varying idioms of distress, that have been devalued or appropriated to fit dominant psychiatric nosological systems (Bracken, et al, 2021). This research is specifically relevant to the field of counselling psychology as critical feminist approaches challenge dominant conceptualisations of e/ds as individual concerns and the strictly pathology-driven framework for evaluating origins, the seriousness of the issue, and it the ramifications of the scale of distress for public health, social justice, and political change.

The ongoing accumulation of critical feminist research is critical to facilitate a paradigm shift away from harmful, narrow diagnostic criteria, that lead to poor outcomes for trans people (Moulding, 2015) and contribute towards decolonising the psych professions. By embracing and valuing diverse perspectives, critical feminist research focuses on peoples lived, embodied experiences and contextualises them within the current dominant patriarchal framework, putting an emphasis on understanding what distress means, what it relates to, and how people cope with distress in a particular social or historical context. It decentralises distress from originating individually and relocates it socially, providing a relational model for distress. This de-pathologises distress and coping behaviours and contextualises it within the person's life as they live it, and the social, historical location. The current study deconstructs experiences sufficiently to demonstrate how gender and e/ds are intertwined. Consequently, this study demonstrates that it is crucial to find ways to strengthen the foothold of the feminist paradigms, in both research and practice, for trans and nonbinary individuals ((Duffy, Henkel, Earnshaw, 2016) as well as neurodiverse people. Critical feminist research demonstrates the structural and systemic factors that constitute gender and e/d issues. In exploring e/ds and gender as historically and socially situated, critical feminist research also highlights how power, knowledge, and truth are intertwined, and illustrates how discourses of

psychiatry and psychology might conceptualise and formulate on to what are inarguably gendered issues. In terms of thinking specifically about counselling psychology, curriculum, policy, and research, I recommend that academic institutions and organisations could evaluate professional doctoral curricula and locate explicitly, the concepts, philosophies, modalities, theories, and the individuals working thin them, within their historical and cultural contexts to make visible any colonial discourses and linguistic harms. I recommend that this begin with contributions by queer, trans, nonbinary, intersex, Indigenous and other marginalised research/researchers to appropriately represent their lived experiences. I recommend this is a process led, collaborative, reflective and embodied task, and one that endeavours to reveal both implicit and explicit discourses of coloniality, patriarchy and power.

In terms of research, I recommend that research council's and UK grant funding bodies commission critical feminist research to explicitly expand our understanding of counselling psychology's role in, and the importance of sociocultural perspectives in treatment practices, for 'gender' and e/ds (Holmes, 2018). In a recent paper describing a large-scale transformation programme following a major government investment, the impact of e/ds was high, with major increases in global incidence, particularly of those with more severe presentations and/or rapid deterioration requiring hospitalisation (Eisler, Simic, Fonagy, & Bryant-Waugh, 2022). The report states that adherence to manualised treatments has limited impact on outcomes, and that non-specific or 'common factors' in psychotherapeutic interventions have an important role to play. Common factors such as, empathy, therapeutic alliance, the 'real' relationship (that is how authentic or genuine the therapist is perceived to be) and treatment expectations (Wampold, 2015) are facilitated by a critical feminist approach that explicitly fosters critical reflective process in the therapy room. Also, the vast amount of critical feminist research that suggests e/ds can involve a potential rejection or eschewal of gender, means that conceptual or treatment models that recourse to gender binary terms are inadequate at best (Holmes, 2018) and often harmful (Duffy, Henkel, Earsshaw, 2016). Furthermore, if it is the responsibility of clients/patients to identify and contribute the significance of gender and other social factors to treatment, either because the therapist is uniformed or the importance of gender is overlooked, then the distress experienced by the client may be misunderstood and alleviating factors neglected.

At service policy level, I recommend a clear multidisciplinary referral pathway be developed to ensure that individuals, and particularly those AFAB, presenting with traits of neurodiversity, and/or e/ds and/or gender incongruence can access support quickly. It is

during e/d treatment that a professional may be the first to recognise autistic spectrum conditions (and other neurodiversity, not restricted to ADHD and sensory processing disorder) in individuals AFAB. Considering the significance of neurodiversity in the occurrence of gendered issues (including e/ds) further studies focusing on these issues, like identifying, diagnosis, treatment etc, are important.

I propose inclusive curriculum that promotes diverse gender presentation and includes explicitly trans and nonbinary (and all LGBTQIA++ students) (McBride, 2021). Appropriate training and policies to support LGBTQIA++ students should be developed and practical consideration for uniforms, personal hygiene and changing should be developed and implemented. Currently the UK and US legal system still upholds a two-gender binary system. Nonbinary genders are not currently recognised by the GRA (Gender Recognition Act, 2004). In terms of action led research, I recommend that it should include explicit adoption of gender affirming language, like gender neutral labels and pronouns, and that they should be recognised and legally legitimised (Bergman & Barker, 2017).

NICE guidelines advocate for the inclusion of 'psychosocial elements'. However, like others have suggested, I argue that there remains a substantial and unwarranted weighting in this biopsychosocial framework, with the 'social' aspects of distress relegated as secondary or facilitating factors within e/d treatment contexts (Bordo, 1993; Holmes, 2016, 2017; LaMarre, Levine, Holmes, & Malson, 2022). Furthermore, there were eight participants of which two were neurodiverse (or had neurodiverse traits), statistically this represents 25% of the participants. This figure is reflected by research that found 27.5% of female patients in an e/d service, with no prior diagnosis of autism, presented with a clinical suspicion of autism - 17.5% went on to be diagnosed as autistic. There is currently no standard screening for neurodiversity within e/d services.

Autist spectrum conditions are over-represented in individuals receiving treatment for an eating disorder, with co-occurrence rates of 23–32% (Parsons, 2023). Individuals AFAB are less likely to be diagnosed as autistic and more likely to be diagnosed later in life than individuals AMAB (Parsons, 2023) I recommend a standard screening protocol within e/d services (Adamson et al, 2022). A systematic review of the prevalence of autism spectrum conditions and ADHD in individuals with gender dysphoria suggest a prevalence of 6-26% in trans people - a figure significantly higher than for the cis population (Thrower et al, 2020).

Practitioners

For the participants of this study, opportunities for conversations around gender, politics, health, and appearance were of major significance to developing a broader, deeper understanding of their subject positions and their recovery beyond individual pathology. Some of the participants had had no opportunity for this conversation in their treatment journey and for many, our interview represented the first time anyone had broached questions of how gender and e/d experiences might be intertwined. Some of the participants spoke explicitly of how they avoided talking about gender in therapeutic settings, and one of them said that it wasn't until they found a trans therapist that they felt they weren't having to 'teach' the therapist about gender issues. Although each participant had different ways of describing their gender and e/d experiences, it is important to recognise and validate people's drive for autonomy and safety in making sense of their identity outside of diagnostic criteria or too narrow categories. Research demonstrates that clumsy therapy, that is, therapy and therapists that are not well informed on potential issues that might circulate around the presenting problem, cause unintentional harm to trans and nonbinary people, often resulting in them wishing they'd not attended therapy at all.

As therapeutic practitioners, practicing embodied critical reflexivity to develop an awareness of our own cultural background, beliefs, and ontological perspective, is central to locating our subject positions relating to privilege and power, and how this may influence our practice. It also provides a frame for us to begin to acknowledge is obfuscated in a therapeutic context, without asking salient questions of the client and ourselves. For example, the importance of understanding our own biases and beliefs around what constitutes health, and the political context of our public health system and treatment interventions, is foundational to ensuring we do not unintentionally cause harm in the therapy room by transmitting some of those neoliberal biopedagogies so prevalent in the findings.

All participants had a sophisticated understanding of the importance of fat politics and body diversity matters circulating around e/d issues, and practitioners taking a standard approach to working with e/ds, that is one that does not explicitly incorporate gender politics, there is a risk of either explicitly using anti-obesity language, or of implicitly marginalising individuals with diverse bodies and identities (Gotovac, LaMarre, & Lafreniere, 2018) by, for example, conflating health with thinness, and from my lived experience in this field, both as a therapist and client, there is often concern that in seeking support, one's body be inadvertently problematised or the problem minimised depending on body size. In my practice experiences, people in bodies categorised as 'normal' or larger, find it difficult to

broach self-starvation and eating practices in therapy and there seems to be a wall of trauma and shame related to weight stigma that disrupts positive fat embodiment (Sturgess & Stinson, 2022).

I encourage practitioners to explore HAES-friendly (Bombak, 2014: ASDAH, 2020) practices, that focus less on the goal of certain bodily norms and more on the persons quality of life, self-determination, and wellbeing for people in all bodies. I encourage all practitioners to explore fat politics and embrace fat-positive perspectives. If reading this invites resistance, I encourage some further self-inquiry into the western cultural fear of fat, fear of difference and how this might influence practice.

Dear Counselling Psychology Trainee

This is specifically a message for my peers working in the fields of e/d and gender. You'll might find that if you are working in an e/d services placement that the resources are thin on the ground and demand is almost unfathomable. It can be a specifically challenging field to work in, as the criteria for patients to access support is often confusing and restricts people who might need it much earlier than they receive it, the standard treatment interventions often script the patient as cunning or lacking agency, the people in treatment are often medically unwell enough to demand medical intervention to prevent death, and recovery is often fraught with relapse. The nature of the problem often necessitates a medical team with dietician, psychiatrist, and nursing professionals, and this can also bring with it challenges of aligning an approach in a team that traverse philosophically very different positions.

What I'd like to say is this: have courage to be passionate about counselling psychology's stance on meaning making and to encourage the professionals involved to view the problem from the patient's vantage point. You do not need sophisticated counselling knowledge or to perform complicated psychanalytic gymnastics in order to do this. Instead, you need to trust that as a counselling psychology professional, your specialism and expertise resides in your capacity to reflect, be insightful and to empathise with your client; to know them and understand them more deeply than perhaps any other professional they might interact with. I invite you to be open to not knowing, and to understanding the complexities of the coping behaviours clients develop, because however maladaptive or self-harming, those strategies or technologies emerge from need and will not be replaced until that need is satisfied. Explore that need and be open to how this relates to selfhood and society. Be open to asking – what does it mean to be you, here and now? How do you hide what you disavow?

How do you share what you want to be seen? How do you wish to be known? What have been your struggles in the pursuit of feeling authentic, safe, and self-determined?

The e/d field is my chosen area of specialism because I find so much joy in the work, especially in the making sense of how humans manage and moderate appetite – for love, hate, safety, and food. I hope you find ways of working in this field that feel sustainable, nourishing and like a warm drink on a cold night.

Concluding remarks

This thesis identified a gap in the literature exploring the ways in which trans and nonbinary identified people construct gender and e/ds. This research was prompted by the lack of data available in this area, and mounting evidence that the lack of attention to gender in e/d interventions causes direct and indirect harm (Duffy, Henkel & Earnshaw, 2016). The current study, that took a discursive analytic, meaning-making approach to a complex experience made important theoretical, methodological and practice-based contributions to the body of knowledge on e/d's and gender, from the embedded and embodied perspectives of trans and nonbinary people. It is potentially an innovative model for how to conduct an interdisciplinary study, by integrating interdisciplinary theories and methodologies (critical feminist, Black feminist, postcolonial feminist, intersectional theory, trans studies, Queer theory, Foucauldian analysis) in a discipline-based field like counselling psychology. Whilst I caveat the findings as socioculturally contingent, and a small sample of participants, I argue that the theoretical, methodological, and practice-based contributions that this thesis offers be extended further and applied to a plethora of research areas, subjects, and practice. As I have argued previously, gender is imbricated in everything, not just the e/d field. I hope that this thesis will inspire others looking to incorporate, develop and extend the methodological contributions herein, to complicate matters further into neo-materialism, affect frames and Indigenous feminist approaches to reveal a deeper, richer, more textural, and importantly, embodied understanding of gendered, eating and body related distress. Importantly, I hope this thesis acts as a launch point for including trans and nonbinary people's perspective in research and that this study contributes to the visibility and value of trans and nonbinary people in research and the social sciences. As the participants said so explicitly, positive representation matters.

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Appendices

Appendix a. Demographics table

Pseudonym	Age	Gender assigned at birth	Gender identity	Country of residence	Nature of e/d	Ethnicity	Other
Bill	41	F	Transman	US	*Dx BED	White	Disabled
Sam	26	F	Agender/non-binary	UK	DX AN	White	Disabled Suspects neurodiverse
Arlo	23	F	Agender	US	Dx EDNOS	White presenting Indigenous heritage	Suspects neurodiverse (Autism)
Indie	28	F	Non-binary	US	Dx AN/BN	White	
Luke	35	F	Man	UK	Dx AN	White	
Nathan	25	F	Man	UK	AN	White	
Charlie	29	F	Male presenting and personally agender	UK	AN	White	
Danni	24	F	Non-binary	US	Restrictive type ED	White	Disabled

*Dx - diagnosed

Appendix b. Non-COSHH risk assessment form

Describe the activity being assessed: conducting face-to-face, online or telephone interviews about experiences of identifying as trans/non-binary and eating disorders.	**Assessed by:**	**Endorsed by:**
Who might be harmed: participants **How many exposed to risk:**	**Date of Assessment:**	**Review date(s):** **31-08-2021**

Hazards Identified ***(state the potential harm)***	**Existing Control Measures**	**S**	**L**	**Risk Level**	**Additional Control Measures**	**S**	**L**	**Risk Level**	**By whom and by when**	**Date completed**
Participant distress	Informed consent, participant information sheet, verbal and written notice of the right to withdraw prior to interview, debriefing after the interview and signposting to relevant supporting	1	2	2	N/A					

	organisations if appropriate.									
Researcher distress	Appropriate use of support from DIS and second supervisor. Researcher is also aware of UWE support services such as the wellbeing service. Using personal therapy where appropriate. Spacing interviews to allow for reflection time.	1	1	1	N/A					
COVID	Where face-to-face interviews are conducted the researcher will adhere to the most current	1	2	2	N/A					

	public health guidelines regarding COVID and comply with appropriate distancing, mask wearing etc. Appripriate venues will be negotiated with participants to ensure compliance with guidelines.									
Researcher safety	Standard safety protocol for in person interviews. I will inform my partner of my destination and estimated time of arrival following completion. It will be his	2	1	1	N/A					

	responsibility to attempt to contact me and alert the appropriate services should I appear to be in danger. Interviews will be conducted in a quiet, private space but not isolated.									

RISK MATRIX: (To generate the risk level).

Very likely 5	**5**	**10**	**15**	**20**	**25**
Likely 4	**4**	**8**	**12**	**16**	**20**
Possible 3	**3**	**6**	**9**	**12**	**15**
Unlikely 2	**2**	**4**	**6**	**8**	**10**
Extremely unlikely 1	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Likelihood (L) Severity (S)	**Minor injury – No first aid treatment required 1**	**Minor injury – Requires First Aid Treatment 2**	**Injury - requires GP treatment or Hospital attendance 3**	**Major Injury 4**	**Fatality 5**

ACTION LEVEL: (To identify what action needs to be taken).

POINTS:	RISK LEVEL:	ACTION:
1 – 2	NEGLIGIBLE	No further action is necessary.
3 – 5	TOLERABLE	Where possible, reduce the risk further
6 - 12	MODERATE	Additional control measures are required
15 – 16	HIGH	Immediate action is necessary
20 - 25	INTOLERABLE	Stop the activity/ do not start the activity

Appendix c. Participant information sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Project title

Exploring experiences of eating disorders from the perspective of trans/non-binary individuals.

Invitation paragraph

You are invited to take part in research taking place at the University of the West of England, Bristol. Before you decide whether to take part, it is important for you to understand why the study is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully and if you have any queries or would like more information please contact Simone Harding Faculty of Health and Applied Sciences, University of the West of England, Bristol, simone2.harding@live.uwe.ac.uk

Who is organising and funding the research?

The project is being conducted by Simone Harding, a counselling psychologist in training, enrolled on the Professional Doctorate in counselling psychology. Dr Helen Malson and Christine Ramsay-Wade are Director of Studies and supervisor respectively, whose bios and details of their work are available at https://people.uwe.ac.uk/Person/HelenMalson and https://people.uwe.ac.uk/Person/ChristineRamsey-Wade

Background to the research

Eating disorders can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender, size, colour or sexuality. They are serious illnesses that affect physical and mental health and every year since 2001, the deaths associated with eating disorders has risen. It appears that there are no effective prevention or treatments strategies for eating disorders, making them a serious and growing problem.

Most of the research on eating disorders concentrates on white, heterosexual, cisgender females but research suggests that nonbinary and transgender individuals have a high risk of developing an eating disorder. There is little research that explores the experiences of transgender or nonbinary individuals which means that we need to know more specifically about this.

This research aims to contribute to the existing research on eating disorders but from a specifically trans/nonbinary perspective.

Appendix d. Participant interview schedule

Participant Interview Schedule

1. Could you tell me about your experience of identifying as trans/nonbinary/?
2. How old were you when you became aware of identifying as trans/nonbinary?
3. Can you tell me about your experience of an eating disorder?
4. How old were you when the eating disorder began?
5. Can you tell me a bit about how identifying as trans/nonbinary/intersex has influenced your experience of an eating disorder?
6. What kind of support did you seek/receive for the eating disorders? How you think identifying as trans/nonbinary has affected the treatment/support you have received?
7. Do you remember what triggered your eating disorder? How did the eating disorder affect the way you felt about your trans/nonbinary identity?
8. What are your thoughts regarding body weight and eating disorders? Have concerns regarding your bodyweight been a factor in your experience of an eating disorder?
9. If you had to offer words of wisdom to anyone else going through something similar, what would you say?
10. If you had to write a chapter in a book about your experience, what would you call it? Who would the main characters be? Who are your allies, who understands and where are the challenges?
11. What ways, in any, has COVID affected your experience of identifying as trans/nonbinary/intersex and eating disorders?
12. Can you expand upon your experience of any treatment regarding:
    a. Any problems or issues encountered in support/treatment?
    b. Can you identify any needs you had that were not addressed?
    c. Things that helped.
    d. Suggestions for the future, either in prevention, support or treatment?
13. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for your participation.

Appendix e. Recruitment advert

Invitation to participate in a study on the trans/non-binary experience of eating disorders

Researchers at the University of the West of England (UWE) would like to invite people to participate in a qualitative research study exploring trans/non-binary individuals' experiences of eating disorders.

The study is open to anyone over the age of 18 who identifies as transgender or non-binary and self identifies as experiencing an eating disorder.

Participating in this study will involve taking part in an interview that will last for approximately 45 minutes – 1 hour that will be conducted over video or phone. Questions will be focused on participants' experiences of disordered eating and gender.

If you are interested in taking part in this study, please contact the researcher, Simone Harding, who can provide further information, including the questions you will be asked during the interview.

Email: simone2.harding@live.uwe.ac.uk
Telephone: 07860604698

Thank you

Appendix f. Participant demographic form

Participant Demographic Form

1. What is your age?
2. How do you describe your ethnic, cultural or racial identity?
3. How do you describe your gender identity?
4. What is your geographic location?
5. How would you describe your eating disorder?

Appendix g. Consent form

Consent Form for research participants

Project: How are non-binary and transgender experiences of ED treatment discursively constructed?

This consent form will have been given to you with the Participant Information Sheet. Please ensure that you have read and understood the information contained in the Participant Information Sheet and asked any questions before you sign this form. If you have any questions please contact Simone Harding, whose details are set out on the Participant Information Sheet

If you are happy to take part in an online video interview for the project 'How are non-binary and transgender experiences of ED treatment discursively constructed?' please sign and date the form. You will be given a copy to keep for your records.

- I have read and understood the information in the Participant Information Sheet which I have been given to read before asked to sign this form;
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study;
- I have had my questions answered satisfactorily by the research team;
- I agree that anonymised quotes may be used in the final Report and dissemination of the results of this study;
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time until the data has been anonymised, without giving a reason;
- I agree to take part in the research

Name (Printed)…… ……

Signature…… Date……

Appendix h. Article

Trans and non-binary people's discursive constructions of eating disorders

Simone Harding

Abstract

Background: Whilst there is a significant body of critical feminist research on how discourses of gender mobilises eating disorders, it has tended to focus on the experiences of anorexia in (assumed) cisheterosexual, white, and middle-class young women (Jones & Mason 2011; Holmes, 2016; LaMarre, Levine, Holmes, & Malson, 2022). There is a lack of attention to the experiences of trans and/or non-binary people (LaMarre, Rice, & Jankowski, 2017; Nowaski et al, 2021) and despite evidence that trans identified people have significantly higher rates of eating disorders than cis identified people of any sexual orientation (Diemer, Grant, Munn-Chernoff, Patterson, & Duncan, 2015).

Aims: This study explores how trans and non-binary people's eating disorder experiences are discursively constructed.

Method: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four trans identified people and four non-binary identified people living in the UK and US. Participants were asked about their experiences of gender and eating disorders. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim and then analysed qualitatively using a Foucauldian inspired, feminist discourse analysis (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2013; Smith, 2015).

Results: Participants frequently construed their experiences of the female gender negatively and located bodily. Eating disorders were construed as contingent upon multiple discourses and produced by a constellation of negative associations with the female and gendered body. Eating disorder practices were produced as rescripting the body in multiple ways, and gender disrupting, with a focus on distancing from femininity, renegotiating identity, and selfhood.

Discussions: This paper explores how gender and eating disorders are inextricably linked through interconnected and historical and social discourses that constitute and regulate individuals *as* gendered. The implications of the analysis for therapeutic interventions, further research and policy are discussed.

Keywords: eating disorders; trans non-binary perspectives; discourse; qualitative research

Introduction

Whilst there is a substantial body of critical feminist research exploring how cultural norms of femininity are imbricated in the discursive production and regulation of cis-gender girls and women's eating dis/order experiences, there is scant research on eating disorders from the perspective of people who identify as trans and non-binary (TNB). A smaller proportion of scholars explore eating disorder experiences in people who identify as queer, homosexual, and TNB individuals (Coelho et al, 2019; Jones & Malson, 2011). Fewer still explicitly explore the TNB experience of eating disorders without placing TNB into a catch-all lesbian, gay, bisexual grouping and there has been scant research exclusively addressing the trans/non-binary/gender queer community and their eating disorder experiences (Duffy et al, 2016). A recent study by Nowaskie et al, (2021) explored eating disorder symptomology and the relationship with gender identity and gender affirming interventions and found subtle but important differences in eating disorders between gender identity and gender affirmations. The same study posits that high eating disorder prevalence in trans women may be as a result from the dual pathways of sociocultural pressures and gender dysphoria.

Prevalence

Hardly any studies have estimated the prevalence of eating disorders in the trans population (Diemer et al, 2018; Avila, Golde, & Aye, 2019). The statistics for trans or non-binary identified individuals frequently report higher rates of e/ds than in any other population (Diemer et al, 2015; Duffy et al, 2016). A scoping review reported wide variation in the percentage of trans youth with an eating disorder diagnosis ranging from 2% to 18% (Coelho et al, 2019). Self reports of eating disorders suggested the highest rates of 17.6% in comparison to 1.8% of cicgender female youth and 0.2% of cisgender male youth (Coelho et al, 2019). Work by Witcomb et al, (2015) found that trans men may be at a particularly high risk of developing eating disorder symptoms and associated behaviours. Furthermore, trans people regularly face considerable minority stressors, political, socioeconomic, and healthcare obstacles that may result in negative health outcomes (Reisner et al, 2016; Safer et al, 2016; Flores et al, 2018; Brewster et al, 2019). Anti-transgender discrimination can be considered a key factor in mental health outcomes for trans people (Breslow et al, 2015). Objectification theory has been deployed concomitantly with minority stress theory to evidence the negative impact of discrimination on eating disorders and body image for trans men (Velez et al, 2016).

TNB eating disorder symptoms and purpose

Body dissatisfaction is described as being core to the distress of trans people, which might be a risk factor for eating dis/orders (Jones et al, 2016) and a qualitative study of e/ds and gender incongruence found that the most participants explained their eating disorders as a striving to suppress or accentuate certain bodily features that they experienced as a particular gender (Ålgars et al, 2012; Coelho et al, 2019). A recent study suggested that TNB individuals AFAB are at greater lifetime risk of developing eating disorders, with multiple reasons proposed - individual structural and interpersonal (Diemer, White Hughto, Gordon, Guss, Austin, & Reisner, 2018). Although eating disorders are constructed as individual pathology by mainstream western psychiatry, in many case reports, trans youth engage in restrictive eating to both express and support gender expression, but these may be misinterpreted as behaviours that solely indicate an eating disorder rather than gender distress (Coelho et al, 2019). Minority stressors (gender incongruence, structural discrimination, internalised heterosexualism, and expectations of rejection (Velez, Breslow, Brewster, Cox & Foster, 2016). For trans men they may feel that their bodies fall short of the constructed masculine gender ideal perpetuated by a sexist, cisheteronormative culture (Velez et al, 2016). Restriction and compensatory behaviours are commonly reported as a means to control puberty development/delay developing secondary sex characteristics or attain characteristics of the preferred gender (Coelho, Suen, Clark, Marshall, Geller, & Lam, 2019). Disrupting binary gendered appearance, through restricting food may also be a means to attain an androgynous body ideal (Cusack, Morris, & Galupo, 2022). In brief, eating disorders in TNB individuals remain poorly represented and understood in research. The need for further research particularly for explorations beyond body image and body dissatisfaction is evident (Jones & Malson, 2011). As Holmes (2017) said,"it is crucial to find ways of widening both the current scope to think about the purchase of the feminist paradigms (in both research and practice) for…transgender individuals, as well as for those who identify outside the gender binary".

Critical feminist analyses of 'anorexia' and 'bulimia', whilst exploring and articulating the gendered complexities of eating disorders (e.g. Bordo, 1993; Eckermann, 1997; Malson & Burns, 2009; Moulding, 2016; Holmes, 2016) have often assumed (if implicitly) that participants are cisgender and/or heterosexual in orientation (Jones & Malson, 2011). They have however, explicated the multiple and fundamentally gendered meanings of eating disorders in the experiences of 'anorexia' and 'bulimia' in girls and women. For example, 'anorexia' has been analysed as a 'performed' spectacle of femininity that attains its meaning from the audience's visual consumption of the visibly wasted body (Ellman, 1993; Spitzack,

1993). The anorexic body, it has been argued, can signify a deathly body that in 'dying so thin the anorexic woman' achieves an ultimate (perfect) femininity *and* an escape from the constraints of femininity (Malson & Ussher, 2010). Others have argued that anorexia signifies an ambivalence about or a rejection of femininity (Orbach, 1993; Eckermann, 1997; Malson & Burns, 2009) whilst others have posited that another route of escape from the vulnerabilities of femininity is through the pursuit of defeminised subjectivity through eradicating the visibility of the breasts, hips, and menstruation by cultivating a 'boyish' body (Bordo, 1993; Malson,1998). Others have explored how discourses of health and fitness are implicated in eating disorder experiences (Gremillion, 2002) and in eating disorder prevention biopedagogies (LaMarre, Rice & Jankowski, 2017). Work by Burns (2009) calls for analyses of eating disorder experiences that incorporates and acknowledges 'the empire of images' (Bordo, 2009) (relating to how body 'image' is inscribed upon the body's exterior) and the embodied meanings of eating disorders. Critical feminist studies demonstrate then, how eating disorders are multiply constituted within the dominant discourses of contemporary western cultures, and how they cannot be understood fully in terms of conforming to body image ideals (or the body as a site of cultural inscription) and that whilst eating disorders are profoundly gendered, the meanings of different bodily presentations are complex, fluctuating and often conflicting. The aim of this article is to present some brief findings from a larger qualitative study on how people who identify as TNB discursively construct eating disorders.

Discursive constructions of eating disorders in in TNB identified individuals

In exploring the TNB discursive constructions of eating disorders, this article draws on a feminist Foucauldian framework (Weedon, 2006) in that discourse is viewed as constitutive rather than reflective of 'reality', subjectivities, experiences, objects, or events (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Instead, this article seeks to present how TNB experiences of eating disorders are products of social processes situated in a historical and social context, that constitute context-specific regimes of truth, that are reflective of relations of power and cultural mores that regulate but not exclusively cause, our everyday subjectivities and practices (Foucault, 1979; Burr, 2015). The focus then, was to explore through an analysis of TNB individuals accounts of eating disorder experiences, the ways these are discursive constituted.

A sample of 8 people contributed to this study, and I chose semi-structured interviews as they are compatible with discourse analysis (Willig, 2015). All the participants were assigned

female at birth (AFAB), white presenting, reside in the UK and US, and all educated to university level. Participants were aged between 24 and 41 years. As outlined in Table 1, the type of eating disoder and whether this was self-reported or formally diagnosed by a healthcare professional, and the various gender identifications are detailed.

Table 1

Pseudonym	Age	Gender assigned at birth	Gender identity	Country of residence	Nature of e/d	Ethnicity	Other
Bill	41	F	Transman	US	*Dx BED	White	Disabled
Sam	26	F	Agender/non-binary	UK	DX AN	White	Disabled
Arlo	23	F	Agender	US	Dx EDNOS	White presenting Indigenous heritage	Suspects neurodiversity (Autism)
Indie	28	F	Non-binary	US	Dx AN/BN	White	
Luke	35	F	Man	UK	Dx AN	White	
Nathan	25	F	Man	UK	AN	White	
Charlie	29	F	Male presenting and personally agender	UK	AN	White	
Danni	24	F	Non-binary	US	Restrictive type ED	White	Disabled

An interview schedule was developed to ensure that each participant was asked similar questions and to keep the interview broadly on track. The aims of the interview were to elicit a narrative, biographical account of participants experiences of identifying as TNB and

having an eating disorder Interview questions included: (a complete copy of the schedule is available in appendix a)

- Could you tell me about your experience of identifying as trans/nonbinary/?
- Can you tell me about your experience of an eating disorder?
- Can you tell me a bit about how identifying as trans/nonbinary has influenced your experience of an eating disorder?
- If you had to offer words of wisdom to anyone else going through something similar, what would you say?

Questions were purposefully open and used as prompts for participants to speak about what they felt were the most salient points. Questions were developed by thinking about how to cover gender, eating and intersections of those, along with a kind of narrative timeline of events. I was hoping to elicit a rich conversational account to reflect upon in analysis. I used prompts like 'can you expand upon that?' and 'how did this affect you?' and this felt like it happened quite naturally because all the interviews were fascinating, and I genuinely wanted to know more. All except one where the participant needed no prompting and if anything, I needed to keep things more concise.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, and the resulting transcripts were analysed using a discourse analytic methodology (Willig, 2015). More specifically, I deployed Foucauldian (1980) inspired, feminist poststructural discourse analysis (Weedon,2006). This qualitative, language-oriented approach facilitated a focus on the text itself and an attention to the specific and often contradictory ways that an identity, experience, or event was variously constituted in an interview (Willig, 2013). I turned to Foucault to illustrate matters of discourse, power, and knowledge (Foucault, 1980). There is no monolithic step-by-step manual to this type of analysis and my intention was to draw from multidisciplinary approaches and disciplines.

Consequently, this analysis takes a 'critical realist' post-structuralist stance, that asks us to interrogate our taken-for-granted assumptions about the world and ourselves (Baxter, 2008; Burr, 2015). In taking a critical realist, post-structural, critical feminist approach to e/ds and gender, identity, and e/d categories, are instead deconstructed, unstable, open to splitting, (Butler, 1990) parody, contradiction, inconsistencies, and multiple meanings. From this perspective experiences cannot be understood as extra-discursive, that is, existing

independently from the discourse in which it is constituted. Instead, it is produced discursively, constituted, and regulated within the dominant discourses, reproducing and/or resisting context specific values, norms and 'truths', so that the qualities of experience are always subjective, open to interpretation and challenge. As such, the interpretations of the accounts must be viewed as subjective rather than 'truths' or causality and are shaped the researcher's own position as a white, non-binary individual with a history of an eating disorder.

The aim of the analysis was not to discover any essential or 'objective truth' of TNB experiences of eating disorders but to explore the multiple possible outcomes in which the experiences are discursively constituted. Post-structural discourses analysis focuses on the text itself, and to locate discursive problematisations, technologies, subject positions, and subjectification in the wider literature (Arribas-Allyon & Walkerdine, 2013) and the specific ways that subjectivities, experiences, and practices of TNB were constituted to the dominant discourses, norms, and concerns of the wider culture. In the analysis that follows, after briefly outlining how TNB perspectives could be like those of (assumed) cisgender, heterosexual women, I explore how eating disorder experiences may be constituted in ways that are specific or nuanced to the TNB subjectivities of the participants in this study. In the analyses that follow, I present eating disorders as expressing (female) gender distress, asserting agency (over reproductive rights) through androgynous subjectivities, as reproducing a cultural gendered domination/submission dynamic internally, as 'mind over body' and recovery as community, meaning making and gender competency.

Constructing TNB eating disorder subjectivities

There is a significant body of critical feminist literature that analyses patriarchal, cultural prescriptions of the 'ideal' female body (Bordo, 1993; Malson, 1998). In research with (assumed) cisgender female and heterosexual participants, femininity was constructed as located in the female body, and female bodies were constructed as out of control, fragmented, and potentially eruptive (Malson, 1998). Biomedical discourses also re-produce an image of a debilitated, dangerous, and pathological female body, governed by a menstrual cycle (Lamson & Ussher, 1996). This can be read in the ways that the TNB also participants constructed the emergence of puberty as a time that they came to associate the female body negatively, and with the onset of eating disorder practices:

> Luke: I think it {puberty} is everything to do with it {restriction} because you get below a certain weight and then you don't have periods anymore and the only thing that can stop that happening apart from that is to take hormones...I just didn't understand what was going on in my body...I just couldn't identify with it. It was just a really out of control time, I was really lost.

> Danni: I did start puberty right around then {onset of anorexia}, I got my period at 11, and I just, ballooned isn't the right word (laughing). But I pretty much like, (.) my chest was growing, my hips were growing, I was getting a very, like, womanly kind of shape to me, when all of my friends were still little stick figures (laughing)...I was just generally very uncomfortable (..) with just all these things happening.

Female puberty is constructed here around discourses of uncertainty, discomfort, and eruption, which are mirrored in the wider cultural discourses around female puberty as eruptive, disruptive, and pathological (Malson, 1998; Ussher, 2006). Eating disorder behaviours are constructed as a practice able to resist or control these female bodily processes and thus destroy the emergent female identity (Malson, 1998). Restriction then, is discursively produced as control, that is a self-destructive, and self-(re) productive practice (Malson & Ussher, 1997). As Luke said '{puberty} is everything to do with it {restriction}' and Danni's association of puberty with 'balloon…chest…hips…growing…womanly shape…uncomfortable' articulates the discursive and cultural conditions that problematise the female body and the subsequent urge to restrict food, growth, puberty, adulthood, femininity, and visibility. Danni used the word 'ballooned' that constructs the body as an object - a thing, suddenly inflating into a round 'womanly' shape. This is contrasted against the description of her friends as 'still little stick figures' - a phrase emblematic of childish scribbles, childhood, play, and fun. At the same time, it can also be construed as signifying grief that the prepubescent, non-feminine, non-eruptive, stable, thin body, and everything it facilitates, is forever lost. The body constructed as an Object can be multiply constructed. It reflects for example, how patriarchal discourses condition the female body to be the passive bearer of the male gaze, to be surveillance and both valued and devalued on appearance, and to be sexualised and dominated (Bordo, 1992). It is through the possibility of surveillance, and the normalising gaze that one might be constituted as a (disciplined) and gendered

individual (Malson, 1998). These accounts share similar meanings with other analyses of (assumed) cisgender female participants (Malson, 1998, Bordo, 2009, Rice, 2014).

Eating disorders as expressing (female) gender distress

In relation with the accounts above, and in the the analysis below, the ways that negative cultural discourses of the female body and of anti-fatness are implicated in the participants disordered eating practices. The pursuit of an 'anorexic' or thin body is construed as the means to express negative feelings related to being gendered as female and make visible gender distress. Starvation is also literally constructed to destruct and de-materialise the female body as it becomes progressively smaller. For example, Luke explicitly construes his eating disorder as dually functioning - to express that he was not 'ok'in his head and to suppress secondary sex characteristics of the female body:

> Luke: having periods was not supposed to be happening to somebody who identified as a man or boy. And growing boobs...it's just not supposed to be happening… the eating disorder was a lot to do with that…weight loss was a way of me saying somebody please help me I'm really not OK, in my head. Also if I'm thin I won't have, my breasts won't get too big, or I won't have periods or gain like a womanly shape either with hips

In this excerpt Luke's account is specific to him identifying as a man and the distress caused by 'growing boobs' and gaining a 'womanly shape'. Whilst this is specific to Luke's masculine identity, it is also like other accounts of 'anorexic' bodies as disappearing bodies (Malson, 1999) in assumed cisgender female participants. The disappearing 'anorexic' body is constituted within the discursive contexts of postmodernity, in that the 'natural' body appears to disappear, to be superseded by the-body-as-image (Malson, 1999). It is argued that we do not see an image of the body, on screen or print, in a purely visual or ocularcentric way, but that we engage other senses in our encounters with other bodies, that translate into affect (Featherstone, 2010). Other bodies and images of bodies in the media and in consumer culture may move us and affect our internal experiences of the body in ways that can be difficult to articulate (Featherstone, 2010). Luke describes not being ok located in his head, and yet the source of the solution seems to be in the reconfiguration of gender by scripting the body in a different way. It is suggested that in the postmodern contexts, the body is reconfigured not as natural or lived in, but as a consumer object or a 'sign-commodity'

(Kroker, 1987) to be worked on as a project; plastic images demanding constant maintenance and augmentation to produce a look that is inscribed on the surface (Malson, 1999). Foucault's 'technologies of the self' articulates embodiment as a set of meaningful practices through which the selves/bodies are (re)constituted ((1984) and that these practices are central in people's subjective experiences. Indie spoke explicitly about body image:

> Indie: we need to complicate what we mean by body image too, right? Because I think when we say body image, we often kind of fall into this idea of all body image if this then this white female, sort of ideal, but like body image, I don't know, like, I struggle with my body image, not because I don't look like someone on the magazine, but because my body doesn't feel authentic to me. Right? I don't know…I've maintained for most of my eating disorder, that body image was never a concern for me. I was never trying to be thin and pretty and perfect, right? Like, but body image is actually a concern, right? It's just that my body image doesn't conform to that gender norm that I'm supposed to have based on what my assigned gender at birth is. Right. And my body image, you know, doesn't actually conform to what exists in society right now. Right? Like there isn't a legible non binary body ideal. But I have an internal one. I think I felt one.

Indie's invitation to 'complicate what we mean by body image' then, can be construed as a concern with deconstructing dominant, normative ideals of the female body 'image' standard as thin, White, heterosexual and cisgendered (Jones & Malson, 2011). For example, men, trans people, fat, non-heterosexual, and people of colour are often assumed to be at lower risk, perhaps because they fall outside of this body 'image' standard (Bordo, 2009; LaMarre, Rice & Jankowski, 2017). Also, body 'image' issues in recovery discourses may legitimise body 'image' dissatisfaction in people with larger bodies, that reinforces a gendered body standard (Gotovac, LaMarre, & Lafreniere, 2018). The invitation to "complicate' body image, also reflects many other accounts of e/d recoveries that seek a voice to share what it means to have an e/d, (Malson, 1998; Malson et al, 2010; Moulding, 2015; Hussain, Dar & Ganson, 2021; LaMarre, Levine, Holmes, & Malson; 2022). Far from being passive, docile, or disconnected from body image, Indie positions themself as acutely aware of the microphysics of power (Foucault, 1977) transmitted through the biopolitics of weight and shape. Indie described having a body that does not conform to the gender assigned at birth (female). In our discussion Indie was clear that their eating disorder

functioned as a measure of self-harm, perhaps related to the inability to conform to feminine standards of physical perfection. Indie's account also demonstrates the changing awareness of the significance of body over and how they are not in pursuit of a 'thin and pretty and perfect' body but a body that feels 'authentic'. In this, Indie articulates a desire to 'feel' authentic rather than 'have' a thin body, that constructs the function of eating disorders as going beyond inscribing the body's external surface.

Asserting agency (over reproductive rights) through androgynous subjectivities

Critical feminist analyses have articulated that 'anorexia' and 'bulimia' sustain multiple meanings, including distancing from the vulnerabilities and visibilities of the sexualised female body, and through the minimisation of breasts, hips and menstruation, thinness can signify a gender neutralised subjectivity by cultivating a 'boyish' body (Bordo, 1993). Unsurprisingly, there were some similarities in the accounts by participants of this study:

> *Arlo*: it's losing weight so that I am thinner, so I appear more, more like a like a twink more androgynous and then also keeping weight off so that this association of you know being pregnant is is gone as well…androgyny in the media is that very thin, pale person…the cultural idea of androgyny is something I feel really drives my eating disorder in the way that I want to look like them.

The androgynous body is constructed here as thin, pale, sterile, and importantly for Arlo - infertile. Arlo's discursive production of the androgynous body and their "drive" to look like them, can be construed as more than just a desire to 'look' androgynous, but to signify an identity that is not pregnant, and therefore, not female. This can be construed as re-configuring a gender-neutral identity that also resists the possibility of oppressive patriarchal discourses related to reproduction. Arlo's concern with pregnancy can be located in the medical discourses of the late twentieth century, where women ceased to have authority over their bodies and wombs during pregnancy, and once pregnant, the woman's rights became separate, and subordinate to the rights of the foetus (Epstein, 1995). Julia Epstein's essay "The Pregnant Imagination" (1995), provides a historical account of the politicising of pregnancy and how this led to social and medico-legal discourses of 'mother blaming'. Epstein wrote, that in a sense, "female interiority has been made public, while women's bodily exterior has attained juridical and moral privacy rights" (p.140). In this context then, women's lives are not under their autonomous control, but are the 'property' of the state. The

foetus then renders the woman's body - state property (Epstein, 1995). Arlo's discursive construction of the androgynous person is embedded within a network of social, legal, medical, and political discourses that construct certain possibilities for an androgynous person to remove the child form the body, and more legitimately evade the "brutally coercive stance towards pregnant women" (Gallagher, in Epstein, 1995). Danni, (who had recently had a hysterectomy) also constructed androgyny as aspirational and thin:

> Danni: from when I was about 11, to 22, I was anorexic…I definitely know that part of it is tied into my gender and that the thinner you are, the more kind of androgynous you can come off. So there was that and then I'm also disabled. So I really clung on to food as the thing I could control because there were so many other aspects that just happened to me and I couldn't do anything about it.

Danni's excerpt, whilst about seeking to cultivate a more androgynous body, reflects an internal conflict over meaning and selfhood, 'I really clung on to food as the thing I could control…so many other aspects…I couldn't do anything about'. Beyond aspiring to androgyny for appearance reasons, Danni positions food and eating as the solitary facets of life where power may be enacted, also rendering life an arena of limited choices. The phrase 'clung onto food' may then signify a 'subtextual subjectivity of 'failure' in all other aspects of life (Malson, 1998, p.123) and signifies a subjectivity of a person who is desperately 'clinging' onto control in the restricted domains of life women (and fat people) are both permitted and encouraged to do so. (In the US, reproductive rights at the time of the interview were being contested by a right wing, morally conservative Supreme Court and by Friday June 2022, the legislation 'Roe v Wade' that made abortion a federal right, was overturned, further diminishing women's autonomy over their body, health, and life.)

Eating disorders as reproducing a cultural gendered domination/submission dynamic internally, as 'mind over body'

The role of gender and agency in e/d's was a pervasive theme in the interviews:

> Indie: when it {e/d} started, it didn't feel like it had much to do with gender. Actually, I think it didn't feel like it had much to do with my body either. Honestly, it felt like a way of managing, feeling, really unsure and really scared and really afraid of the future. Feeling kind of directionless, and wanting to have something to hold on

> to…that relapse was pretty clearly connected to gender dysphoria…I don't want to gain weight, because right now my body is manageable for me in terms of my gender and my feelings of being able to inhabit it in that way

Anorexia nervosa has frequently been construed as a response to feeling out of control, and a bid to enact control by controlling the body with food (Malson 1998). Similarly, eating disorders are constructed here as producing a body that feels 'manageable' in terms of gender, and of 'managing' negative feelings of fear related to the future. Indie's eating disorder is construed as something to 'hold on to' and rather than an individual pathology, and Indie implies that it was necessary and useful in pursuit of comfortable embodiments. This can also be construed as controlling feelings through the control of an 'eruptive' body, (through eating disorder technologies of the self - Foucault, 1984). Indie's account can be located in discourses of Cartesian dualism that constitutes the body as threatening and eruptive, producing the need for controlling the body, that replicates the domination submission dynamic of male/female in contemporary culture. For example, in discourses of Cartesian dualism, the mind and body are separated, and the mind privileged as superior, and associated with masculinity, rationality and objectivity (Henriques et al, 1984; Bordo, 1993; Malson, 2010; Willig, 2013; Tischner, 2013). Within Cartesian duality, binary constructions serve to act as a way of privileging object over subject, male over female and mind over self or body.

Arlo also discusses coping, feeling that they had limited choices and implied that their eating disorder was a (limited) means to seize power:

> Arlo: It [e/d] was also a way to cope with a lot of, I felt like a lot of stress of, you know, I can't cut my hair, I can't bind, I can barely, like, no matter what I how I dress, it's going to be wrong. So being able to choose what I ate and choose how I physically moved in that way. It felt very empowering in a dark way

There is something vital about the role of e/d's as mediating control/out of control-ness over the body and gender. It is only through the construction of the body and gender as something unruly, that it may become the arena for shame, self-destruction, and domination, as Arlo said, 'being able to choose what I ate and choose how I physically moved…It felt very empowering in a dark way'. 'Dark' may signify moral binaries of good and evil or could be a metaphor for a 'dark' force, avenging a death - perhaps the death of self that is being

oppressed through the constrained choices of femininity. Dark can also be construed as a metaphor for 'dark' emotions such as anger, hatred, and resentment, that would be entirely appropriate in response to the limited options of self-expression and self-determination that Arlo describes.

Recovery as community, meaning making and gender competency

I asked participants what had helped them during any episodes of recovery.

> *Charlie*: The community you know… because I've been very lucky to find a few people who get it and some of them are trans and some of them aren't but just having even a handful of people who can see me as I am and at the same time be gentle and not encourage but not punish me for my disordered behaviours that has been more healing than most anything else. To have peers that get it.

Charlie described his recovery as outside of a psychiatric setting and instead, located it within the trans community who as he said, 'can see me as I am'. One of the main themes for many of participants was being 'read' or perceived in ways that felt aligned with that individual's sense of self, or gender identity. For Charlie, this is also a significant factor in his recovery along with the trans community being 'gentle' and not 'punishing' Charie for his eating disorder behaviours. Other qualitative studies (Garrett, 1998, & Malson et al, 2011) have illustrated that eating disorder recovery is constructed as a connection or reconnection with self (Jones & Malson, 2011). Indie was explicit in saying that therapist competencies around gender and nuanced approaches facilitated in him being able to talk about gender in treatment:

> *Indie*: I moved and move states and started seeing a new therapist who is a trans man himself and so that felt like a really important change. And I was so still, caught up in this feeling of like, okay, what's gender and what's eating disorder that was really hard for me to talk about. With him, even though I knew like, he would get it right, at least he would get some version of it. But it has been really helpful to not have to do kind of the one on one stuff. And that, once I was finally able to talk about it {gender} has been really helpful…Finally, if we want to have good treatment, we need to start moving beyond preconceptions of like, what we, what it is we're dealing with, right? Because it is different every time. Every person is different, whether it's gender or the eating disorder, right. Like, I don't know if you've had this experience,

but like every person I talked to with an eating disorder, even though they might say similar things. Right. There are those shades of difference, right?

Indie's call to 'move beyond preconceptions' reflects the need to incorporate a feminist approach to eating disorders, that is demonstrated in critical feminist literature (Holmes, 2017; LaMarre, Levine, Holmes, & Malson, 2022). Likewise, other research into TNB individuals suggests that the queer, or TNB characteristics of the therapist facilitated their recovery. Indie told me he had previously been working with therapists who had little understanding of the role of gender, nor of TNB concerns and found that he had to 'educate' his therapist on these matters, and that this was counterproductive. As queer and TNB individuals often suffer from 'microaggressions' by cisgender, heterosexual therapists, (Cusack et al, 2022) therapists disclosing their own TNB identity may help TNB clients feel safer (Berke et al, 2016) and more likely to be understood without having to undertake the emotional and cognitive labour of having to explain what are now considered, (at least by critical feminist scholars and therapists) pervasive gender issues.

Discussion and conclusions

As explored above, critical feminist analyses have discussed how multiple dominant cultural norms, particular to gender, are imbricated in women and girls eating disorder experiences. However, these studies have tended to assume, if not explicitly, that individuals diagnosed with an eating disorder are cisgendered. Consequently, not enough is understood about the nuance of TNB experiences of and meanings of eating disorders. This article has sought to address the gap in knowledge and contribute to the growing but, modest body of critical feminist literature on TNB experiences of eating disorders. To my knowledge, this is the first critical feminist analysis dedicated explicitly to this topic.

The analysis articulates both similarities and differences in TNB individuals and cisgender women's accounts, and the meanings they assign to their eating disorder subjectivities and practices. As with other interview-based studies with women assumed to be cisgendered, participants in this study described multiple constructions of eating disorders as a search for a self, an enactment of self-control and a pursuit of a body that can be free of surveillance (Bordo, 1993; Malson, 1998; Saukko, 2008). However, most participants' accounts were in many ways, very specific to their TNB identities. This was read in the ways that participants explicitly described wanting to minimise the appearance of secondary sex characteristics with starvation, that related to their (female) gender distress and to minimise gender distress. Eating disorders were constructed to both articulate gender distress, and to

suppress menstruation. In much critical feminist research body image is cited as a motivation for eating disorders through the production of gendered, unrealistic body image ideals. This has been criticised as an oversimplified analysis that positions the body as a potentially passive and docile object awaiting inscription (Burns, 2009). The focus on body as image, has also been criticised for rendering the bodies static, meaning that the body is uncoupled from the multiple social forces that shape how bodies feel and with what consequences (Probyn, 2009). This was reflected by one of the participants, who said that body image, whilst being implicated in eating disorders, is not a central 'cause'. They construct the eating disorder as 'more complicated' and position themselves as incredibly aware of the social forces and media images that converge upon the TNB body. Eating disorders were constructed as a means to control the choice to not be pregnant, and excerpt agency over the body and self. In this, the body is a site of political resistance, and eating disorders are construed as technology in the struggle for selfhood. The patriarchal power struggle of men dominating women, was reproduced within eating disorder subjectivities through the mind dominating body. It was also construed as a resistance to the limited means or freedoms that TNB people may have in making decisions about how to perform their preferred gender. Finally, recovery was briefly explored as contingent on the trans community, who were constructed to provide a safe, non-judgmental space where selfhood may be explored, also on therapist competencies, and on the capacities of the therapy approach to accommodate shades of difference in the ways that eating disorders are presented. This is reflected in research on the trans experiences of eating disorder treatment that suggest a shocking lack of attention to gender in the treatment process (Duffy, Henkel, Earnshaw, 2016). More recent research suggests that TNB individuals are heterogeneous in their eating disorder presentations (Scandurra et al, 2019) and highlights that there are both helpful and unhelpful aspects of TNB individuals experienced within treatment (Cusack et al, 2022).

This study represents only a small sample of trans and non-binary people, and all were AFAB, white presenting, reside in the UK and US, and all educated to university level. Equally too, this study focuses on the trans and non-binary perspectives on e/ds, and this was a deliberate strategy (although, not all participants had a formal diagnosis, and in this case were self-identified as having had an e/d). Clearly, further research with larger and more demographically diverse groups of participants is warranted. As Holmes (2017) said: "Indeed it is crucial to find ways of widening the scope to think about the purchase of the feminist paradigms (in both research and practice) for transgender individuals, as well as those who Identify outside the gender binary". Jones & Malson (2011) too said "additional studies are

also needed to explore gay, bisexual, transsexual and queer perspectives on anorexia and bulimia and, indeed, on other kinds of eating disordered experiences and practices".

A further possible limitation of this study is that all the participants were assigned female at birth, meaning that at the onset of their eating disorder, some were already identifying as trans or nonbinary, and some were not yet aware of their gender status. All but one participant has employed medical or surgical transition, (either through hormones or surgery) and one had undergone a medically indicated hysterectomy. Further research into how the experiences of people who have undergone medical and surgical transitions compared to those who have not may be useful in understanding the difference between these experiences. From a critical discourse analytic perspective, participants' accounts can be read as descriptions that are shifting, rather than essential or diagnostic subjectivities, in which their gender assigned at birth is both implicated in the meanings and onset of eating disorders, but not exclusively a cause, not the *only* factor in the development of an eating disorders. Likewise, eating disorders are constructed here as significantly gendered and the body as inscribed with their various meanings. Yet what remains to be explored thoroughly, are the embodied meanings of TNB individuals eating disorder experiences. A limitation of poststructural discourse analysis is that there is a focus on the body's textuality (Burns,2009). Further studies that can retheorise the body as embodied subjects rather than 'body texts' I would argue, could contribute to 'flesh out' these understandings of the TNB eating disorder experiences and bring the complex and multiple meanings to fruition, without reducing eating disorders to the pursuit of 'idealised' body images.

In accordance with the philosophical underpinnings of critical feminist research, and to explicitly place myself on the same critical plane as the participants (Bloom, 1998) I disclose my own identities as a researcher. For example, I am white, British born, with a working-class background. I am 44 years old, female presenting, non-binary pansexual married to a cis gender man, and I have a history of eating disorders. I am also a therapist working in the field of eating disorders.

To conclude then, whilst this study is a small qualitative sample of AFAB TNB participants, the analysis clearly presents some fundamental ways that TNB perspective of eating disorders that may be different and somewhat homogeneous to those of assumed heterosexual and cisgender female participants. Attention to the retheorisation of bodies as embodied subjects, rather than 'body as text' may be useful to explicate the other possibilities for theorising body management practices and embodiment in TNB individuals.

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